
The Erasure of a Shameful Past

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Abstract

In Italy during the thirties, in spite of a proclamation for a rural society by the regime, cities were still the core of the political matter. Mass gatherings to hear Mussolini's speeches, military parades and fitness performances were planned with a specific political purpose just in urban areas.

This process actually started in the late XIX century particularly in Italy and Germany to consolidate the foundations of two recent political entities after unification. Street names and monuments recalling common past glories or sacrifices of war contributed to build the reborn national identity.

Nevertheless the breaking of mass society into the XX century economical and political frame with all the consequent problems drove the ruling class towards new ways to preserve the power.

It was so necessary to hide social contradiction, exploitation of working class and expulsion of poor citizen from the core of the cities under patriotic sentiments, spectacular representations, rhetorical devices and historical mystification.

So the time of public life was filled with secularized rites based on the totalitarianism of the one-party, and the space of social interaction was covered with an obsessive anthology of images: roman eagles, rough ancestral farmer, weapons, simple workers, doubtless soldiers, ancient roman heros etc... The outcome was an iteration of a precise conservative ideology scattered on the streets through a well-tested strategy.

Not all of these icons can be strictly connected with fascism even for a well-trained eye but there are some other remarkable urban signs that, just as the swastika in Germany, recall directly the worst period of Italian history. So "fasces", Mussolini's portrait or his name on walls were a significant part of the landscape. If it is quite strange that Rome has still incredibly maintained many of these evidences of a shameful past a totally different destiny has been reserved for such symbols in Milan: erasure.

Only an accurate survey, based on historical comparison, can collect hidden, partially deleted or even barely visible rests of a past that the city wanted to forget. Nowadays some sculptures pass unobserved, empty spaces evoke ghosts, hidden reliefs lie in invisible places. The economic capital of the country, which suffered bombings more than the legal capital, has consciously scratched out most of the evidence of these dark years. Why this difference? The answer can be found in a specific social frame and ideology of post-war era that a proper visual analysis can disclose.

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