
One Monument, One Town, Two Ideologies: The Monument to the Victory of Bolzano-Bozen

MALCOLM ANGELUCCI AND STEFANO KERSCHBAMER

This article provides a close reading of 'BZ '18-'45: One Monument, One City, Two Dictatorships', a public permanent exhibition inaugurated inside the fascist 'Monument to Victory' (1926-1928) in the Italian border-town Bolzano-Bozen in July 2014. Since the fall of fascism the monument has been a most controversial site. It is ringed by twelve columns, each thirteen meters high, in the shape of *fasci littori*, the official symbol of fascism. This image sits uneasily within a democratic society. However, despite the overtly fascist imagery, it has proven politically impossible to destroy this relic, or at least remove its most confronting symbols.

A number of discourses and agendas play against this: a discourse about the historical and artistic value of the artefact and a nationalistic

Public History Review

Vol 24 (2017): 54-75

ISSN: 1833-4989

© 2017 by the author(s). This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0) License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), allowing third parties to copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format and to remix, transform, and build upon the material for any purpose, even commercially, provided the original work is properly cited and states its license.

discourse that sees the monument as the fundamental symbol of the Italian presence in a region with an overwhelming majority of German speakers, which was annexed to Italy in 1920. Italian nationalism is thriving in the province fuelling right wing groups and movements. Despite not having won elections, the right wing post-fascist party Movimento Sociale Italiano and its later incarnations have retained more than thirty per cent of the vote since the mid 1980s.² More recently, at the last elections, the unapologetically fascist movement 'Casa Pound' earned two spots on the town council.³ In this context, the 'Monument to Victory', as Jeffrey Schnapp describes it, is alive and well: 'today like yesterday we are not in front of a monument that looks at the past; it is also an instrument of unrest and mobilisation.'⁴

Public history, monument and memorial studies are disciplines that offer a variety of approaches to these kind of artefacts and their complex, fluid and often contested relationships to rhetorics, ideologies, memory and affective and ritualistic modes of engagement. 'States', Sandford Levinson has written, 'always promote privileged narratives of the national experience and thus attempt to form a particular kind of national consciousness, yet it is obvious that there is rarely a placid consensus from which the state may draw'.⁵ In this area, moving from the seminal work of Pierre Nora in the French context,⁶ we find mourning practices mapped across specific countries, as in the work of Paul Ashton, Paula Hamilton and Rose Searby in Australia, with their categorisation of non-war memorials, communities of mourning, transformations and relationships with evolving public discourses.⁷ We find wider, transcultural anthologies dwelling on the relationship between artefact, fruition and audience interaction and the process of intervention, change and political/cultural re-signification that public sites witness through time.⁸ We find structured methodological approaches to monument reading that go beyond the semiotics of the artefact as a text, towards work on site specificity (indexicality) and modes of fruition,⁹ and resilient sociological and anthropological work on specific contexts.¹⁰

In the area of European war iconography after World War I,¹¹ which is closer to our analysis, are specific works on Fascist spectacle and propaganda,¹² and the growing sub-discipline devoted to the history of public monument of past dictatorships. The object of our research – a fascist monument in the context of its contemporary use – has continuities with analyses of current interventions on/around monuments of a dictatorial past: the so-called *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* and construction and performance of specific sites in new and

democratic ways.¹³ Our approach, however, is partially different. The circumstances around both the building of the Monument to Victory and the opening of the new exhibition can be usefully explored through Atkinson and Cosgrove's argument¹⁴ that public monuments are a strategy to test, propose and impose a particular discourse on the public through architectural means. It is true that 'the socially vital monument coalesces communal memories and aspirations and becomes a mechanism for the projection of personal values and desires'.¹⁵ But it is also true that a politically meaningful monument has an implied reader in mind. In other words, it aims in more or less open, democratic, inclusive or hegemonic ways to construct a particular narrative, and with it a particular citizen that should engage with this narrative. Monuments 'move to action', exhort one to embrace a particular way of thinking: they are perlocutionary.

Our general goal here is to bring to light the dynamics of this construction in the specific case of 'BZ '18-'45' through a textual analysis of the official guidelines for the new exhibition *vis a vis* their implementation by the architects and designers. We will show what particular idea of visitor is implied in this process, and the ideological agenda behind the proposal of a 'correct' way to understand the fascist artefact in the context of the recent history of the region. In doing this we adopt approaches and methodologies deriving from literary / textual studies and theories of historiography. We are aware that this approach does not engage, for example, with an ethnographic understanding of the actual practices of the visiting audiences potentially challenging the official political agenda. We hope however that this will offer an original interdisciplinary contribution that can orient further work.

THE MONUMENT TO VICTORY

The Monument to Victory is one of the most controversial signs of the 'Italianisation' of the province.¹⁶ Built by Marcello Piacentini on the orders of Mussolini between 1926 and 1928, during the first wave of colonisation of the area, the monument immediately became the symbolic and ideological centre of the Italian town west of the river Talvera, opposite the old 'Austrian' historical centre. The project was proposed as a *Denkmal* for the martyrs of World War One. In reality it was a triumphal arch built in the area of a pre-existing Austrian monument that imposed a Fascist iconography and a nationalistic rhetoric on an almost exclusively German speaking population.¹⁷ This symbolism and a pervasive iconography of 'victory' over Austria culminated in a Latin inscription that has all the flavour of colonialism:

'Hic patriae fines signa hinc ceteros excolimus lingua legibus artibus' (here are the borders of the Fatherland, fix the sign. From here we taught the languages, the laws and the arts').

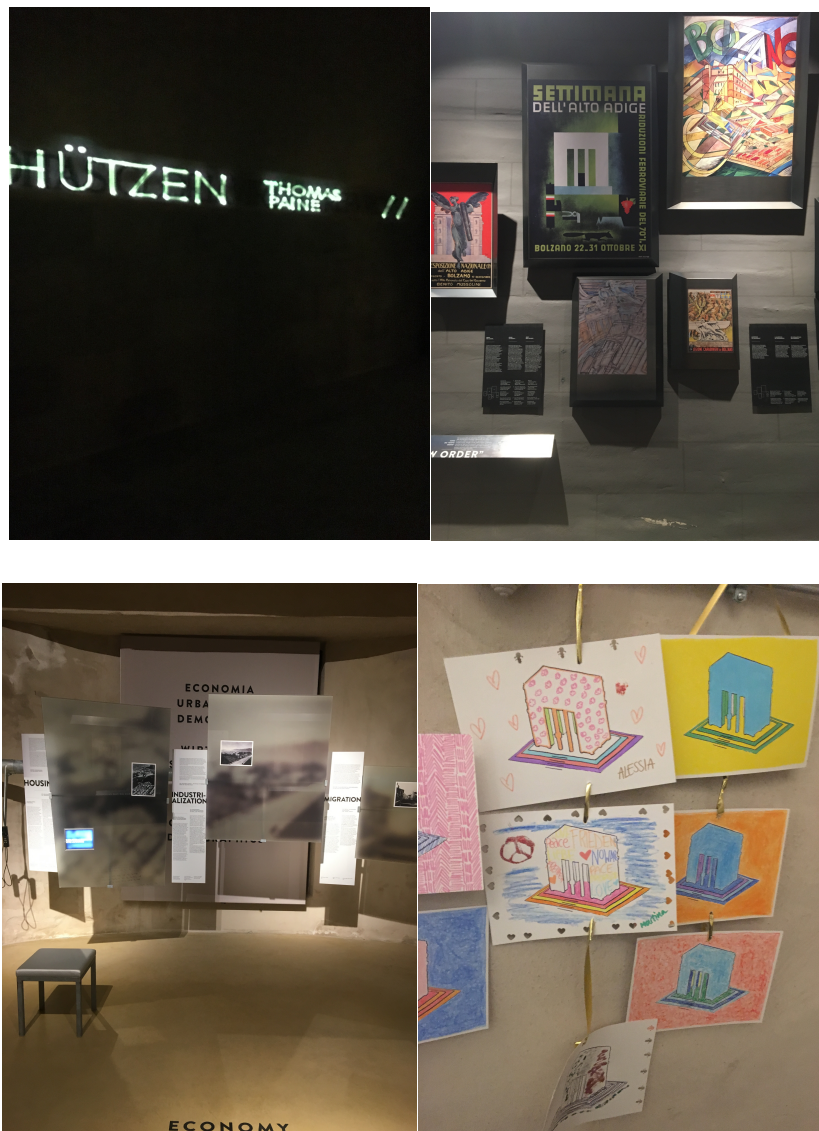
Piacentini reserved a central place for the monument in the new town, making it a myth of origin for the Italian presence in the area. It reified a series of narratives dear to Fascist rhetoric: the link with Imperial Rome,¹⁸ the link with World War One, the cult of the veterans and their victory through the 'redemption' of the Austrian province. For example, the rather menacing statue of 'Jesus the Redeemer' by Libero Andreotti – a reiteration of the by then established iconography of the soldier/martyr¹⁹ – is strategically positioned to the East, directly facing the South-Tyrolean German speaking part of town.

The Monument to Victory is in this sense not only a mythical construction in the Barthesian sense, a further sign that carries an ideological meaning beyond the literal.²⁰ It is a conceptual simplification²¹ of the complex reality of the 'Italian presence'. It offers an easy, albeit politically dangerous, instrument of cohesion for the newly arrived Italian speaking population. Like most myths, this extremely simplified and confrontational reduction is easily transmitted and disseminated.

The oppositional message of the Monument to Victory represents an idea of the province divided along an ethno-linguistic axis.²² It reifies an important dichotomy that is present if not thriving in today's local political context. Precisely because of the relevance of these views, prior to the inauguration of the permanent exhibition 'BZ '14-'45', there had never been a shared process of dealing with the past. The monument, fenced and closed to the public in 1978 for fear of vandalism – with the exception of a restoration in 1993 – remained isolated for decades. The exhibition called for a renewed discussion of the monument's meanings, resuming a process of small steps that began in the 1970s with the removal of the fascist statues of one of its main bridges. This continued through the work of the *Archivio Storico* (Historical Archive) with its focus on the first 'Italian' migration and the recovery of the history and memory around the area of the Nazi *Durchgangslager* (Transit Camp). That process continues today²³ through complex negotiations with different stakeholders: the Town Council, the powerful and vocal right wing minority, the provincial government, the State Superintendent for the Arts and, not least, a media environment always ready to fuel a polemic. In this sense, the specific ways in which the re-opening of the monument was articulated are complex and carry a degree of ambiguity with regard to the use of the artefact as a medium for political rhetoric.



The permanent exhibition is hosted in the underground area of the monument, in rooms that open around the original atrium and crypt located directly under the statue of the *Redeemer*. In its provision of a historical and explanatory experience *in situ*, the exhibition works like one of the many *Gedenkstätte* – such as memorials and guided visits to former concentration camps – that characterise much of the post war German *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*.²⁴ It touches both reason and feelings and provides historical contextualisation, explanation and reasons for reflection. This approach embodies the intentions of the public stakeholders²⁵ to have a commission of experts comprising historians, art historians and conservators of cultural assets to ‘finally solve, in a



European spirit, a problem capable of periodically evoking tensions and divisions in the social and political fabric of the town',²⁸ through a dedicated re-design of the area.

On the East façade, a ring positioned on one of the columns with moving red LED writing quotes the title of the exhibition in Italian, German and English while on the other, a series of permanent signs indicate the entrance. This architectural intervention, the 'form' of the exhibition, re-contextualises the monument and reinterprets its meaning, as much as its content does. In general the re-design and the exhibition

work as a 'counter-monument' in the seminal definition given by Young: '[counter-monuments] aim not to console but to provoke; not to remain fixed but to change; not to be everlasting but to disappear; not to be ignored by passers-by but to demand interaction; not to remain pristine but to invite its own violation and desanctification; not to accept graciously the burden of memory but to throw it back at the town's feet'.²⁷ Our aim is to map how these aspects are either embodied or effaced in the exhibition, and with what implications.

Stevens, Frack and Fazarkerley further articulate this concept of counter-monument, proposing a distinction between 'anti-monuments' and 'dialogic monuments'. The first directly critiques the architectural genre and its presumptions, while the latter 'critiques the purpose and the design of a specific, existing monument, in an explicit, contrary and proximate pairing'.²⁸ 'Dialogic', for these scholars, means a counter-monument coupled with the original which 'would directly challenge the old one, to illuminate its questionable past purposes and to reframe its status as an historical document and witness'.²⁹ An understanding of the new exhibition as dialogical will guide our analysis. We will however borrow a further definition of dialogism from literary criticism.

Mikhail Bakhtin defines dialogism as the defining category of novelistic discourse, in which the words of the characters:

are completely denied any authorial intentions: the author does not express himself in them (as the author of the word) – rather, he exhibits them as a unique speech-thing, they function for him as something completely reified. Therefore the stratification of language – generic, professional, social in the narrow sense, that of particular world views, particular tendencies, particular individuals, the social speech diversity and the language-diversity (dialects) of language – upon entering the novel establish its own special order within, and becomes a unique artistic system, which orchestrates the intentional theme of the author.³⁰

Dialogism coincides with an opening of the complexity of points of view and discourses. In the debate around history and historiography, in particular in its post-colonial setting, this has been translated not only into an embodiment of different histories, but a questioning of the very authority of the 'authorial voice'. Robert Berkhofer effectively synthesises this debate: 'the challenge of dialogism in historical discourses lies... in representing viewpoints beyond that of the historian'.³¹ For the risk is that different viewpoints are incorporated into

an inclusive but ultimately predominant conceptual and political viewpoint'.³² Juxtaposition, sorting, limiting, arranging, editing or 'orchestrating' – as Bakhtin calls it – sources, nevertheless imposes an overarching point of view. It is in this sense that the challenge of 'polyvocal'³³ research becomes also a stylistic one: a movement from the rhetoric of multiplicity towards the multiplicity of rhetorics.³⁴

The commission of experts for the exhibition worked under ideas of 'shared initiatives' and 'democracy' to mend 'divisions and tensions', using historiography as the chosen field to facilitate this process. The issues identified by Berkhofer are thus most relevant here. In adapting Bakhtin and Berkhofer to read the exhibition, our interpretive work will focus on content and form, choices and arrangement, curatorship and orchestration of the material. The elements with which an analysis of the new message should come to terms are: the explanatory signs and boards and their implied genre, the design that hosts and arranges these signs together with primary sources and multimedia texts and the relation this arrangement enters into with other interventions (including the ring and the new entrance) and the fascist architecture itself. In order to address this we will use approaches derived from textual analysis, rhetoric and literary criticism, focusing on the ways the exhibition is presented rather than providing an interpretation of its historical 'content'. This, however, will need to take into consideration the ideological and symbolic importance that the site has acquired historically. Our analysis will therefore discuss the implications of what we see as an attempt at de-sacralisation and secularisation of the monument by the democratic town.

The exhibition 'BZ '18-'45' is hosted inside the monument and at the same time contextualises and introduces it. It opens, both literally and figuratively, a new threshold for its interpretation and therefore orients any new reading. In this sense it works as an introduction, a commentary, or, more technically, a paratext. A 'paratextual element can give a word of advice or, indeed, even issue a command'.³⁵ It 'surround [the text] and extend it, precisely in order to *present* it, in the usual sense of this verb but also in the strongest sense: to *make present*, to ensure the text's presence in the world, its 'reception' and consumption'.³⁶

A Fascist monument accomplished in itself is now considered 'unfinished', in the sense that its understanding is possible only through the addendum of an exhibition.³⁷ Thus: "'Para" is a double antithetical prefix signifying at once proximity and distance, similarity and difference, interiority and exteriority, something inside a domestic economy and at the same time outside it, something simultaneously this

side of the boundary line, threshold, or margin... A thing para, moreover, is not only simultaneously on both sides of the boundary line between inside and out. It is also the boundary itself'.³⁸ Our questions are about the relationship between text, paratext and context: what kind of new democratic message is 'officially' sent by the local government in the exhibition? What is the relationship between this message and the aim of 'resolving the tensions' that afflict the town? What kind of new citizen is implied and produced through this message? The exhibition does not efface but rather re-signifies the monument for the present. The historian, as well as interpreting the history of the effects³⁹ of the site, produces a new effect of their own. Is this a new, monologic, hegemonic reading, or an open and dialogic one? Is the exhibition simply substituting one fascist message with another and thus exploiting the monument for a different agenda? Or is this a more complex way to question the nature of public architecture?

THE GUIDELINES OF THE INTERVENTION

Before interpreting the specific outcome of this engagement as it is performed throughout the exhibition, it is necessary to critically read its presumptions as presented in the report of the commission of experts on 1 May 2011.⁴⁰ It is also important to stress the difficulties that the commission most certainly encountered in negotiating the expectations of local politicians. For example, the town executive that approved the plan and the budget described the project as a 'public exhibition, devoted to documenting the history of the monument and its celebratory and historical intentions (sic)'.⁴¹ To 'document', in Italian, sits between to 'illustrate' and to support a statement with documents. In this case, one would document the fact that the monument celebrates something that in the statement remains undisclosed, and that these intentions are 'historical': one can hardly imagine something more politically neutral and vague referred to a Fascist monument.

A long citation is needed to discuss the ways chosen by the commission to negotiate these difficulties:

The monument represents still today an element of division in civil society. [M]ore than 80 years after the construction of the monument, it is necessary to undertake shared initiatives, able to heal this tear/wound. This, not starting from an iconoclastic hypothesis, but rather investing in the potentialities of an intervention that explains and contextualises the artefact historically. This will let clearly emerge its totalitarian

components, the celebratory intentions and the historical and artistic values. An attentive exhibition would consist of bringing into full light the ideological meanings of the monument. In this way, it would be possible to stimulate a debate around this cumbersome legacy... The commission thinks that an appropriate and knowledgeable work of contextualisation, anchored in the most up to date historiographic debate, could finally allow the contrasts that originated with the presence of a political and ideological symbol of the 'century of the extremes' to be overcome.⁴²

The main goal for the commission is to heal a wound without being *iconoclastic*. The latter is a very charged term. If it is true that a common meaning is well established, it is also true that the term refers to the destruction of sacred images and more in general to those who fight against traditions, convictions and opinions that are considered fundamental for the society in which they belong. In using it, the commission thus implicitly acknowledges the 'sacralised' role of the monument for part of the population; this is indeed one of the main sources of the 'open wounds'. And yet the attempt at healing explicitly avoids eradicating the cause, relying instead on historiography to 'stimulate debate'. Science is thus presented in neutral, objective terms, not as the process of interpreting a contested site. It enables the 'emergence' of its fascist nature: historiography is the meta-language of the healing process.

The clarity and intelligibility of the symbols are the source of the monument's power in the popular imagination. But would a mere 'explanation' of their meaning prevent an ideological use? What remains alive is the performative aspect of the site as described by Jeffrey Schnapp. Implicit in the statement of the commission is that this aliveness of the monument not only remains unchallenged, but is potentially re-channelled to serve a new agenda. The work of the historian is both allegedly neutral, and yet perlocutionary. It is a meta-language that 'stimulates' a debate, but how? By creating a space for dialogue or by being part of it? We argue that the commission attempts to establish a new democratic telos under the monologic umbrella of an 'objective history'.

To discuss if and how the monument maintains its performative role, we will now follow the usual path of a visitor, from above ground through to the journey underground. We will see that the historiographic content is embedded in a variety of architectural, artistic,

and design intervention, that guide the experience in very specific and consistent ways. We will not discuss every room, but rather focus on examples that show how history is part of this complex palimpsest and entanglement of texts and partatexts that constitutes the site as it is actualised today, and how it contributes to its new ideological message.

BEFORE HISTORY: TOUCHING, PROFANING, PARODYING THROUGH ART AND DESIGN

The catalogue describes the interventions that confront the visitors when they approach the site as 'artistic' and 'minimal'.⁴³ This follows almost verbatim the lexicon of the original project by the architects of GruppeGut⁴⁴ who designed 'symbolic'⁴⁵ interventions directly on the structure of the monument without explicit contextualisation, thus altering – even if always in a reversible and almost ephemeral fashion – its characteristics. The visitor sees 'writing in LED, as a ring around one of the lictor-columns on the eastern side of the monument'.⁴⁶ The ring runs a loop with the title of the exhibition in Italian, German and English, stressing the political importance of touching as an act of profanation: 'the artificial and forced nature of the intervention, at the same time sharp and subtle, affects [In Italian '*incidere*' means both to affect and to engrave] the rhetoric softening its impact, but without damaging [*Intaccare*' means both damaging and indent, carve] its integrity'.⁴⁷ In other words, the ring touches the fascist symbol and this suffices.

We indicated earlier that the symbolic message of the monument is communicated through a sacred iconography that is coherent with the *topoi* of World War One.⁴⁸ Technically, sacredness implies a separation: the removal of an object from common use to reserve it for a special destination, one that has a foundational value for the community.⁴⁹ The irony of the Monument to Victory is that for more than three decades this separation has been quite literal: the site was closed and fenced out in 1978 to preserve it from vandalism. This enclosure had two important consequences. Firstly, the monument became literally untouchable, out of the flow of history, timeless. Secondly, the 'symbolic maintenance' that allows significance to be perpetuated,⁵⁰ the reiteration and celebration of its ideological meaning, has been left to be performed by whomever (nostalgic, neo-fascist and so forth) wanted to reclaim its importance for the present. The main 'political' success of the new intervention resides precisely in the 'profanation' of the artefact, again in the technical sense proposed by Agamben: 'profanation neutralises what it profanes. Once profaned, that which was unavailable and separate loses its aura and it is returned to use'.⁵¹ For a visitor approaching the

site, the message is clear. The red LED, vaguely resembling the 'open' sign of a cheap restaurant, means that the monument is once again 'open for business', but business of a different order. This 'touch' on the column, invites other people to touch.

In this apparent simplicity, however, lie two major complications. The first is in line with the ambiguity of the quote above, something 'incide', without 'intaccare': it affects without damaging, it engraves without indenting. The metallic structure of the ring can be removed without leaving a mark or a trace. This may signify a desire to avoid a fixed substitution of the 'eternal values' of fascism with others. But the attempt to 'avoid iconoclasm' would have paradoxically reassured the right wing nostalgic that the site is profaned, though only temporarily.

The second complication arises from profanation and democratic practice itself. This hinting at democratic impermanence through a removable sign both determines a new use of the space and shows the audience how the site should be experienced now. For Agamben, the political and radical perspective of profanation lies in its making the object available to a new use without ever determining its nature. It is a re-opening of its potentialities that invites one to imagine an interaction without determining its possibilities. The new use is akin to play.⁵² It is a radical incarnation of openness and polyvocality of engagement: a way to destitute the sacred power of the object without substituting it with a new, alternative one;⁵³ a radical questioning of the presumptions of power. The ring, however, performs something similar to secularisation. While it breaks the ideological link between religion and ideology: 'a ring that neutralises the impression of monumental power linked with ideology'.⁵⁴ But it also indicates a new, singular destination for the artefact, a museification of which the political power is the sole custodian.⁵⁵ In their questioning of the original architecture, these interventions constitute themselves as counter-monumental: they are provocations and invitations to interaction and engagement with the burden of memory, to paraphrase our quote from Young. However, what interests us here is a degree of ambiguity in this critique with regard to what Young calls the call for 'desanctification' of counter-practices. We could read this as a counter-monument to fascism. But we could also read it as a new 'monument to the victory of democracy', with all its problematic rhetorical implications.

This reading is further complicated by the visitors experience of the space underground. The first room indicated in the tour map is the crypt, a space that opens directly under the statue of the *Redeemer*. However, this space has no sign of historical contextualisation. For the

architects, the crypt 'evokes a sacred place', one that 'shows the ability of dictatorship to transform spaces into places for the celebration of power'.⁵⁶ The original crypt has allegorical frescos, four candelabra designed as the only light source of an otherwise dark room and a Latin frieze worshipping and glorifying the heroes of the Fatherland. The aim of the architects here is to 'neutralise' this 'hero-worshipping text... with a minimum of artistic intervention'.⁵⁷ At regular intervals, the artificial lights dim down until the room is in complete darkness. Suddenly laser writings of the same size and at the same height of the fascist frieze begin to run along the walls. They are new mottoes, tri-lingual, anti heroic quotes from Hannah Arendt, Bertolt Brecht and Thomas Paine.⁵⁸ This critiques and re-orientes the frieze through a re-actualisation of the genre.

Inhabiting the form of a text while 'staying beside' (para) it, is – technically speaking – the definition of parody. A parody sits beside the original and offers a critique: 'a repetition with critical distance that marks difference rather than similarity'.⁵⁹ In doing so, however, it necessarily reaffirms the importance of the original: a parody of an unknown person cannot be understood as parody. The critical power of parody lies in its capacity to lay bare the workings of the original, bringing to light the ideological and rhetorical nature of its message. It reaffirms its importance while problematising it.

In our case, the laser temporarily substitutes the frieze with quotes that make sense only in relation to the original. Its ambiguity lies in the positive investment in a form, the motto, which is at the same time shown as ideological. The content of the fascist motto is relativised through the juxtaposition. But to the audience the positive investment in the substituting, anti-heroic quotes is obvious. The architect's comments on the crypt – showing the ability of dictatorship to transform spaces into places for the celebration of power – can easily be referred to the theatricalities of the laser act, equally exhortative, equally prescriptive.

Alternatively, we could see this as self-parody: the ideological message of a democratic power that wants to colonise the old, but in doing so reveals its own ideological nature. It reveals, in other words, the desire to leave the monument at the centre of the discourse on the town, but as its democratic rather than fascist foundation. We need to understand if the exhibition is a democratic practice or the propaganda of democracy.

DEMOCRATIC TELOS THROUGH DESIGN AND CONTENT

The message of the historical section is determined by the curatorial setting of the underground area. We will focus briefly on two examples to show the consequences of this co-dependency in terms of the establishment and communication of a new telos for the community of the town.

The commission of experts does not offer specific indications with regard to a target audience, and mentions only in passing the need for a degree of 'multimediality' in the final display. The points of reference for the architects are thus only the general concepts of explanation, contextualisation and historical rigour. They are called to enable this through the design of the display, and they interpret this strictly in the sense of a performative experience for the audience. Because of the temporal dissonance between the life of the monument – 1926 until today – and the period covered by the exhibition – 1914 to 1945 – the display provides three different paths: the internal perimeter centred on the history of the monument; the external perimeter focused on its broader contextualisation inside Italian and European events; and a path that links the two focusing thematically on the role of monuments and set in four rooms at each corner of the underground area. A first room, just after visitors exit the crypt, explains this arrangement and offers a series of options via an audio-visual introduction: the freedom of the viewer to pursue an individual journey is strictly regimented.

The external and internal paths are organised according to opposite visual principles, as if to be compared and contrasted as opposite ways to engage with history. For the inner path, the project mentions the following:

As in an old-fashioned art gallery, the narrative sections are presented hanging side by side or above one another. The images are hung in solid, alternating convex and concave black untreated steel frames that cast dark, angular shadows on the grey rear wall.

These are cold, harsh, lapidary images, monumental in their effect, that appear as something ultimate in character to visitors.⁶⁰

Here the subject matter is the monument itself and its rhetoric is replicated formally: monologic, authoritarian, 'ultimate'. The kind of engagement implied is passive, as if once again the message should be conveyed through a direct experience of the means of ideological

propaganda. And yet the signs devised by the historians – exhaustive, accurate and requiring a conscious investment of time to be read in full – are themselves part of this arrangement on the walls. Are they also framed as elements of propaganda? Is this another simple substitution of fascism with democracy? Or maybe, despite the programmatic statement, they call for a more active fruition. In order to read the signs, one must overcome the initial threatening experience of the display and patiently read through the argument proposed by the historians.

The external perimeter explicitly calls for a more active role for the visitor. The architects frame the broader historical contextualisation as an opportunity to highlight the role and value of critical inquiry and scientific research: '[t]his narrative is based on the notion that history can only be presented in relation to a specific time, as each epoch develops its past on the basis of its own present'.⁶¹ This requires a rupture: 'Our room design quite deliberately avoids following the perpendicular, rational structure of the architecture. It rather bursts through the rooms in asymmetrical fashion, penetrating the thick retaining walls easily and at an angle'.⁶² This is intended as a logic of democratisation: 'The material used for the panel axes is galvanised steel, a low-cost and thus 'democratic' mass product, with no costly finishing... The semi-transparency of the glass evokes flexibility and the vulnerability and openness of democracy: fragile glass as a contrast to the stoniness of dictatorship'.⁶³ Through this an explicit performative aim becomes possible:

The large-format photos printed on the glass cannot be made out by visitors from a distance as they are deliberately blurred. But each motif also appears quite small and crisply in focus on the glass surface, like a post card. What is shown becomes apparent only when you approach the smaller image. The explanatory text panels hang, somewhat hidden, behind or between the glass shards. Visitors therefore have to come closer to the blurred image before they can see, recognise and unravel the historical context. The basic thrust of our overall concept is reflected in this design element: history is only revealed through inquisitiveness and conscious engagement, a desire to get closer to the issues!⁶⁴

This movement from far to near is a performative act that constructs the visitor as a 'good historian'. Once again the design is prescriptive and the only alternative to focus is disinterest. But what do we find in this close engagement and symbolic 'depth'? First a small single photo, in

focus. Then the explanatory sign hidden away and a set video. We do not find the historiographical problem in the form of multiple paths or material, we find the solution, the 'right answer', the results of research conducted others and prepared for us in advance.

The exhibition does not have a dedicated pedagogical project for schools, something that could engage students proactively in the issues that underpin the ideological conflicts within the town. Instead, they are invited to symbolically perform scientific enquiry, and replay myth of the good, democratic, engaged citizen. The question remains: what is the difference between the monologic message of the linear rigour of the internal path, and the one of a fragmented design that nevertheless hides a linear project towards a single truth?

THE MYTH OF THE NEW BOLZANO-BOZEN

The analysis so far allows us to understand how curators and designers realised the brief of the commission for a 'shared initiative' to 'stimulate a debate' that would eventually 'overcome the contrasts' that afflict the town. The exhibition works as a counter-monument that questions the original but does not create a space in which a dialogic debate can take place. There is not a space, physical or not, in which the dialogism of points of view is either presented or performed. The experience of the exhibition is rather a tool to create a citizen capable of sustaining a democratic debate. There is however a problematic implication in this otherwise laudable choice: the discourse provided by the historian situates itself outside the debate, as a common terrain, a necessary meta-language.

An example from the didactic/historical content of the internal perimeter will allow us to confirm this. As stated in the introduction, we are not providing a detailed analysis of the written work of the historians. The various signs and panels constitute a 100 pages long section of the catalogue, arguably what will become the most read text of local history in a Province that historically has not succeeded in effectively introducing this subject into the curriculum of Italian schools. A detailed discussion of this important step deserves a dedicated forum. Two major points, however, are fundamental for our argument. The first is the general reliance of the exhibition on a framework focused on ethno-linguistic identities. Whilst the exploration of its relevance and historical roots is important, other critical lenses – gender, class, aesthetics and art, subcultures, to name a few – could potentially cut transversally across the ethno-linguistic divide. Dialogue could be fostered through alternative perspectives, or alternative pictures of the

same history. Secondly, it is important to understand why and how the curators decided to include the history of the controversies and reclamations around the monument. This 'coda' to the exhibition in fact pushes the temporal limits of the display to well after 1945, taking visitors quickly through the decades of the second part of the last century, and proposing a new role for the monument.

We need to read these last rooms patiently as they require a detailed knowledge of events at the turn of the millennium. Here, under the titles 'Restauration, polemics and parades'⁶⁵ and 'Attacks and demonstrations',⁶⁶ we find a synthesis of nationalism and neo-fascism *vis a vis* South-Tyrolean irredentism. They are dense paragraphs citing post-fascist pilgrimages to the site, German separatist terrorism in the early 1960s, military celebrations and counter demonstrations by the members of the 'German' association *Schützenbund*, as well as isolated attempts, such as the one of the Green politician Alexander Langer, to propose radical political strategies to overcome the dichotomy that afflicts the province. Squashed between these two sections is a brief paragraph titled 'To Preserve or to Destroy', the only explicit admission that 'still today the monument represents divisions'.⁶⁷ Three lines synthesise the most mocking of examples. In 2001 the town council approved a change of name for the square that hosts the monument from 'Victory square' to 'Peace square', with the symbolic intent of officially sanctioning a new era for a reconciled town. Affiliates of the right wing Italian party quickly organised a public referendum which resulted in the majority of the population opting for a return to the original name. Currently street signs indicate, mockingly enough, 'Victory Square, Formerly Peace Square'.

But at the very end of the exhibition the story is quite different. Here the title 'A monument to other victories?' sanctions once again an idea of reconciliation that explicitly links the exhibition to the spirit of 2001 while effacing the failure to change the name of the square.⁶⁸ The text becomes celebratory: 'from the monument conceived in the 20th century by and for Fascism, to a monument of the 21st Century, read by a democratic society that believes in the values of participation, tolerance and human respect'.⁶⁹ This is juxtaposed with photos of a demonstration by the pacifist movement in 2001 and the inauguration of 'Peace square'. The latter portrays a woman dressed in traditional South Tyrolean clothes happily pointing to the new street sign, with two men representing the Italian speaking and the migrant communities. On the same wall, a life size street sign of 'Peace square' dominates the room as a final message, effacing again the events of the referendum. This is not a casual, spontaneous decision. The last pages of the catalogue contain a

photograph of the representatives of the museum accepting a 'Special Commendation' for the 'European Museum of the Year Award 2016'; on stage behind them and on the overhead projector is the street sign 'Peace Square'.

What are the consequences of this decision? First of all, a new timeline is implicitly imposed on the recent history of political divisions. The conflict and the tensions around the monument and the 'wound' that needed to be healed are pushed into the past. 'Peace Square' and the year 2001 are turned from bitter defeat into symbols of a new victory. The stories about the 'polemics' and 'protests' become History. The year 2001 is framed as the birth of a new democratic town that despite the incongruence in the dates, tends to merge with the opening of the exhibition. It is the 'other victory' of a new, democratic myth that substitutes the fascist one, while using the same site to propagate itself. The telos of an experience that goes through history towards the production of a new citizen is accomplished: 'the exhibition BZ '18-'45 is dedicated to civil participation and offers a space for critical reflection on the past that could help imagining future scenarios... A place offered to everybody to discuss, ask questions and look for possible answers'.⁷⁰

CONCLUSIONS... AND ONE PROPOSAL

Our analysis shows that at face value the new work inside and around the Monument to Victory is a counter monument in a narrow sense: it 'directly challenges the old one and illuminates its questionable past'.⁷¹ A closer look, however, shows an attempt to propose a new hegemonic message whilst embracing many of the original, fascist strategies: from mottoes to a theatrical use of space, from performative arrangements to monologic, myth-building messages. The relation between old and new relativises the 'questionable past' and the critique, while investing in a new telos that grounds the democratic town in the same soil as the fascist one. It is in many ways like boxing: in the press conference the challenger both discredits and respects the champion, fights following the rules of the game and eventually takes the belt. In a town still torn by ethno-linguistic tensions the 'democracy' of this act should be questioned.

We have seen how the exhibition aims at constructing a meta-discourse that allows the 'new citizen' to think about the future. At the very end of the journey in fact, the visitor – now knowledgeable and informed – is invited to see a video with a series of interviews proposing a variety of opinions on the monument and the exhibition as the seed for future conversations. But this external, objective, preliminary positioning

of history is unsustainable. The intervention on the monument is not external to a debate on the effects of the artefact, but rather it is itself an effect. It is not the neutral terrain to find a solution but is itself a solution. As we said earlier: 'a thing para... is not only simultaneously on both sides of the boundary line between inside and out. It is also the boundary itself'.⁷³ So is the exhibition with regard to the monument. This position, needless to say, does not answer the crucial methodological questions posited by Berkhofer.

In our critique of the ideological aims and subtext of the exhibition we are not claiming that a government should not establish itself, communicate its values and work towards self-perpetuation. We are not advocating for an anarchic, self-destructing power. What we are questioning is the necessity to build that ideology through a reclamation and colonisation of the imagined roots of the Italian ownership of the province. Sharing roots is by definition not 'radical': what kind of new arborescence can grow from this?

A neutralisation of the monument could be achieved by moving in the opposite direction, by making it politically irrelevant, forgotten or, to borrow a term from Deleuze, exhausting its potentialities and its capacity for a political re-actualisation.⁷⁴ Rather than a secularisation that shifts power and ownership, we propose a radical profanation that destitutes power without substitution.⁷⁴ Almost paradoxically, there is a room in the exhibition that points precisely in this direction, and we will take this as a concluding example and proposal.

'The final room at the end of the tour is dedicated to teaching and instruction... There is a space for children and young people to work on history projects'.⁷⁵ At the time of our last visit we did not find 'projects' but a series of photocopies, coloured-in by young visitors as in a standard activity book for children. The object to be coloured was indeed the Monument to Victory. The choice to propose a stylised version of fascist symbols is undoubtedly brave, and disconcerting (or maybe itself a parody?). It is quite anxiety-provoking to see infinite multiplications of *fasci littori* without 'explanation' and 'contextualisation', and to see the monument treated as an icon: a local Eiffel Tower or Coliseum or a 'cool' new iconic museum. That said, we see a monument coloured by children as the Italian flag or the German one (of all things!), a rainbow, love hearts, glitter, unicorns... The form is just a starting point for the most arbitrary of plays. It was quite literally profanation of sacredness through play: 'an entirely inappropriate use... of the sacred'.⁷⁶ And it was very funny. The shape was used, temporarily destined to some scope, and then re-photocopied, ready for a new invention. Can we think this at the scale of the real monument? Could it be free to be 'touched',

explored, changed, played without a particular end? Could we be open enough to accept some ideological attempts – some coloured-in flags, so to speak, or some vandals – and their reworking by others? Could it be that the monument – like a doll or a toy car – will over time stop being interesting, and, left alone, finally become exhausted and neutralised? Only a sustained ethnographic study of the site will point towards possible answers. Hopefully, this contribution has fostered an interdisciplinary terrain for these future endeavours.

ENDNOTES

¹ Ugo Soragni, coordinator of the commission of expert, is a strong advocate of preservation for artistic/historical reasons. This is the spirit behind his accurate work of documentation in Ugo Soragni, *Il Monumento alla Vittoria di Bolzano*, Neri Pozza, Vicenza, 1993.

² The link with fascism of post-war Italian right wing parties is a contentious and charged topic. A good case study is proposed by Roger Griffin, 'The 'Post-fascism' of the Alleanza Nazionale', in *Journal of Political Ideologies*, vol 1, issue 2, p123.

³ Data on the last elections can be found here:

<http://www.comune.bolzano.it/prog/elezioni/com2016/>.

⁴ Sabrina Michielli (ed), *BZ '18-'45: Un percorso espositivo nel Monumento alla Vittoria*, Folio Editore, Vienna e Bolzano, 2016, p35.

⁵ Sanford Levinson, *Written in Stone: Public Monuments in Changing Societies*, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 1998, p10.

⁶ Pierre Nora (ed), *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1996.

⁷ Paul Ashton, Paula Hamilton, Rose Searby, *Places of the Heart: Memorials in Australia*, Australian Scholarly Publishing, Melbourne, 2012.

⁸ Robert Nelson, Margaret Olin (eds), *Monuments and Memory, Made and Unmade*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 2003.

⁹ Ronald Scollon, Suzanne Scollon, *Discourses in Place: Language in the Material World*, Palgrave MacMillan, London, 2003.

¹⁰ Erika Doss, *Memorial Mania, Public Feeling in America*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 2010.

¹¹ George L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1990; David Atkinson and Denis Cosgrove, 'Urban Rhetoric and Embodied Identities: City, Nation and Empire at the Vittorio Emanuele II Monument in Rome, 1870-1945', in *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, vol 88, no 1, 1998, pp28-49.

¹² Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle: The Aesthetic of Power in Mussolini's Italy*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2000.

¹³ Tim Benton, 'From the Arengario to the Lictor's Axe: Memories of Italian Fascism', in Marius Kwint, Christopher Breward, Jeremy Aynsley (eds), *Material Memories*, Berg, Oxford, 1999, pp199-217; Krystyna von Henneberg, 'Monuments, Public Space and the Memory of Empire in Modern Italy', in *History and Memory*, vol 16, no 1, 2004, pp37-85; Benjamin Forest and Juliet Johnson, 'Unraveling the Threads of History: Soviet-Era Monuments and Post-Soviet National Identity in Moscow', in *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, vol 92, no 3, 2002, pp524-547; Mechtild Widrich, *Performative Monuments: The Rematerialisation of Public Art*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2014.

¹⁴ Atkinson and Cosgrove, op cit.

¹⁵ Nelson and Olin (eds), op cit, p6.

-
- ¹⁶ For a review of other Fascist relics see Gerald Steinacher, 'Fascist Legacies: The Controversy over Mussolini's Monuments in South Tyrol', in *European Yearbook of Minority Issues*, vol 10, 2011, pp647-666.
- ¹⁷ On this history see at least: Claus Gatterer, *In lotta contro Roma: Cittadini, minoranze e autonomie in Italia*, Praxis 3, Bolzano, 2007; Rudolf Steininger, *South Tyrol: A Minority Conflict of the Twentieth Century*, Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick, NJ, 2003.
- ¹⁸ On this see Falasca-Zamponi, op cit, 1997, pp90-99.
- ¹⁹ Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers*, op cit.
- ²⁰ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, The Noonday Press, New York, 1972, pp109-126.
- ²¹ Hans Blumenberg, *Work on Myth*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1985, p4.
- ²² For a history of the fascist attempt at linguistic and cultural annihilation of the local community see at least Gatterer, op cit.
- ²³ For example with the intervention on the fascist bass-relief which still sports a portrait of Mussolini, right in 'Piazza Tribunale', 'Courthouse Square'.
- ²⁴ As an example of this see at least Gregorio Carboni Maestri, 'Today is Already Yesterday: The Glossa XXI Architectural Project for the Italian Memorial in Block 21 at Auschwitz', in *Images: Journal of Jewish Art & Visual Culture*, vol 6, 2012, pp135-145.
- ²⁵ National government, Province and Town Council.
- ²⁶ *Commissione per il percorso espositivo all'interno del Monumento alla Vittoria di Bolzano* (Online). Available: http://www.monumentoallavittoria.com/fileadmin/user_upload/pdfs/Wissenschafts-konzept-IT.pdf (Accessed 15 June 2017). All translations from official documents are ours, except the architect's concept.
- ²⁷ James Young, *The Texture of Memory. Holocaust Memorials and Meaning*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1993, p30.
- ²⁸ Quentin Stevens, Karen Frank and Ruth Fazakerley, 'Counter-Monuments: the Anti-Monumental and the Dialogic', in *The Journal of Architecture*, vol 17, no 6, 2012, pp951-97, p952.
- ²⁹ *ibid*, p963.
- ³⁰ Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, University of Texas Press, Austin, 2004, p299.
- ³¹ Robert Berkhofer Jr, *Beyond the Great Story: History as Text and Discourse*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge and London, 1995, p197.
- ³² *Ibid*, p198.
- ³³ *ibid*.
- ³⁴ In museum studies, see the seminal work by James Clifford, *Roots: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1997.
- ³⁵ Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, New York, 1997, p11.
- ³⁶ *ibid*, p1.
- ³⁷ Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1987, p56.
- ³⁸ Joseph Hillis Miller, 'The Critic as a Host', in Harold Bloom (ed), *Deconstruction and Criticism*, Continuum, London and New York, pp177-207, p179.
- ³⁹ Hans Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, Continuum, London and New York, 2004, p299.
- ⁴⁰ *Commissione per il percorso espositivo all'interno del Monumento alla Vittoria di Bolzano* (Online). Available: http://www.monumentoallavittoria.com/fileadmin/user_upload/pdfs/Wissenschafts-konzept-IT.pdf (Accessed 15 June 2017).
- ⁴¹ Comune di Bolzano-Bozen, 'Deliberazione della Giunta Comunale' (Deliberation of the Town Council) n916, 20 December 2011 (Online). Available: http://www.comune.bolzano.it/UploadDocs/10652_delibera20122011.pdf (Accessed 15 June 2017).
- ⁴² *Commissione per il percorso espositivo all'interno del Monumento alla Vittoria di Bolzano*, op cit.
- ⁴³ Michielli (ed), op cit, p14.

-
- ⁴⁴ Gruppe Gut, 'Concept for the Design of the Permanent Exhibition Within the Monument to Victory of Bolzano/Bozen' (Online). Available: http://www.monumenttovictory.com/fileadmin/user_upload/pdfs/GGG_MaV_Konzept-EN.pdf (Accessed 1 June 2017).
- ⁴⁵ *ibid*, p11.
- ⁴⁶ Michielli (ed), *op cit*, p16.
- ⁴⁷ *ibid*.
- ⁴⁸ The most successful nation building ritual in pre-Fascist Italy was the transportation of the unknown soldier from the frontline to the 'Altare della Patria' in Rome, in 1921. See Lorenzo Cadeddu, *La leggenda del soldato sconosciuto all'Altare della Patria*, Gaspari Editore, udine, 2005. In Bolzano, in an echoing fashion, there were plans to bring a bag of the 'sacred soil' where the irredentist Cesare Battisti was executed: a sort of disembodied relic of the 'land'.
- ⁴⁹ Giorgio Agamben, *Profanations*, Zone Books, New York, 2007.
- ⁵⁰ Pierre Nora, *op cit*, p9.
- ⁵¹ Agamben, *Profanations*, p77.
- ⁵² *ibid*, p75.
- ⁵³ *ibid*, p85.
- ⁵⁴ Michielli (ed), *op cit*, p16.
- ⁵⁵ 'Secularisation is a form of repression. It leaves intact the forces it deals with by simply moving them from one place to another'. Agamben, *op cit*, p77.
- ⁵⁶ Gut, *op cit*, p2.
- ⁵⁷ *ibid*.
- ⁵⁸ 'Nobody has the right to obey' (Hannah Arendt); 'Unhappy the land that is in need of heroes' (Bertolt Brecht); 'The duty of a patriot is to protect his country from his government' (Thomas Paine).
- ⁵⁹ Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody*, Methuen, New York and London, 1985, p6.
- ⁶⁰ Gut, *op cit*, p7.
- ⁶¹ *ibid*, p8.
- ⁶² *ibid*.
- ⁶³ *ibid*.
- ⁶⁴ *ibid*.
- ⁶⁵ Michielli (ed), *op cit*, p133.
- ⁶⁶ *ibid*, p134.
- ⁶⁷ *ibid*, p133.
- ⁶⁸ And in this disrespecting the democratic outcome of a referendum, albeit ugly in its proposition and campaign.
- ⁶⁹ *ibid*, p135.
- ⁷⁰ *ibid*, p139.
- ⁷¹ Stevens, Frank and Fazakerley, *op cit*, p693.
- ⁷² Miller, *op cit*, p179.
- ⁷³ Deleuze, Gilles, *L'esausto*, Nottetempo, Roma 2015, p15.
- ⁷⁴ Giorgio Agamben, *L'uso dei corpi*, Neri Pozza, Vicenza, 2014, p347.
- ⁷⁵ Michielli (ed), *op cit*, p11.
- ⁷⁶ Agamben, *op cit*, p75.