**PART IV**

**VISUAL AND TEXTUAL DISCOURSES**

**CHAPTER 24**

**(Re)Invoking Humanism in Modernity**

**Architecture and Spectacle in Fascist Italy[[1]](#endnote-1)**

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The influence of Fascism on intellectual, artistic and architectural developments in interwar Italy has been the subject of intense debate. This has given rise to contested views about the combined impact of modernism and historical precedents on Fascist ideology, the arguments often clouded by disputes concerning the patrimony of art in Italy and whether Fascism should cultivate its own distinctive aesthetic.[[2]](#endnote-2) However, many of the leading voices of Italian cultural life during the Fascist regime refused to discriminate between different aesthetic choices, believing that “Italian cultural traditions precluded aesthetic regulation.”[[3]](#endnote-3) The debate becomes most revealing when considered in the context of the origins of Fascism. The eminent Italian philosopher and historian Benedetto Croce believed, for example, that Fascism could be traced back almost exclusively to the futurist movement,

…both in its artistic aspirations and in political activism…in the resolution to go down to the piazza, to impose one’s own feelings, to shut the mouths of those who are dissenting, to be unafraid of commotions and riots; in the eagerness of the new, in the desire to break every tradition, in the exaltation of youth, which was proper to futurism…”[[4]](#endnote-4)

A contrary view was argued by Croce’s one-time intellectual colleague, Giovanni Gentile, with whom Croce embarked on a twenty-year dialogue about the relationships between the *Risorgimento* and the rise of Fascism in Italy.[[5]](#endnote-5) This exchange, which drew inspiration from their collective interests in Italian philosophy and humanism, would abruptly come to an end in 1923 when Gentile became a member of the Fascist Party and subsequently Croce’s nemesis.[[6]](#endnote-6) Gentile believed that Fascism (at least in its early manifestations) was a natural progression of nineteenth century Italian liberalism, and that this relationship found its most fertile philosophical expression in the legacy of Renaissance humanism in the collective consciousness of the Italian people.[[7]](#endnote-7) At the centre of this assertion was Gentile’s conviction in the role of the active life of citizens – “man as chiefly born for action” – that served as the foundation of his particular form of practical philosophy, called ‘Actualism.’[[8]](#endnote-8) This philosophy, which later became the basis of Gentile’s work on the philosophy of art, contrasted with Croce’s predilection for the contemplative aspects of philosophical enquiry, characterised by his much criticised ‘armchair’ view of politics.[[9]](#endnote-9)

Gentile’s intellectual and practical interests in humanism and the relevance of classical learning in the modern world formed part of a much more widespread debate about the legacy of Italian humanism in Europe during the first half of the twentieth century, and its relationship to artistic representation.[[10]](#endnote-10) This chapter proposes to examine this debate in the context of developments in architecture and spectacle in Fascist Italy, revealing how philosophical disputes concerning the ideological basis of Fascism (and the assertions by some of its advocates of humanistic influences) were partly mirrored in debates surrounding architecture. Whilst it is not claimed here that there existed a form of ‘Fascist humanism’ as such, the aim is to demonstrate that the conscious emulation of the ‘classical past’ in interwar Italy, which ranged from assertions of *Romanitas* (‘Roman-ness’) to the cultivation of mediaeval and Renaissance models of civic space and public ceremony, were partly informed by intellectual debates surrounding the origins and meanings of humanism and their relationships to Italian (Latin) identity. Accordingly, the chapter will consider the issue of classical reception in Fascist Italy, not as a direct (conscious) emulation of classical principles, but as an indirect re-examination of modernist perspectives of humanist classical precepts. The distinction is important, since classical culture in general is rarely described as exclusively ‘humanist.’ Moreover, it is important to differentiate between Renaissance humanism, the focus of this enquiry, and Romantic humanism, which developed in the eighteenth century to advance principles of universality and the free-thinking individual while rejecting the restraints of objective morality and scientific empiricism.[[11]](#endnote-11)

Relationships between Italian Fascism and humanism have not been properly understood before, partly due to assumptions that the discredited regime of Fascism, and its architectural manifestations, had little in common with the principles or values commonly associated with Renaissance culture, such as individualism and republicanism.[[12]](#endnote-12) Tim Benton alerts us to the dangers of making such assumptions when he states that “Humanism was given a bewildering wide range of meanings in the twentieth century, many of them heavily loaded with political and moral resonance,” a point he further underlines by referring to its definition in the ‘official’ Fascist encyclopaedia.[[13]](#endnote-13)

This range of meanings is partly due to the ongoing difficulties of Renaissance historians and commentators to define Italian humanism; understanding it in terms of civic life must acknowledge a spectrum of meanings between nascent republicanism and the sometimes conflicting roles of princes and priests within society.[[14]](#endnote-14) A common theme, however, in these complex relationships was how citizens conducted themselves in public life, which often required the highest levels of decorum, a priority that Fascism sought in various ways to emulate through its public parades and spectacles.[[15]](#endnote-15) Originally bound up in the politics of city-states, Renaissance humanism was later reduced, according to Paul Oscar Kristeller, to a learned curriculum and literary movement of classical culture for princely families when these city-states succumbed to benign tyrants.[[16]](#endnote-16)

Benton’s examination of this subject, however, in the context of architecture, falls short of a proper consideration of the complex intellectual debates surrounding humanism during the interwar period, and how these paralleled similar disputes about the status and meaning of architecture and its urban contexts. Hence, in this chapter, a substantial part of the investigation will be devoted to establishing the philosophical, historical and ideological backgrounds to the debate on humanism in Fascist Italy, before an examination of aspects of its architectural manifestations is embarked upon. Given the scope of this subject, the study will be limited to the humanistic disputes of Benedetto Croce, Giovanni Gentile, Martin Heidegger and Ernesto Grassi, and the architectural works and ideas of Gustavo Giovannoni, Giuseppe Terragni and Giovanni Michelucci.

**Humanism and Classical Reception under Fascism**

The first half of the twentieth century witnessed an abundance of scholarship on Renaissance humanism, which accompanied important philosophical exchanges concerning the significance of humanism in the modern age.[[17]](#endnote-17) These debates, moreover, coincided with the rise of totalitarian regimes in Europe which, in various ways, drew upon these scholarly pursuits to legitimise their ideological, social, political and cultural agendas.[[18]](#endnote-18) Much of the scholarship on Renaissance humanism was the result of a productive exchange of ideas between Italian and German historians and philosophers. Evidenced in the writings of such eminent figures as Giovanni Gentile, Benedetto Croce, Nicola Abbagnano, Enrico Castelli, Eugenio Garin, Paul Oskar Kristeller, Martin Heidegger, Ernst Cassirer, Karl Löwith and Ernesto Grassi, this dialogue demonstrated not just a desire to acquire a deeper understanding of Renaissance culture, but also reflected differing attitudes towards the relevance of humanistic thought to the shifting political and ideological climate in Germany and Italy. Whilst some of these intellectuals actively supported Fascism and National Socialism, most notably Gentile and Heidegger, others were victims of these totalitarian regimes and their ideological/racial policies (Kristeller, Cassirer and Löwith).[[19]](#endnote-19) The renewed interest in civic events, their urban/architectural contexts and their multifaceted influences under Fascism mirrored in many ways the contested views of Croce and Gentile, varying between broadly ‘innovative’ (avant-garde) approaches and those forms of representation that consciously drew upon a perceived ‘classical inheritance’ underlying humanism.

The symbolic importance of Florence in these intellectual debates – the official ‘birthplace’ of the Italian Renaissance – was exploited under the Fascist regime through a combination of populist and academic initiatives. These included the establishment of the *Società del Rinascimento del Libro* in 1929, a publishing house dedicated to the promotion and dissemination of scholarly works on the Renaissance founded by Enrico Barfuci, and the *Centro di Studi Rinascimentale*. The latter was a research centre dedicated to the study of Renaissance art and culture, established in 1937 by a group of eminent Fascist poets, politicians and architects which included Giovanni Papini, Gustavo Giovannoni and Alessandro Pavolini.[[20]](#endnote-20) It is clear that Mussolini was keen to support the new Centro di Studi Rinascimentale and to promote its activities, with proposals to introduce satellite research centres in other European cities.[[21]](#endnote-21) These institutions, and the projects/initiatives they helped to promote, coincided with the revival of mediaeval and Renaissance festivals and spectacles during the 1920s and 1930s, which aimed to emphasise the participatory dimensions of Renaissance urban life as a model for a modern and progressive Fascist society. This included the famous ‘*antico giuoco del calcio*’ in the Piazza di Santa Croce in Florence, which was also commemorated in the first published work from the *Società del Rinascimento del Libro* – Alfredo Lensi’s *Calcio*.[[22]](#endnote-22)

One of the founders of the *Centro di Studi Rinascimentale* in Florence, Gustavo Giovannoni, was a prominent urban designer/conservationist, architectural historian and educator who was instrumental in initiating reforms to architectural education. An authority on the work of the sixteenth-century architect Antonio da Sangallo, Giovannoni helped establish the *Scuola Superiore di Architettura* in Rome in 1918 and was later appointed its dean from 1931 to 1935. Giovannoni believed that the professional architect under Fascism was ideally suited to build upon the architectural and artistic legacy of “*la grande era bramantesca.*”[[23]](#endnote-23) Indeed, Bramante, who Giovannoni believed taught Italians how “to speak in the art of Latin building,” and thereby convey a specifically humanistic spirit of the classical past, was seen as a decisive link in the relationship between *Romanitas* and Fascism.[[24]](#endnote-24) As a legitimate heir to Italian “national culture,” Fascism was a motivating force for “re-authenticating classicism.”[[25]](#endnote-25) Hence, rather than merely propagating historicism for its own sake, Giovannoni believed he was seeking to reinvigorate the “paternal spirit” of architecture, of which Renaissance humanism constituted an essential ingredient.[[26]](#endnote-26)

**The Humanist Debates**

A much-contested topic in the exchange of ideas about the role and meaning of humanism in the modern age was the status of Renaissance humanism as a philosophy.[[27]](#endnote-27) This gave rise to complex (sometimes conflictual) relationships between young emerging thinkers and their more established mentors. The centres of these debates in Germany and Italy attracted thinkers from both historical scholarship (classical, mediaeval and early modern) and philosophy (neo-Kantianism, phenomenology, neo-Hegelianism, neo-Thomism and Vichianism).[[28]](#endnote-28) Among the key philosophers in both countries, Benedetto Croce and Martin Heidegger emerge as perhaps the most prominent, whose very different political views and attitudes towards humanistic thought generated considerable influence on a whole generation of thinkers.[[29]](#endnote-29)

Renowned for his idealistic philosophy and interest in Italian politics during a period of tumultuous change, Croce is traditionally regarded as the modern heir to Italian humanist thought, first conceived in the ideas of Boccaccio and Petrarch in the fourteenth century and later brought to prominence in the cultivated environment of early fifteenth-century Florence through the work of humanists like Leonardo Bruni, Cristoforo Landino and Leon Battista Alberti. It was, however, through the ideas of a fellow Neapolitan philosopher – the eighteenth-century thinker Giambattista Vico – that this historical lineage of humanism was firmly channelled to the modern age.[[30]](#endnote-30) A professor of rhetoric at the University of Naples, Vico’s work draws upon the ancient classical tradition of rhetorical thought found in Aristotle, Cicero and Quintilian, and their reincarnations in the early Renaissance that played such a crucial role in early 20th century debates on Humanism and their urban and architectural manifestations.[[31]](#endnote-31) Vico’s broadly mytho-historic perspective of humanistic principles, informed by his extensive knowledge of philology, provided one of two key influences on Croce’s work and ideas, the other being Hegel’s idealism.[[32]](#endnote-32)

This twofold influence on Croce’s thought, and that of other Italian thinkers, is representative of an ‘intellectual axis’ between Italian and German philosophy in the early twentieth century which in many ways formed the background to a new ideological alliance, driven in part by Germany’s assertion of being the ‘inheritor’ of Italian Renaissance humanism and its legacy of classical philosophy and philology.[[33]](#endnote-33)Croce’s philosophy, however, was framed by a deep-seated rejection of Benito Mussolini and the rise of Italian Fascism, a view that was to result in his virtual isolation in Naples during the latter period of Mussolini’s rule.[[34]](#endnote-34)

Gentile’s commitment to Fascism, on the other hand, and his belief in its political, social and cultural ‘orientation’ to humanism, underpinned a rather different model of humanist philosophy “on the grounds that the roots of the Italian tradition were in Greece and Rome.”[[35]](#endnote-35) Influenced by a new awakening in Italian national identity, which emerged at the turn of the century, Gentile drew upon the ideas of such contemporary Italian intellectuals as Giovanni Papini, poet and essayist, and Giuseppe Prezzolini, founder of the Fascist journal *La Voce*. Both Papini and Prezzolini advocated a “spiritual nationalism…that was inspired by a doctrine of voluntarism, elitism, commitment, and sacrifice.”[[36]](#endnote-36) In advancing what he believed to be a humanistic conception of the world, Gentile sought to emulate the active life (*vita activa*) in Renaissance humanism, thereby rejecting “…any kind of passivity in a world of dynamic change.”[[37]](#endnote-37) In the end, however, Gentile’s philosophy would be reduced to dogma as a result of the ideological/political necessities of appealing to a mass-culture and a nationalist identity (through the instruments of education and spectacle), rather than to the local contexts of public life as existed in Renaissance culture. This priority would also, of course, have a significant bearing on Fascist architecture.[[38]](#endnote-38)

The disagreements between Croce and Gentile about the role of humanism in the construction of the Italian state serve as a useful counterpart to the dispute between Heidegger and Grassi. Born and raised in Milan, Grassi moved to Freiburg in 1928, where he developed a ten-year friendship with Heidegger that gave rise to Heidegger’s famous essay “Letter on Humanism,” published in 1947 under the editorship of Grassi. Following a later academic appointment in Berlin, where he would establish the Italian institute *Studia Humanitatis*, Grassi served as an unofficial cultural attaché of the Fascist government in Germany.[[39]](#endnote-39) Grassi’s forays into German philosophy, living and working under the shadow of National Socialism, and his initiative to promote Heidegger’s philosophy in Fascist Italy, gave him a unique perspective on the complex intersections between historical scholarship and ideological principles at that time, which finds interesting parallels in architectural ideas, as will be argued later.[[40]](#endnote-40) The seeds of his philosophy really began, however, during his time in Freiburg, where Grassi developed a special insight into Heidegger’s ontology which later formed the basis of his dispute with the great philosopher. The main issue of disagreement is highlighted in the following statement, taken from Heidegger’s “Letter on Humanism:”

Every humanism is either grounded in a metaphysics or is itself made to be the ground of one. Every determination of the essence of man that already presupposes an interpretation of beings without asking about the truth of Being, whether knowingly or not, is metaphysical. The result is that what is peculiar to all metaphysics, specifically with respect to the way the essence of man is determined, is that it is “humanistic”. Accordingly, every humanism remains metaphysical. In defining the humanity of man humanism not only does not ask about the relation of Being to the essence of man; because of its metaphysical origin humanism even impedes the question by neither recognising nor understanding it.[[41]](#endnote-41)

Heidegger’s assertion of the intrinsic metaphysical foundations of humanism, and therefore its antipathy to the “relation of Being to the essence of man,” forms the starting point of Grassi’s counter-argument and ultimate challenge to his former teacher. This challenge cleverly inverts Heidegger’s dismissal of Renaissance humanism as a philosophy incompatible with his own phenomenology, a challenge which also reverses Heidegger’s belief that Latin scholarship lacks “speculative thought.”[[42]](#endnote-42)

The dispute, in many ways, grew out of an earlier debate that took place in 1929, in Davos in Switzerland, between Martin Heidegger and Ernst Cassirer. The encounter has been interpreted by some commentators as representing a decisive shift from an older, more established, philosophical position (neo-Kantianism) to the new philosophical outlook of phenomenology, or more specifically, Heidegger’s ontological philosophy.[[43]](#endnote-43) At the heart of the debate was Heidegger’s charge that neo-Kantianism “suffers from a decontextualized and implicitly metaphysical model of the human being,” much like his later claims about Renaissance humanism.[[44]](#endnote-44)

Heidegger’s criticism of humanism is based on a false premise according to Grassi; namely, that the *Studia Humanitatis* is derived primarily from Platonic/Neoplatonic principles that saw a revival during the late fifteenth century, specifically in the work of Marsilio Ficino.[[45]](#endnote-45) The assumption, moreover, lays particular emphasis on the exclusivity of Latin/Greek literature and mathematical/geometric forms of enquiry for revealing divine essences.[[46]](#endnote-46) Grassi, however, challenges this premise by arguing that the beginnings of humanism actually took place within the arena of the vernacular spoken word and the debates surrounding language as poetry in the early fifteenth century, evidenced in the work of Giovanni Pontano, Cristoforo Landino and others.[[47]](#endnote-47) Consequently, Grassi identified a philosophy *within* the eloquence of fifteenth-century rhetoric redolent of Vico’s revival of classical rhetorical thought, but in this case founded on Dante’s principles of the Italian language.[[48]](#endnote-48) In describing the building of the Tower of Babel, Dante uses the analogy of the different trades and modes of construction to convey the growing multitude of tongues: “There was the first [language] for master builders, another for all the stone-rollers…For all the different tasks that were present at that project there arose different languages which led to the disintegration of the unity of the human race” (*tot idiomatibus tunc genus humanum disinngitur*).[[49]](#endnote-49) Importantly, Dante’s argument of an intimate connection between building and language would find a modernist response in Giuseppe Terragni’s design for the Danteum. We will see later to what extent Grassi’s communicative model of humanism, anticipated in Dante’s vernacular poetry, is reflected in this unbuilt project.

On the basis of Dante’s particular linguistic emphasis, Grassi argues that Heidegger’s search for a “non-literary character of poetry was originally set forth in Italian Humanism,” before its decline into a mere curriculum of classical learning.[[50]](#endnote-50) Curiously, as if contradicting his own apparently ‘anti-humanistic’ stance, Heidegger claimed in 1929 that he was seeking to pave the way for a “new humanism,” an assertion that would no doubt have been construed by Grassi as confirmation of his own interpretation of the great philosopher’s ontology.[[51]](#endnote-51) Ironically, this “new humanism” (if we accept Grassi’s rhetorical model), was put into practice in the debate that took place in Davos, as Jürgen Habermas describes:

The conflict between Cassirer and Heidegger, which extended into the political domain, was not played out [in the debate]. The opposition between the decent, cultured spirit of a cosmopolitan humanism, and that fatal rhetoric set on throwing man back into the “hardness of his fate” was reflected only in the contrast of gestures and mentalities.”[[52]](#endnote-52)

The contested views outlined above, concerning the meaning of Renaissance humanism, its classical reception and its relevance to early twentieth-century modernity, reveal two essentially competing philosophical positions: Gentile’s actualism and Grassi’s rhetorical/poetic model, which he believed underpinned Heidegger’s phenomenology. In each, we see how humanism and its ‘classical heritage’ was deemed to constitute an essential foundation for reinvigorating the communicative dimensions of modernity, even if both positions drew very different terms of reference from the traditions of Renaissance culture.

**Humanist Associations in Fascist Architecture**

The disputes between Croce, Gentile, Heidegger and Grassi shine a light on the many contradictory and conflictual aspects of Fascist architecture. These reveal a rich tapestry of contested ideological positions and theoretical views about architecture that were unique to Italy during the interwar period.[[53]](#endnote-53) A common thread in these philosophical and architectural debates concerned the issue of rationalism. Croce dismissed the philosophical unity underpinning Gentile’s actual idealism as “irrational,” on the grounds that his elevation of the state, which Gentile believed “has its transcendental ground in the relation of the individual to his conscience,”[[54]](#endnote-54) was innately non-dialectical and therefore philosophically wanting.[[55]](#endnote-55) This irrationality, moreover, serves as an interesting philosophical counterpoint to the work and ideas of the Italian rationalists, an architectural movement that flourished under Fascism and benefited from the regime’s active endorsement of modernist sensibilities.[[56]](#endnote-56) As a leading member of the group and a committed Fascist, Giuseppe Terragni sought to use his vision of architecture to reinforce the primacy of the state under the regime, which at one level served as an effective organ of Gentile’s social philosophy.

In architectural terms, we tend to think of rationalism as broadly a ‘recomposition’ of fragments of the city[[57]](#endnote-57) which perennially appropriate urban conditions, but which in the end never achieve unity (whatever the refinement and apparent resolution of the final work).[[58]](#endnote-58) Such a definition, however, seems remote from the stated objectives of the Italian rationalists and the work of Terragni in particular, which, as Giorgio Ciucci states, presented itself as “a ‘true’ classicism, based on purity, the absolute proportion, mathematics, and the ‘Greek spirit.’”[[59]](#endnote-59) To help us understand this paradox, and therefore the underlying relationships between the rational and irrational in Fascist ideology, the following observation by Grassi provides helpful guidance:

If by irrational we mean the reality that *man* is incapable of subjugating and grasping for his present purposes (*attualmente*), either because (as with the ancient transcendental school) it transcends *human intellect*, or (as with the modern school of immanence) because spirit does not yet fully possess itself, the term ‘irrational’ is improper. We assert, instead, that reality is always rational but sometimes it presents itself *implicitly*, that is, not yet totally comprehensibly. Moreover, what appears irrational to use today will become explicit tomorrow.[[60]](#endnote-60)

By considering irrationalism as essentially a misnomer, Grassi believed that the classical forms of tragedy (which express the unattainable in human nature) constitute the basis of the ‘not yet rational.’[[61]](#endnote-61) It is interesting to consider Italian rationalism in these terms, as a modernist (Fascist) *response* to classical models of tragedy, emblematised in the tropes of the Renaissance ideal city.[[62]](#endnote-62) In this response, Fascist civic buildings become masks that “prove…to be ideologically burdened and still semantically undefined.”[[63]](#endnote-63) To examine these characteristics of Italian rationalism, it is helpful to begin with a brief examination of the façade of the Casa del Fascio in Como.

**Insert Figure 24.1 here:**

**Giuseppe Terragni (1904-1943), Casa del Fascio, Como (1936): a) View from the roof-terrace, looking towards Santa Maria Assunta (Duomo), and b) view of the palace and piazza from the cathedral.**

For Kurt Forster, certain historical associations loom large in Terragni’s design:

Terragni sought in his concept of the Casa del Fascio a typological anchorage in Italian architectural history. He made use of individual terms which came either from the architectural theory of the Renaissance, or from the polemics of modern building. Not in historical forms, but in the history of form, he searched for the outlines of a work which was to serve him, down to the very details of construction, to create a new relationship between past and present, just as the new architecture of the Renaissance was trying to distance itself from its present in order to insist on the authority of a distant past. In addition to the new instrumentation of building materials, Terragni's concept is especially striking for the eminent importance of the facade. In this respect, too, he followed a way of imagining and representing architectural ideas that clearly stem from the Renaissance.[[64]](#endnote-64)

Terragni’s interest in the three-dimensionality and depth of the façade serves as an effective rhetorical device for conveying a ‘civic presence.’ This is further amplified by the topographical relationship of the building to the domed cathedral located opposite, as if consciously emulating the paradigmatic religious/political dialogue between the duomo and the palace of the *podestà* in Renaissance cities. Terragni constructed a photomontage to communicate what he saw as a “historical succession” in the topography of Como, in which the Casa del Fascio (“*Tempi Nostri*”) forms the culmination of a sequence of buildings and spaces that includes the bell-tower and town hall (“*Medievale*”) and the duomo (“*Rinascimento*”).[[65]](#endnote-65)

**Insert Figure 24.2 here:**

**Giuseppe Terragni (1904-1943), Casa del Fascio, Como (1936); a) Photomontage of a people’s assembly in June 1936 in front of the Casa del Fascio (published in *Quadrante*, October 1936); b) Photomontage showing the “historical succession” from mediaeval tower, Renaissance duomo to the Fascist palace (1936).**

The manner, however, in which the serene white-framed building of the Casa del Fascio imbues a sense of detachment and purity is disturbed in a series of other photomontages that Terragni produced:

The austere restraint of the building itself would seem to argue for restraint in the application of decorative elements, if indeed any should be added at all. The photomontage proposed by the Terragni group…presents a striking contrast to the otherwise reserved and unadorned structure; it has the appearance of a political billboard, a schematized presentation of selected aspects of the history of Fascism.[[66]](#endnote-66)

Added to this is another photomontage that shows a popular assembly in front of the main façade of the Casa del Fascio, with the building itself montaged with silhouetted standing figures (the Fascist ‘apparatchiks’) on the balconies facing the cathedral opposite. Compared to the orderly civic/religious processions depicted in Renaissance representations of urban spaces, Terragni’s second photomontage is little more than a disorderly crowd – or mob – without ceremonial coherence, whose presence in the image seems to disrupt, or ‘undo,’ the sense of decorum and restraint conveyed in the trabeated structure of the palace façade. The image reinforces Croce’s observation that Fascism is “unafraid of commotions and riots,” and indeed cultivates them for its own ends.

Combined, both photomontages serve as a poignant reminder of the contradictory nature of Fascism; the priority given, on the one hand, to arousing the masses into action through the agency of propagandist slogans and collective hysteria, and on the other the much-honed principle of historical continuity and harmony that was central to legitimising its ideology. Here, in many ways, lies the central paradox: Fascism’s ‘nod to history,’ with its humanistic/classical bearings and cultivation of *Romanitas*, and its ultimately a-historical political agenda.

These contradictions, revealed in Terragni’s photomontages of the Casa del Fascio, find a more hermetic form of expression in his unbuilt project, the Danteum. The design of this project remains one of the most controversial and discussed of the Modern movement, and it is not the intention here to revisit this debate, but rather to highlight some key issues pertinent to this investigation.[[67]](#endnote-67) In 1938 (the same year that both Hitler and Heidegger visited Rome), Terragni and Pietro Lingeri were appointed to design a library and museum dedicated to the work of the great Italian poet, Dante Alighieri, to form part of the 1942 World Exposition. The originator of the idea behind the project, Rino Valdameri, who was director of the *Accademia di Belle Arti di Brera* in Milan, assembled a panel of advisors for the project, among whom was Gentile.[[68]](#endnote-68)

What was initially conceived as a commemorative building to the great poet and his work would later become a powerful spatial allegory of Dante’s *Divine Comedy*. The intended location of the building on the north side of the newly formed Via dell’Impero (later Via dei Fori Imperiali) – a ceremonial street built under Mussolini, extending across the ancient ruins of the imperial fora and linking the Colosseum with the Piazza Venezia (along which Hitler paraded with Mussolini in May 1938) – was on the site formerly designated for the Fascist Party national headquarters (Palazzo del Littorio), to which Terragni also submitted a competition entry. Walter Adamson’s assertion that Fascism is a dynamic “generator” of desirable forms of language (mythic, historic, poetic)[[69]](#endnote-69) is demonstrated in the Danteum through what Andong Lu calls “a hybrid system of episodic and situational narrations that turns…geometric space into a narrative labyrinth.”[[70]](#endnote-70) In this system, Terragni attempts to convey the experiences of inferno, purgatory and paradise as stages in a spiritual pilgrimage that transcribes, spatially and symbolically, Dante’s poetic account of his three-fold journey in the company of two guides, the poet Virgil and Beatrice (the woman Dante confesses to love).

**Insert Figure 24.3 here:**

**Giuseppe Terragni (1904-1943), the Danteum (1938); a) Terragni’s plan showing the different spaces that reconstruct allegorically the journey from inferno and purgatory to Paradise (1938); b) 3D digital model of the interior space of ‘paradise’ in the Danteum.**

The abundance of columns in Terragni’s design, which serve as spatial and allegorical registers of the different stages of the journey (from the semi-subterranean labyrinth of travertine columns in the entrance *bosco oscuro* to the translucent glass columns in the culminating heavenly realm above), also underpin the humanistic content of the project in their implied anthropomorphism. This is alluded to in an early sketch of the project, in which Terragni includes a direct reference to “Virgilio” for one of the columns, a personification that was probably intended to register in his own mind the reciprocity between the poetic journey of the narrative, the actual journey of the visitor and its physical architectural setting.[[71]](#endnote-71)

Underlying Terragni’s design is a tacit acknowledgement of the distinctive architectural qualities of the *Divine Comedy*, structured around an interweaving between proportional systems – principally the golden section rectangle and its subdivisions (which remind one of the numerical relations described in the poem), anthropological inferences and allegorical references that draw upon Dante’s narrative.[[72]](#endnote-72) However, rather than resulting in a harmonious design, which Terragni claims in his supporting commentary to the project (the *Relazione sul Danteum*), this combination of linguistic and mathematical references gives rise to internal tensions between two ostensibly competing modes of representation: “The Danteum…manifests the confrontation between an atemporal geometric monument and a diachronic spatial pattern engendering peripatetic experience, between two systems of encoding allegorical meanings – architecture and literature.”[[73]](#endnote-73)

Terragni’s search for geometric precision and consistency in the layout of the Danteum constitutes, in many ways, a metaphysical ‘scaffold,’ upon which the more lyrical (and visceral) experiences of the threefold journey to paradise in the *Divine Comedy* are invoked as distinct ‘atmospheres’ – redolent of Dante’s poetry. This feature of the design is implied by Terragni himself, when he states: “…to imagine and translate into stone an architectural organism that, through the balanced proportions of its walls, ramps, stairs, ceilings, the play of the ever-changing light from the sun above, can give to him who traverses its internal spaces the sensation of contemplative isolation.”[[74]](#endnote-74)

Given the political context of the Danteum, it is perhaps appropriate that Cangrande (mediaeval ruler of Verona, autocrat and leading patron of Dante) is a concluding theme in the tour through the lugubrious Danteum (alluding to the ‘Party’ to which the nation was sacrificed); a reference, moreover, which also tacitly acknowledges the status of *Dux/Duce* when city-states in late mediaeval and Renaissance Italy finally succumbed to ‘benign’ tyrants.[[75]](#endnote-75)

What emerges, therefore, in Terragni’s design, is an underlying dialectical relationship between the rhetoric of language and mathematics, which reminds us of the dispute examined earlier between Heidegger and Grassi concerning the status and meaning of Renaissance humanism. Grassi, it will be remembered, considered Heidegger’s interpretation of humanism as essentially a ‘narrow’ and one-sided approach to classical learning, derived from Platonic metaphysics (of which number and geometry constituted the chief modes of ‘measure’). Such an emphasis, Grassi argues, only became clear by the late fifteenth century, through the work of Neoplatonists such as Marsilio Ficino. Before then, a rather different sensibility of Renaissance humanism flourished that was distinctly Latin (rather than Greek) in nature, and entailed a combination of the experiential meanings of Ciceronian oratory and ‘Dantesche’ poetry, the latter largely communicated through the oral traditions of the Italian (Tuscan) vernacular. Whilst Platonic metaphysics could broadly be understood as an eternal and absolute system (which would later be stripped of cosmological bearings and reduced to abstract scientific principles as we see in Cartesian geometry), early humanism was in every sense ‘diachronic’ and situational, and thereby associated with specific places and settings. It becomes clear that implicit in the design and symbolism of the Danteum is a dialectical relationship between these two sensibilities, which Terragni believed could be harmoniously brought together and ultimately reconciled. It could be argued therefore that the Danteum reinforces Grassi’s account of the rational (referred to earlier) as an unresolved rather than a completed process, and by implication the implicitly ‘tragic’ nature of the whole enterprise.

A different form of dialectic emerges in the project for the new railway station at Santa Maria Novella in Florence, which consciously brings into play a number of humanist themes and influences. The new station promised access to modernity in Fascist Italy, in what was believed by many Italians at the time to be a backward-looking rural country.[[76]](#endnote-76) The protracted process of identifying the right design for the station began when a new masterplan for the area was issued in 1915. Designed by a consortium of architects (Gruppo Toscano), headed by the leading Florentine architect Giovanni Michelucci, the presentation of the initial scheme to the panel of judges received vehement opposition from the more conservative ranks of the architectural profession and intellectuals/public figures, most notably the Fascist journalist Ugo Ojetti (who later condemned Terragni’s design for the Danteum).[[77]](#endnote-77) In the end, however, Michelucci’s design won favour and was eventually approved, with some revisions to appease the critics.[[78]](#endnote-78) Completed in 1935, the station, which was formally opened in the presence of King Vittorio Emanuele III, is generally regarded as a fine example of Fascist modernism, closer in spirit to Italian rationalism and European avant-garde than to the more conservative aspects of Fascist design typified in the work of Marcello Piacentini and advocated by Gustavo Giovannoni.

**Insert Figure 24.4 here:**

**Gruppo Toscano and Giovanni Michelucci (1891-1990); a) Santa Maria Novella Railway Station, Florence (1935). Perspective view of the main front of the building with cascading glass wall; b) Palazzina Reale (1935), ground floor plan.**

As part of the project brief, Michelucci and his collaborators designed an elegant pavilion on the east side of the station, along Via Valfonda and Via Berardi. Called the Palazzina Reale (Royal Palace), the building served as a vestibule (or perhaps more aptly an ‘ante-room’) to the city of Florence for the king and his family when arriving in the city by train.[[79]](#endnote-79) In sharp contrast, however, to the dynamic forms of the railway terminal building, whose steel and glass roof ‘spill’ into the newly-formed Piazza Santa Maria Novella on the south side of the complex, the Palazzina Reale is presented as a serene and classically inspired pavilion – clad in the so-called ‘*fior di pesco carnico*’ (peach-blossom-coloured stone) rather than the more familiar Carrara marble, and set back from the hustle and bustle of the east entrance to the station. Its outward simplicity, however, belies the dialectical nature of the design of the building. This is revealed in the manner in which it seeks to bridge the technological and aesthetic attributes of the station complex with the Renaissance city of Florence beyond, to which it serves essentially as a ceremonial gateway. This mediating function of the building recalls – in almost contradictory fashion – both Grassi’s principle of Renaissance humanism as a *via media* (between traditional and proto-modern precepts) and Gentile’s philosophy of actualism.

The pavilion connects two trajectories of ‘vehicular’ movement; on the west side is the railway track and adjacent station platform, which forms the first in a sequence of parallel platforms of the main railway station. This first platform serves as the entry point to the palace via a double atrium space. On the east side is a curved route for the royal cortege, which culminates in an open, double-height canopied space for parking cars that forms an integral part of the pavilion building. This ceremonial passage functions as the exit point to the city. The building itself, which is planned in the form of simple rectangle block, is arranged in a series of spaces that follow the west-east movement from entry to exit points. In the middle of the pavilion is a large, double-height audience hall where the king would address an audience, with reception foyers at either end. On the south and north sides of this hall are a series of transitionary spaces used as resting areas for the king and for members of the monarch’s court, whilst the first floor (accessed by a staircase from the east lobby) is occupied by offices and a balcony overlooking the audience hall and the canopied driveway.

When examined in isolation, the layout and configuration of the Palazzina Reale reminds us of a range of different plan-forms, among them the Renaissance *villa suburbana* (Villa Giulia, Villa Madama and Villa Farnesina) and its ancient Roman antecedents; the sequence of spaces of the pavilion brings into play themes relating to classical notions of *otium* and *negotium*, but in such a way that they are overlaid by the dynamics of the transitionary setting of modern vehicular movement. This is initially demonstrated by the incorporation of garden settings for both entrance and departure spaces of the Palazzina Reale, albeit appropriated to address the particular urban, temporal nature of the building. At the entrance, the king would have passed through a double (paired) atrium-space with planted palm trees – a miniature *hortis conclusus* providing initial respite from his train journey.[[80]](#endnote-80) These classical references also remind one of Roman houses, perhaps a conscious allusion to the ‘domus housing’ found in Pompeii which were a great source of interest under the Fascists.[[81]](#endnote-81)

**Insert Figure 24.5 here:**

**Gruppo Toscano and Giovanni Michelucci (1891-1990), Palazzina Reale (1935); a) View of the south façade with canopied driveway on the right; b) View of the allegorical sculpture of the city/regions of Florence and the Arno River on the east façade, facing the fountain garden.**

From this space, the king would then enter the west foyer (*vestibolo d’onore*) of the pavilion, flanked on either side by large marble bas-reliefs that commemorate Renaissance engineering and architectural achievements in Florence.[[82]](#endnote-82) On the south wall is a relief by Mario Moschi of the construction of the fortifications of Florence by Michelangelo in 1529, showing a fully-armoured knight/warrior holding a sword (centre), flanked by the architect with youthful assistant in attendance on the left and the project’s head mason on the right with his back turned. The panoramic scene of the walled city of Florence, visible in the background, was no doubt intended to refer to Giorgio Vasari’s famous fresco of the 1530 Siege of Florence in the Palazzo Vecchio. The other bas-relief on the north wall, by Giannetto Mannucci, shows a representation of the construction of the dome of Florence cathedral, with the figure of Brunelleschi on the left holding a model of the dome (without lantern) and dividers in his right hand. Dominated by a scene of building labourers in the centre of the relief, the background is highlighted with a profile of the unfinished dome of the cathedral with stone ribs clearly visible.

**Insert Figure 24.6 here:**

**Gruppo Toscano and Giovanni Michelucci (1891-1990), Palazzina Reale (1935); a) Mario Moschi, bas-relief ‘Michelangelo and the construction of the fortifications of Florence’; b) Giannetto Mannucci, bas-relief ‘Brunelleschi and the building of Florence Cathedral Dome.’**

Each bas-relief is orientated in the direction of the engineering/architectural achievements they refer to, the scene of Brunelleschi’s dome facing the duomo to the south and the representation of the city’s fortifications appropriately oriented towards the periphery of the city. Hence, upon entering the Palazzina Reale, Vittorio Emanuele III would have been presented with representations evoking the geography of the Renaissance city (centre and periphery). These reliefs served to reinforce the revival of the ‘active’ life of Italian (humanist) culture, which from the perspective of Gentilian Actualism involved modern equivalents of engineering achievements such as the construction of the new railway station. The military theme (underlying the scene of the fortifications of Florence) continues in the main audience hall of the pavilion, where tapestries are displayed showing both historic (Renaissance) and modern (Fascist) armoury.[[83]](#endnote-83) Finally, the departure space of the Palazzina Reale evokes a revived classical nymphaeum, with an imposing exedra terminating the north side of the pavilion and a pool opening out from the glazed and marbled wall of the porticoed driveway. Importantly, the configuration of this semi-enclosed space constitutes a somewhat strange conflation between a familiar Roman classical archetype and the curved trajectory of a motor car, the latter defining the route of the departing cortege from the Palazzina Reale to the city as it circumnavigates the perimeter of the ceremonial pool.

This ceremonial journey, moreover, passes a monumental sculpture installed on the east-facing wall of the building. Here, allegories of both the city/regions of Florence and the Arno river are represented by large, reclining figures: a female representing the city and a male the river, in each case following the traditions of Roman classical iconography.[[84]](#endnote-84) Whilst the attribution of the male figure is made clear enough by the presence of a conspicuous shell, over which hovers his right hand, the symbolic association of the female figure requires more explanation. She is shown caressing a small lamb resting on the rocky ledge next to the trunk of a tree. Beyond its obvious biblical meanings, the lamb (when represented with a flag) has a particularly important symbolism that Vittorio Emanuele III would have known; it served as the coat-of-arms of the powerful Wool Guild (*Arte della Lana*) of Renaissance Florence (previously related to the rival *Arte di Calimala*), which was instrumental in the construction of the dome of Florence cathedral. Hence, upon leaving the Palazzina Reale, the king would be reminded of the propitious meanings and venerated status of Florence and its regional topography, whose rich legacy of Renaissance humanistic achievements served as an exemplary model for modern Fascist Italy, of which he was sovereign custodian.

Many years after the construction of the new station in Florence, Michelucci wrote a book on Brunelleschi (*Brunelleschi Mago*),[[85]](#endnote-85) in which he reflects on the influence of the great Renaissance architect on his own work: “If life is lacking in the creative presence and participation of man, then space does not speak. And Brunelleschian space speaks of the intensity of life in an elementary language that is very pure and profound, even when we do not want to listen to it.”[[86]](#endnote-86) Moreover, Michelucci goes on to state:

But we must ask what is the city for Brunelleschi. The city is man with other men: if there is God on the streets and squares we cannot know it and we cannot exclude it. But God is certainly in the diffusion of movement and in the miracle of its duration…Of this god-city Brunelleschi has made his constructive principle and it could only be so: we have yet to add, if it were needed, that this universalism of the city destroys the walled city: the city is also the countryside and therefore other cities.[[87]](#endnote-87)

Michelucci’s interpretation of Brunelleschi, in which architecture and the city “speak” of human interaction and a latent divine presence, conveys a distinctly humanistic sensibility redolent of Grassi’s rhetorical model of Heidegger’s ontology, outlined earlier.[[88]](#endnote-88) The emphasis on the “god-city” (perhaps a conscious allusion to St Augustine’s *de Civitate Dei*), whose influence extends beyond the physical boundaries of the city walls, reminds us of Alberti’s famous interpretation of Brunelleschi’s newly-completed dome of Santa Maria del Fiore. In his prologue to the *volgare* version of his famous treatise, *On Painting*, Alberti describes how the dome casts a shadow over all of Tuscany, thereby encompassing within its symbolic reach all Tuscan citizens (like the protective cape of the Madonna della Misericordia).[[89]](#endnote-89) Implicit in Alberti’s vernacular panegyric to the great architect is his tacit acknowledgment of the relationship between language (the *volgare* of the people) and architecture (embodied in the cathedral dome).

Such a relationship prompts us to speculate on Michelucci’s intended symbolism of the Palazzina Reale, particularly how its function as a ‘threshold’ to Florence for the king of Italy intentionally mediates between notions of centre and periphery of the city, expressed in the bas-reliefs of Brunelleschi’s dome and Michelangelo’s city-walls displayed in the entrance foyer of the building. In their symbolic relationship, Fascism exploited for its own political ends the Renaissance indistinguishability between artistic/architectural achievement, military prowess and humanistic enquiry, famously demonstrated in the iconography of the court of Federico da Montefeltro.[[90]](#endnote-90)

**Conclusion**

This chapter has sought to demonstrate how the intellectual debates surrounding the meaning and veracity of Renaissance humanism as a philosophy and social model in interwar Germany and Italy, find fertile comparisons with the internal conflicts underlying Italian Fascist architecture. In the disputes between Gentile and Croce, and Grassi and Heidegger, it is apparent that the debates about Latinity, language and civic identity reveal broader questions about the relevance of humanistic thinking to modernity, and the extent to which the reception of classical culture in general during this time was unconsciously filtered through artistic and scholarly interests in the *Rinascimento*. The ease with which this filtering process took place was due in part to the relative ‘closeness’ of Renaissance culture to early twentieth-century Italian thinking, in terms of its familiar social/political structures, its much-paraded intellectual achievements and its very visible artistic and architectural legacy, not to mention the perceived importance of the period as a ‘bridge’ between modernity and antiquity (essential to *Romanitas* as Gustavo Giovannoni believed).

It is, however, for the simple reason that the so-called ‘rebirth’ of the classical past during the age of humanism was ultimately more convincing and culturally embedded, from a twentieth-century perspective (privileged as it was in possessing new academic knowledge and insight), than later post-Renaissance classical ‘revivals’ such as eighteenth-century neoclassicism or nineteenth-century historicism, that Fascist interpretations had a certain persuasiveness and depth of meaning. As we have seen in the architectural examples highlighted in this chapter, by Terragni and Michelucci, this association with Renaissance humanism was not so much a conscious reworking or re-enactment of ‘set pieces’ or models (in spite of what took place elsewhere in Fascist revivals of some mediaeval/Renaissance festivals), but rather a creative quarrying of themes susceptible to reinterpretation, transformation and even renewal. It is for this reason that Italian rationalism provided such a fertile (and problematic) terrain in which to exploit the dialectical relationships that existed within Renaissance humanism and modernity, and in their mutual juxtaposition. In these relationships, moreover, the reception of classicism gave rise to ‘rediscovered’ horizons of meaning, both familiar and unfamiliar to modern audiences and communicated through notions of the tragic, paradigmatic, participatory and the civic.

1. The authors wish to thank Peter Carl, Renee Tobe, Hazem Ziada and Rina Arya for their helpful comments of an earlier version of this chapter. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. The historical distance separating the ‘modern’ from ancient and early modern models of classicism was not seen as an obstacle to selectively choosing aspects from each in Fascism: “Eliminating intervening, often historically embarrassing, periods (barbarians’ sack of Rome and long periods of foreign control) telescoped the distance between the two eras and allowed the ready exploitation of imperial Roman imagery. The restoration of Italy’s ‘mystical origins’ involved both the construction of an idealised past and the destruction of a real one: but the modernization program was fundamentally linked to this ‘restoration’ operation.” Diane Ghirardo, “City and Theater: The Rhetoric of Fascist Architecture,” *Stanford Italian Review* (1989): 165-94, 184-85. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Marla Susan Stone, *The Patron State: Culture and Politics in Fascist Italy* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998), 66. Stone refers in particular to the views of Giuseppe Bottai, minister of corporations and national education, and the conservative cultural critic, Ugo Ojetti. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Benedetto Croce, *Cultura e Vita Morale* (Bari: Laterza, 1955), 245-7. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. For a discussion of the joint legacy of Gentile and Croce, see especially David. D. Roberts, *Historicism and Fascism in Modern Italy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), chap. 4. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Fabio Fernando Rizi, *Benedetto Croce and Italian Fascism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 75. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. An important feature of humanism which, according to Gentile, made it an appropriate model was its apparent rejection of mediaeval superstition and religious fervour: “Humanism was a violent spiritual countercharge that was readied in the slow but profound social shift that began as early as the eleventh century and brought about the autonomous life of communal cities and the subsequent ruin of the imperial notion and authority…Humanism frees man from deadly concerns, and prepares the freedom of spirit of modern times.” Eugenio Garin, ed., *G. Gentile, Storia della Filosofia Italiana*, vol. 1 (Florence: Sansoni, 1969), 159. Quoted in Rubini, *The Other Renaissance*, 99. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. A. James Gregor, *Giovanni Gentile: Philosopher of Fascism* (New Jersey; New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2001), 6. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Giovanni Gentile, *La filosofia dell’arte* (Florence: Le Lettere, [1931] 2003); Rizi, *Benedetto Croce and Italian Fascism*, 7. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. This debate was to lead to a significant body of published works between 1946 and 1947. Rocco Rubini, *The Other Renaissance: Italian Humanism between Hegel and Heidegger* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014). The debate also provided the intellectual background for a series of seminal studies on Renaissance architecture after the war, most importantly Rudolf Wittkower, *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism,* vol. 19 (London: Studies of the Warburg Institute, 1949). [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. The difference between both modes of humanism is perhaps most clearly demonstrated by the treatment of Plato in Romantic humanism as an ‘idealist,’ rather than a ‘sage’ and Attic precursor of Christian doctrine as many Renaissance humanists believed. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. These popular attributions of Renaissance humanism have, however, been strongly contested. See John Jeffries Martin, *Myths of Renaissance Individualism* (Basingstoke, Hants: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), and James Hankins, ed., *Renaissance Civic Humanism: Reappraisals and Reflections* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Tim Benton, “Humanism and Fascism,” in *Humanist Traditions in the Twentieth Century:* *Vol. 23, Comparative Criticism,* ed. E.S. Shaffer(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 69-115, esp. 69-70. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. For a succinct examination of this, see Hans Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1966). [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. On the decorum of Renaissance public life, see Baldesar Castiglione’s *The Courtier*, which progresses from family affairs to Plato’s ideas of the statesman. *Castiglione: The Book of the Courtier*, trans. George Bull (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1981). [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. For Kristeller’s overview of humanism, see his 1978 lecture, “Humanism,” *Minerva*: *A Review of Science, Learning and Policy* 16, 4 (Dec. 1978), 586-95. It is during this later period that the terminology of *Dux/Duce* emerges to designate rulers of principalities, which Mussolini later adopted through Gabriele d’Annunzio. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Some examples are: Bertando Spavento, *La filosofia italiana nelle sue relazioni con la filosofia europea* (Bari: Gius. Laterza and Figli, 1908), and G. Toffanin, *Che cosa fu l’Umanesimo* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1929). [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. It should be pointed out at the outset, however, that up until 1938, Mussolini’s Fascist regime was not totalitarian, but “just an ordinary nationalist dictatorship developed logically from a multiparty democracy.” Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harvest, 1994), 257. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Hugo Ott, *Martin Heidegger: A Political Life* (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 1993); M.E. Moss, *Mussolini's Fascist Philosopher: Giovanni Gentile Reconsidered* (Oxford: Peter Lang Publishing, 2004) [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. D. Medina Lasansky, *The Renaissance Perfected: Architecture, Spectacle, and Tourism in Fascist Italy* (University Park, PA: University Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 80. In 1940, Giovanni Papini visited Mussolini in Rome and presented him with a copy of the journal produced by the centre, appropriately called *La rinàscita*. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. Ibid., 79. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. Christof Thoenes, “La grande era bramantesca non è chiusa – Italienische Renaissance Architektur aus der Sicht des Fachismus,” in *Architektur als Politische Kultur: Philosophia Practica*, ed. Hermann Hipp and Ernst Seidl (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 1996), 69-77. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. Ibid., 72. Thoenes refers to the Fascist developments in ‘Roman’ Brescia in the 1930s and 1940s, which were designed with a combination of antique and Renaissance references (p.71). Bramante’s role as linchpin in this relationship is underscored by “*il sentiment tutto classico delle forti masse*” and “*la plastica conformazione dei grandi spazi, che Bramante si prepara a dominare,*” which Giovannoni saw as underpinning this historical continuity from ancient Rome to Fascism. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. Ibid., 73 and 71. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. “…l’umanismo in Italy is a period in the history of philosophy falling between la scholastica and l’eta moderna, a 200 year period between Petrarch and Bruno.” Hankins, “Two twentieth-century interpreters of Renaissance Humanism,” 108. See P. Rossi and C.A. Viano, *Storia della filosofia*, vol. 3: *Dal quattrocento al seicento* (Rome: Laterza, 1995). Such a claim is counter to Anglo-Saxon views that conveniently “skip over the period between Aquinas and Descartes,” which was considered to be largely devoid of philosophical enquiry. Hankins, “Two twentieth-century interpreters of Renaissance Humanism,” 108. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. For coverage of these different philosophical influences on twentieth-century perspectives of humanism, see Rocco Rubini, *The Other Renaissance: Italian Humanism between Hegel and Heidegger* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014). [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. For Croce’s reaction to Heidegger’s philosophy, see Benedetto Croce and Karl Vossler, *Carteggio 1899-1949* (Rome: Laterza, 1951), 340-44. [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. See Benedetto Croce, *The Philosophy of Giambattista Vico*, trans. R. G. Collingwood (New York: Russell and Russell, 1964). [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. On Vico’s interest in rhetoric see David L. Marshall, *Vico and the Transformation of Rhetoric in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014). [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. Rizi, *Benedetto Croce and Italian Fascism*, 21. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. Horst Bredekamp, “Berlin, the Second Florence: Fragments of a Broken Mirror” (unpublished lecture, Josephine Waters Bennett Lecture, Renaissance Society of America Annual Meeting, Humboldt University, Berlin, March 26-28 2015). The cultivation of the Renaissance legacy in Florence at this time was partly mirrored by attempts in Germany to present Nuremburg as the centre of the German Renaissance: “Hitler reportedly liked Florence because, like Nuremburg, it was both a medieval city and a Parteistadt [Party City].” Benton, “Humanism and Fascism,” 88. E. Kuby, *Verrat auf Deutsch: wie das dritte Reich Italien ruinierte* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe Verlag, 1982), 81. During Hitler’s famous visit on 8th May 1938, among the guides who accompanied him around the city was Friederich Kriegbaum, director of the *Kunsthistorisches Institut* in Florence at the time. Benton, “Humanism and Fascism,” 86-89. [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. As Tim Benton states, “After a brave revolt by Benedetto Croce and others, Italian intellectuals broadly acquiesced and in most cases set about doing their best for Fascism, in an atmosphere which encouraged discussion and even dissent, within certain rather ambiguous limits.” Tim Benton, “Epigraphy and Fascism,” *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies*, special issue (supplement 75: The Afterlife of Inscriptions), 44, S75 (July 2000): 163-92, esp. 163. The ideological axis between Italy and Germany at this time prompted Croce to voice a counter-position: “A notorious speech by Martin Heidegger and his sympathy for Hitler provided the occasion [for Croce] to criticize Gentile once again and to point out the practical effects of his philosophy, or any other philosophy based on irrationalism.” Rizi, *Benedetto Croce and Italian Fascism*, 205. [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. Giovanni Gentile, “Concezione umanistica del mondo,” in *Introduzione alla filosofia* (Rome: Treves-Treccani-Tumminelli, 1932), 1-19, esp. 17; H.S. Harris, *The Social Philosophy of Giovanni Gentile* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1960), 55-56. [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
36. Gregor, *Giovanni Gentile: Philosopher of Fascism*, 12. [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. Ibid. Gentile’s distinction, however, between both modes of philosophical enquiry, between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, was challenged by his contemporary Eugenio Garin, who regarded the fifteenth century “as a period which saw an evolution from active participation of humanists like Leonardo Bruni in civic life to a politically quietest culture under the egemonia medicea, dominated by metaphysics, religion and Platonic ‘villa intellectuals.’” Hankins, “Two twentieth-century interpreters of Renaissance Humanism,” 110. The status of the early fifteenth century as a time for collective action is reiterated in Giuseppe Mazzotta, *Cosmopoiesis: The Renaissance Experiment* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), xiii. [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
38. The manner in which Gentile’s understanding of humanism became dogmatic, and ultimately divorced from the principles underlying Renaissance humanism, is the way Fascism cultivated mass-culture through nationalist causes. This had very little in common with the *popolo* of Italian city-states, who, particularly in the sixteenth century, were happy to go to war with each other or to shift alliances for local advantage, having little concept of the nation-state or nationalism. Giovanni Gentile, *Teoria generale dello spirito come atto puro* (Pisa: Mariotti, 1916); Emanuele Severino, ed., *Giovanni Gentile, L'attualismo* (Milano: Giunti, 2014), 14-86. [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
39. For an examination of Grassi’s philosophy in the context of Fascism and National Socialism, see Wilhelm Büttemeyer, *Ernesto Grassi: Humanismus zwischen Faschismus und Nationalsozialismus* (Munich: Karl Alber, 2009). [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
40. Alberto Pérez-Gómez first brought to my attention the influence of Grassi’s philosophy of orality on architecture. See in particular his *Attunement: Architectural Meaning after the Crisis of Modern Science* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016), esp. 162. [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
41. Martin Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism,” in *Martin Heidegger, Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1993), 213-65, esp. 225-26. [↑](#endnote-ref-41)
42. Ernesto Grassi, *Rhetoric as Philosophy* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1980), 4. [↑](#endnote-ref-42)
43. For a detailed examination of this meeting, see Peter E. Gordon*, Continental Divide: Heidegger, Cassirer, Davos* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010). [↑](#endnote-ref-43)
44. Ibid., 357. [↑](#endnote-ref-44)
45. Heidegger’s knowledge of humanism may have been partly shaped by two visits he made to Italy in the late 1930s. The first was in 1936, when he gave a lecture on Hölderlin at the German-Italian Culture Institute in Rome, after which he made a series of trips to Frascati and Tusculum with a former Jewish student, Karl Löwith, and his wife, who were living as refugees in Italy at the time. The second was in 1938, when he visited Italy as “an official representative of the Nazi regime,” during which time he “inquired about [Kristeller] in a friendly way.” It may be that this latter visit was timed to coincide with Hitler’s famous visit to Rome in May 1938. Karl Löwith, “My Last Meeting with Heidegger in Rome, 1936,” *New German Critique* 45, special issue on Bloch and Heidegger (Autumn 1988): 115-116, esp. 115; Paul Oskar Kristeller and Margaret L. King, “Iter Kristellerianum: The European Journey (1905-1939),” *Renaissance Quarterly* 47 (1994): 907-929, esp. 918. [↑](#endnote-ref-45)
46. This is perhaps best epitomised in Luca Pacioli, *De divina proportione*, written around 1498 and first printed in 1509. [↑](#endnote-ref-46)
47. On Cassirer’s neo-Kantian perspective of the Renaissance, see his *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy* (New York: Dover Publications, 2003); Grassi, *Heidegger and the Question of Renaissance Humanism* (Binghampton: State University of New York, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies,1983), 52. [↑](#endnote-ref-47)
48. Dante was one of the first to argue a fundamental difference between the priority of language as written testimony (principally Latin) and as spoken communication (the vernaculars). Articulated in his *De vulgari eloquentia*, Dante believed that Latin was essentially a ‘frozen’ language, devoid of signs of development or evolution, whilst the vernaculars were historical and living. See Mirko Tavoni, *Qualche idea su Dante* (Bologna: Società editrice il Mulino, 2015), esp. chaps I and II. [↑](#endnote-ref-48)
49. Ernesto Grassi, *Rhetoric as Philosophy: The Humanist Tradition* (Pennsylvania: Penn State University, 1980), 77. [↑](#endnote-ref-49)
50. Grassi, *Heidegger and the Question of Renaissance Humanism*, 92. [↑](#endnote-ref-50)
51. Martin Heidegger/Karl Jaspers, in *Briefwechsel, 1920-1963*, ed. Walter Biemel and Hans Saner (Frankfurt am Main: V. Klostermann, 1990), 132-33. Quoted in Gordon, *Continental Divide*, 262. [↑](#endnote-ref-51)
52. Habermas, “The Liberating Power of Symbols,” 23. Quoted in Gordon, *Continental Divide*, 356. [↑](#endnote-ref-52)
53. Diane Ghirardo has examined this multifaceted aspect of Fascist architecture. See in particular “Architects, Exhibitions, and the Politics of Culture in Fascist Italy,” *Journal of Architectural Education* 45, 2 (1992), 67-75. [↑](#endnote-ref-53)
54. Harris, *The Social Philosophy of Giovanni Gentile*, 264. [↑](#endnote-ref-54)
55. Rizi, *Benedetto Croce and Italian Fascism*, 58. [↑](#endnote-ref-55)
56. Scholarship on Italian rationalism is extensive. For Italian commentators, see Leonardo Benevolo, *L’architettura nell’Italia contemporanea* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1998); Michele Cennamo, *Materiali per l’analisi dell’architettura moderna. La prima Esposizione di architettura Razionale* (Naples: Fiorentino, 1973); Carlo Cresti, *Architettura e fascism,* (Florence: Vallechi Editore, 1986); Paolo Nicoloso, *Gli Architetti di Mussolini. Scuole e sindacato, architetti e massoni, professori e politici negli anni del regime* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1999); Rosario De Simone, *Cronache di architettura: 1914-1951* (Florence: Edifir, 1998); Marcello Piacentini*,* “Prima internazionale architettonica, con 30 illustrazioni*,*” *Architettura e Arti Decorative*, fascicolo XII (August 1928): 544-561. [↑](#endnote-ref-56)
57. See Andong Lu, “The telling of a spatial allegory: the Danteum as narrative labyrinth,” *Architectural Research Quarterly* 14, 3 (2010): 237-46, note 2, 245. [↑](#endnote-ref-57)
58. For a general overview of twentieth-century rationalism in Italy, see Andrew Peckham, “The Dichotomies of Rationalism in 20th-Century Italian Architecture,” in *Rationalist Traces*, special issue of *Architectural Design* 77, 5 (September/October 2007): 10-15. For a discussion of Terragni in the context of Italian rationalism, see Thomas L. Schumacher, *Surface and Symbol: Giuseppe Terragni and the Architecture of Italian Rationalism* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996). [↑](#endnote-ref-58)
59. Ibid., Giorgio Ciucci, “Introduction,” 8. [↑](#endnote-ref-59)
60. Ernesto Grassi, *Primi scritti (1922-1946)*, ed. Ingrid Basso, Luca Bisin and Massimo Marassi, 2 vols (Naples: La Città del Sole, 2011), vol. 1, 29. Quoted in Rubini, *The Other Renaissance*, 182. [↑](#endnote-ref-60)
61. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-61)
62. See Richard Krautheimer, “The Tragic and Comic Scenes of the Renaissance: The Baltimore and Urbino Panels,” *Gazette des Beaux Arts* XXXIII, 327 (1948): 327-46. [↑](#endnote-ref-62)
63. Kurt W. Forster, “BAUgedanken und Gedankengebäude – Terragnis Casa del Fascio in Como,” in *Architektur als Politishe Kultur: Philosophia Practica*, ed. Hermann Hipp and Ernst Seidl (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 1996), 253-71, esp. 254 (translation from the German by Annette Witham). I use the term ‘mask’ in the context of M. Tafuri, “Giuseppe Terragni: Subject and Mask,” trans. Diane Ghirardo, *Oppositions* 11 (1977). [↑](#endnote-ref-63)
64. Forster, “BAUgedanken und Gedankengebäude,” 258. [↑](#endnote-ref-64)
65. Ibid., 259-60. [↑](#endnote-ref-65)
66. Diane Ghirardo, “Politics of a Masterpiece: The Vicenda of the Façade Decoration of the Casa del Fascio, Como 1936-39,” *College Art Association of America*, LXII (1980): 466-78, esp. 469. [↑](#endnote-ref-66)
67. The literature on this building project is extensive but to highlight just some examples, see Bruno Zevi, *Giuseppe Terragni* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1980); Flavio Mangione, Luca Ribichini and Attilio Terragni, eds., *Giuseppe Terragni a Roma. Ediz. italiana e inglese* (Rome: Prospettive edizioni/Ordine Architetti di Roma, 2015). [↑](#endnote-ref-67)
68. Thomas L. Schumacher, *The Danteum: A Study in the Architecture of Literature* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1985), 20-21 [↑](#endnote-ref-68)
69. Walter L. Adamson, “Avant-Garde Political Rhetorics: Prewar Culture in Florence as a Source of Postwar Fascism,” *History of European Ideas* 16, 4-6 (1993): 753-57, esp. 753. [↑](#endnote-ref-69)
70. Lu, “The telling of a spatial allegory,” 237. [↑](#endnote-ref-70)
71. Aarati Kanekar, “From building to poem and back: The Danteum as a study in the projection of meaning across symbolic forms,” *Journal of Architecture* 10, 2 (2005): 135-59, esp. 150-51. This idea is also supported by T. L. Schumacher, *The Danteum: A Study in the Architecture of Literature* (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1993). [↑](#endnote-ref-71)
72. J. Guzzardo, “Dante: Numerological Studies,” *American University Studies, Series II, Romance Languages and Literature*, vol. 59 (New York: Pete Lang, 1987). [↑](#endnote-ref-72)
73. Lu, “The telling of a spatial allegory,” 238. [↑](#endnote-ref-73)
74. From Giuseppe Terragni, “Relazione sul Danteum,” quoted in Lu, “The telling of a spatial allegory,” 239. [↑](#endnote-ref-74)
75. I wish to thank Peter Carl for pointing this out. [↑](#endnote-ref-75)
76. The entire modernisation of Florence took place between 1926 and 1934 and was strongly supported by Alessandro Pavolini, federal secretary of the national Fascist party of Florence and co-founder of the *Centro di Studi Rinascimentale*. See Claudia Conforti, Roberto Dulio, Marzia Marandola, Nadia Musumeci and Paola Ricco, *La stazione di Firenze di Giovanni Michelucci e del Gruppo Toscano 1932-1935* (Milan: Mondadori Electa spa, 2016), 11-12. [↑](#endnote-ref-76)
77. The Gruppo Toscano was formed by Michelucci and some ex-students from the Faculty of Architecture in Florence. Members of the group consulted each other occasionally during La Palazzina Reale works, but this last building of the station complex was only signed by Michelucci. Carlo Cresti, “Un carteggio inedito per la storia del ‘Gruppo Toscano,’” *La Nuova Città* 3 (Jul.-Dec. 1993): 96-107. [↑](#endnote-ref-77)
78. When the competition for the station concluded, all project entries were exhibited in the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence, with large numbers of visitors flowing into the Renaissance halls. See “Come procedono i lavori per la mostra dei progetti,” *La Nazione,* March 3, 1933, 5. See also Carlo Severati, “Cronaca di Santa Maria Novella,” *L’architettura cronache e storia* 211 (May 1973): 59, and “Il progetto del ‘Gruppo Toscano’ definitivamente approvato per l’esecuzione del nuovo edificio,” *La Nazione,* May 20, 1933, 5. [↑](#endnote-ref-78)
79. The king had embraced the birth, rise and fall of Italian Fascism. He appointed Benito Mussolini as prime minister in 1922, but overthrew him in 1943. The monarchy was then abolished in Italy by referendum after the end of World War II. [↑](#endnote-ref-79)
80. For studies of the Palazzina, see in particular Fabio Battaggia, Colomba Pecchioli and Guido Murdolo, *La Palazzina Reale: Nuova sede dell’Ordine degli Architetti di Firenze e della Fondazione Architetti Firenze* (Florence: Maschietto Editore, 2013), 8-30. [↑](#endnote-ref-80)
81. Giovanni Michelucci had enjoyed long visits to Pompeii during his residence in Rome in the 1920s. In an article entitled “Lezione di Pompei,” written in collaboration with Roberto Papi and published in 1934, the authors state: “Spontaneous and majestic, as the colour of its walls, Pompeii reveals to the people the spiritual nature of its architecture; Pompeii recalls feelings of warmth by a fireplace, family places…Pompeii makes us aware of our primitive self of Italian race, the civility of which makes us living our own beautiful life. Ordering things in a logic and harmonious way is what we need in our life in reality…” Fabio Battaggia, et al., *La Palazzina Reale: Nuova sede dell’Ordine,* 26-29 (text translated by Eleni Tracada). [↑](#endnote-ref-81)
82. Carlo Cresti, *Firenze, da nazionalista a “fascistissima” 1903-1944: Arti figurative, architettura, letteratura e circostanze politiche* (Florence: Angelo Pontecorboli Editore, 2018), 292. [↑](#endnote-ref-82)
83. For an account of the artwork for the new station, see *Rodolfo Margheri, Dipinti 1935-1967, Catalogo* *della mostra*, *Firenze, Palazzo Strozzi, dicembre 1982 - gennaio 1983*, (Florence: Il Bisonte-Vallecchi Editore, 1982); Conforti et al., *La Stazione di Firenze di Giovanni Michelucci,* 32-33. [↑](#endnote-ref-83)
84. M. Margozzi, *L’antico del modern. Scultura italiana degli anni trenta, catalogo della mostra, Roma, Aula Ottagona delle Terme di Diocleziano, 10 settembre 2012-6 gennaio 2013* (Milan: Electa, 2012), 60-61. [↑](#endnote-ref-84)
85. First published in 1972 and later in 1990, the most recent edition is 2011; Giovanni Michelucci, *Brunelleschi mago* (Milan: Edizione Medusa, 2011). [↑](#endnote-ref-85)
86. “*Se manca la vita, la presenza creativa e la participazione dell'uomo, lo spazio non parla. E lo spazio brunelleschiano parla per intensità di vita in linguaggio elementare, purissimo e profondo, ‘anche quando non vogliamo ascoltarlo*.’” Ibid., 88 (translation by Nicholas Temple). [↑](#endnote-ref-86)
87. “*Dobbiamo pero domandarci che cosa é la città per Brunelleschi. La città é l'uomo con gli altri uomni: se vi sia Dio per le strade e nelle piazze noi non possiamo saperlo e non possiamo escluderlo, ma Dio é certamente nella diffusione del movimento e nel miracolo della sua durata…Di questo dio-città Brunelleschi ha fatto il suo principio costruttivo e non poteva che essere cosi: dobbiamo ancora aggiungere, se ve ne fosse bisogno, che questo universalismo della città distrugge la città murata: citta e anche la campagna e sono anche le altre città*.” Ibid., 106 (translation by Nicholas Temple). [↑](#endnote-ref-87)
88. For further examination of this issue, see the forthcoming Nicholas Temple, *Architecture and the Linguistic Debate: Artistic and Linguistic Exchanges in Early Modern Italy* (London: Routledge, 2020), chap. 1. [↑](#endnote-ref-88)
89. This interpretation forms the background to chapter 1 of the forthcoming book in note 86, and is partly influenced by the chapter “Edificare: Representing Brunelleschi’s Dome of Santa Maria del Fiore,” in Roy Eriksen, *The Building in the Text: Alberti to Shakespeare and Milton* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001), 49-77. [↑](#endnote-ref-89)
90. See in particular Barry Bell, “The Role of Political Power in Architecture: The Real and the Ideal at the Ducal Palace of Urbino,” in *Building as a Political Act: Proceedings of the 1997 ACSA International Conference, May 31-June 4, 1997* (Washington, DC: ACSA Press, 1998), 59-64. [↑](#endnote-ref-90)