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The politics of vibrant matter: Consistency, containment and the concrete of Mussolini's bunker

Nadia Bartolini
The Open University, Milton Keynes, UK

Abstract
This article explores the idea of how vibrancy can be produced. Specifically, the attempt is to investigate the multiplicities of vibrancy by considering one of Mussolini's bunkers. The author examines the location of the bunker in the EUR (*Esposizione Universale Romana*) neighbourhood in Rome, the bunker's materiality, and the context and social meaning of the bunker through a contemporary art exhibition called 'Confronti' (Confrontations) that took place in the bunker in 2009. The article argues that while emphasizing matter's inherent vibrancy may be useful in some cases, there is also merit in further unpacking the ways in which vibrancy is produced. In this example, the concrete bunker expresses vibrancy through the processes involved in the emergent material form, and in the sustained politics and social considerations embedded in valuing tangible urban heritage.

Keywords
Bunker, concrete, fascism, matter, Rome, vibrancy

Introduction

In the preface of *Vibrant Matter* (2010), Jane Bennett highlights that her philosophical project is based on the perception that matter is passive, inert and dull while life and beings are active and vibrant. The dichotomy of matter on the one hand and living beings on the other is brought together through her book by exploring how matter can be vibrant. Each of the chapters in the book elaborates on specific types of matter (food, cells, metal) that she argues, in and of themselves, are vibrant. Bennett's preface also outlines a politi-

Corresponding author:
Nadia Bartolini, Faculty of Social Sciences, The Open University, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA, UK.
Email: nadia.bartolini@open.ac.uk

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cal project 'to encourage more intelligent and sustainable engagements with vibrant matter and lively things' (p. viii).

Bennett poses a valid point, and by focusing on matter that actively does something, one can envision political and policy shifts. Considering matter as an agent that can potentially generate its own power and create chaos outside controlled boundaries, matter opens up new angles that would otherwise be ignored. However, by homing in on certain types of matter that are inherently vibrant, there is an assumption that all matter is always vibrant without having to think through the meanings associated with such vibrancy. Bennett engages with how matter can actively be and become vibrant without the intervention of social construction or meaning by persuasively arguing for the life force of matter – for example, the energy and movement contained within atomic structures. However, this obscures matter classified as heritage that is already imbued with social construction, and undermines the processes through which materials are combined to produce vibrancy. By focusing on how matter is inherently vibrant, one may also invariably drift into the contentious terrain that opposes the dull and the vibrant which in the end remains unhelpful if there are no demarcations to depict these seemingly monochromatic terms.

While Bennett's contribution is key to answering a call on the vibrancy of matter, studies from the last decades that have centred on materiality, in their own way, have touched upon various forms of 'vibrancy' to reinforce why matter matters. Collections such as *Material Cultures* (Miller, 1998) and *Materiality* (Miller, 2005), and the *Handbook of Material Culture* (Tilley et al., 2006) depict the variety of subjects and areas where cultural practices are examined through the lens of objects. It could be argued that studies on consumerism and commodification, for instance, tend to explore matter's vibrancy in terms of how an object produces economic or affective value in line with historical materialism. Other authors such as Bruno Latour (2007) and Michel Callon (1986) examine matter through agency, and elaborate on how matter is actively involved in changing networks and shifting power. By seeing objects as actants, matter's vibrancy could be perceived here as emerging from vitalism by actively contributing to shaping human and non-human networks. Such categorizations become blurred, however, when studies engage with acknowledging the value of material agency or vibrancy together (Alberti et al., 2013) or when depicting non-humans as having some form of charisma which evokes Walter Benjamin's work (Lorimer, 2007).

Following Bennett's intervention in 2010, the 'vibrancy' terminology has been applied to subsequent work focusing on materiality. In the pages of this journal, Charlotte Townsend-Gault (2011) suggests that Bennett's call to explore matter's energies is a provocation to examine the effect of sea-lion whiskers and spray-crete on Aboriginal status and governance in Canada. This relates matter's vibrancy to a local and affective register in terms of its specific Aboriginal context in British Columbia, and positions it in relation to the legal and political context of Aboriginal rights in Canada. Yet, Bennett's call has also been useful for thinking about the different types of matter, and how some of matter's inherent energy cannot be structured or tamed neatly. Nigel Clark's *Inhuman Nature* (2010), for example, engages with matter as a vital force, much of which lies outside human control; rather, it is the aftermath of major catastrophes – or the matter left strewn everywhere – that must be considered by humans. Here, 'vibrancy' is more

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complex and diffuse as it relates to many materialities, some of which involve innate energies that explode uncontrollably. It also suggests that vibrant matter is not always 'good' for humankind, and renders the relationship with culture almost obsolete when one is caught in the midst of material destruction.

This article is based on these emerging questions on vibrancy, particularly in the context of tangible urban heritage. I am interested in how the term 'vibrancy' can be explored and in what material circumstances it can inform us. The implications of vibrancy came to the fore for me when visiting a World War II bunker in Rome. In this case, the heritage in question is made of concrete, and dates from a relatively recent political regime in the context of Rome's history. Its original construction is associated with safeguarding people from potential attack, rather than showcasing an architectural design or promoting an ideology. This is different from much of the literature on fascist monuments and memorials which mainly focus on the creation of places for memorialization around horrific events such as the Holocaust (for example, see Huyssen, 2003; Young, 1993, 2000)[1] or on re-imagining spaces where fascist heritage may be viewed as undesirable (Macdonald, 2006a). This particular bunker is not a memorial or monument that was created to memorialize the fascist past, but rather a remnant of that period. In addition, the bunker is not necessarily undesirable, a hindrance, or a site of reconciliation. So, how would 'vibrancy' contribute to a better understanding of remnants that are present in the city?

To develop this idea, this article seeks to unpack the different ways that materials exhibit vibrancy. While this is also one of Bennett's aims, I want to suggest that social constructs should not be ignored in the pursuit of finding out the contingencies of vibrancy, especially when considering tangible urban heritage. I propose to explore these contingencies through the use of a case study: a contemporary art exhibition in Mussolini's bunker in the EUR (*Esposizione Universale Romana*) neighbourhood in Rome. The case study brings together elements that illustrate how matter can produce vibrancy, namely the concrete underground bunker, and the use of art to draw attention to the space and politics of a particular era. The article will start by considering the geography of the bunker to highlight why the construction of the EUR matters in relation to Rome and in the creation of vibrancy. I then consider the materiality and spatiality of the bunker, and follow with a reflection on how the politics of vibrancy can be explored through a contemporary art exhibition. The article concludes that there is merit in engaging with the contingencies of vibrancy. Unravelling the ways in which matter gets to be vibrant and the different 'vibrancies' involved bypasses the dualism of matter as being either active or passive. The art exhibition in Mussolini's bunker reveals that vibrancy was produced in a number of ways by exploring the nature of concrete; considering the social constructs involved; assessing the politics of vibrancy through the exhibition; and by localizing the bunker within Rome's fabric.

EUR's fascist legacy

In the 1930s, Fascists 'drew on a variety of contradictory ideological currents' at the time, which also reflected the way they planned the city of Rome at the centre of Italy's identity (Agnew, 1995: 47; Duggan, 2006[1994]); Gentile, 2002a). To refashion Rome and the Italian nation into a new era, Mussolini sought territorial expansion. One of the

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Figure 1. The *Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana* renamed *Palazzo della Civiltà del Lavoro* (Office of the Culture of Work) in the EUR neighbourhood. © Photograph taken by Nadia Bartolini on 26 March 2009

key strategies was to expand the city towards the sea which 'recalled the outward orientation of imperial Rome' (Agnew, 1995: 49). The highway from Rome to Ostia was completed in 1928 for that purpose.

Embedded in this plan was the development of an area called the EUR located about 10km south of the city centre. The idea behind the EUR took shape during the invasion of Ethiopia in 1935 (Gentile, 2002b): the neighbourhood would exhibit to the world the rise and power of the Fascist Empire, and 'the idea of Rome's universal mission' which would coincide with the 20th anniversary of the March on Rome (Etlin, 1991: 482; Painter, 2005). The area would showcase seven sections each representing a different *città* or city (Etlin, 1991; Guidoni, 1987). The concept of the *città* to concentrate specific activities in a representative location was central to Fascist policies at the time, such as the Foro Mussolini/Italico in 1928 as the city of sport (Arthurs, 2010); the La Sapienza district completed in 1935 as the educational city; and *Cinecittà* as the cinema city in 1937 (Etlin, 1991; Guidoni, 1987). Within each *città*, a central structure would symbolize the section. The *Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana* (Office of Italian Culture) was to be a staple building representing the EUR, even though it encountered the most controversy in architectural debates (Etlin, 1991, see Figure 1). Through architecture, Fascism sought to capture memories of antiquity with the contemporary by incorporating both Classical elements in design and a modern perspective in construction techniques (Benton, 2010).

The EUR was a neighbourhood through which Fascism could express itself with a clean slate since it was devoid of remnants (Baxa, 2004, 2010). Nonetheless, Fascism

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was tied to the imagery of power, strength and expansion represented by the Roman Empire. A key question guiding architectural debates at the time was to determine how Fascism could be visually represented in the EUR, thereby debating the relationship between the 'ancient' past with a present revolution and a future vision of the city bound with the representation of the nation.

Even though the Universal Roman Exhibition never took place because of World War II, many of the planners and architects who had been in charge under the Fascists remained in office under the new Christian Democratic Party from 1946 to 1975 (Agnew, 1995). Projects initiated in the EUR were completed in the 1950s and 1960s (Rossi, 2003; Vidotto, 2001). At the time, there was a significant anti-Fascist sentiment across Italy, and concurrently, the EUR's image was modified to represent an accessible, residential quarter with single-family dwellings and large apartments in the hope of attracting families (Baxa, 2010; Painter, 2005).

Today, the EUR is once again being portrayed as Rome's modern vision. In effect, the motto of the neighbourhood is *La Città nella Città* (The City in the City) (see Roma EUR's official website). This recalls Fascism's attempt to develop themed cities within the EUR, and also suggests that the EUR is self-reliant and distinct from the image of Rome associated with the historical city centre. If Mussolini used the EUR to promote the regime's ideology and imperial vision, the mayors of the last 20 years have also been utilizing the EUR as a modern urban laboratory in Rome. This is reflected in three high-profile projects for development that some suggest would never see the light of day if they were constructed outside the EUR: a Congress Centre by Massimiliano Fuksas, a residential complex by Renzo Piano and an 'eco-sustainable' residential skyscraper, the Eurosky Tower, by Franco Pucini.

Part of the difficulty in negotiating the Fascist past in contemporary Italy is that the 'fascist vision of modernism and modernity retains a powerful grip over the Italian imagination' (Arthurs, 2010: 124). Similar to the attempts to sever and resolve the Nazi past in contemporary Germany (Cochrane, 2006; Huyssen, 2003; Macdonald, 2006a, 2006b; Till, 2005; Young, 2000) Italy's relationship with Fascism remains complex and unsettled. In the last few decades, public opinion and media coverage on the issue vacillate depending on the political party at the helm. EUR's concrete material legacy is a reminder that the future is also etched in a Fascist contemporary past.

The chosen location for this particular bunker has an effect that informs the debate surrounding the creation of vibrancy. Its presence amidst Mussolini's planned 'city in a city' signals how the vision of the future empire was meant to promote power as well as safeguard it. By pushing to the side the social life of objects to emphasize inherent vibrancy, one could argue that matter can be decontextualized. However, in this case, it is not possible to jettison the bunker's history since its spatial location generates meaning in a capital city, particularly as the EUR is primarily built with concrete.

When matter becomes concrete

The Futurist and Modernist movements that influenced the planning of the EUR tended to favour concrete as the material of choice to fashion visions of modernity onto the urban landscape (Berman, 1989; Forty, 2012; Humphreys, 1999). Le Corbusier's

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fascination with concrete and the extent of his influence on design attest to how concrete enabled the expression of modern urban lifestyles as well as the reflection of art and abstraction (Minuchin, 2013; Samuel, 2007). Antonio Sant'Elia's 1914 designs of the *Città Nuova* (New City) contributed to the association of concrete with modernity and, as Picon points out, 'no material has been more closely associated with the origins and development of modern architecture than concrete' (Forty, 2012; Humphreys, 1999; Picon, 2006: 8).

Concrete's appeal is in part attributed to its initial form. While Le Corbusier considered concrete as a fixed material, meaning that its 'character was predictable and unvarying' (Le Corbusier, 1995, quoted in Samuel, 2007: 18), one cannot ignore concrete's compelling formation as it changes from liquid to solid state. Concrete's liquid malleability invites the promise of creativity; in its momentary fluid state, concrete has the potential to be manipulated to any shape (Onderdonk, 1928). Furthermore,

> the quantity of water added to the concrete determines its strength and resistance to weather, wear, and other destructive agencies as well as its permeability … Due to its plasticity before setting, concrete can adopt any conceivable form. (pp. 20, 29)

In this sense, concrete's consistency as a material is temporally vibrant: it remains in a process of becoming. It is therefore fitting that concrete is made, bringing together a measured quantity of water that determines its future durability. In the throes of reaching a solid state, concrete's possibilities resonate with what Dixon (2012) describes as 'the spectre of non-completion' when referring to the potential futures of unfinished buildings.

By the end of World War I, reinforced concrete, consisting of adding material such as steel prior to consolidation to increase concrete's durability and solidity in tension, became universally available and no longer restricted to the availability of local labour or materials (Forty, 2012; Onderdonk, 1928). This process enabled structures to withstand tension and weight through the calculation of stresses (Onderdonk, 1928). Indeed, 'although the Romans used concrete of a sort extensively they could not manufacture artificial cement and reinforcing was unknown to them'; the Pantheon, for instance, remains to this day the largest *un*reinforced concrete dome (Onderdonk, 1928: 3; Roman Concrete website). The addition of steel suggests that concrete structures are not entirely made of concrete, but that they are a combination of materials that are bound together. Prestressed concrete, a technique developed in the 1930s which uses rods to overcome concrete's weakness in tension, was almost entirely attributed to Germany's preparation for World War II (Marrey and Grote, 2003). While defensive mechanisms in World War I took the shape of mud trenches and shelters dug into the soil and in caves, World War II saw the rise of concrete bunkers to provide shelter from aerial attacks (Bennett, 2011; Boglione, 2012). The use of concrete for bomb shelters expanded across Europe and beyond, and so did concrete's architectural connotations from illustrating modernity to providing strategic security (Forty, 2012). Albert Speer, Hitler's architect, pointed to Hitler's fascination with bunkers – both personal and for military purposes – and his desire to perfect the structures (Bennett, 2011; Fest, 2004).

One could say that Mussolini had a similar obsession. A total of 12 bunkers have been documented in Rome, most of which were commissioned by Mussolini, including three

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in his private residence of Villa Torlonia (Grassi, 2012).[2] The bunker in the EUR, built between 1937 and 1939, was discovered in 2002 and was originally designed to protect up to 300 high-level officials and administrative assistants for a number of months, but its only military use was in housing a garrison in 1943.

The underground bunker is a fixed and immobile defence shelter surrounded by earth, and built during a time when military technology enabled fast-paced, mobile warfare (Forty, 2012; Virilio, 2012[1975]). Purposely interred, dug deep within the bowels of landscapes, the bunker is a concrete fortress that cuts through the natural environment. It is a present obstacle yet, in its concealed state, it can be completely ignored by people (and things) on the surface. The bunker's main purpose is to safeguard from enemy attack, but it is also meant to immobilize time and space in the name of security. In effect, the bunker acts as a container: keeping air, food and people safe inside, while potential mayhem occurs on the surface, above and outside its concrete walls. Warnier's (2006) discussion of containers and surfaces provides a good starting point for considering the meaning of being inside, outside, passing through the bunker as a container. As Warnier maintains, a container in and of itself has little value. Without objects and people *being contained*, and people and objects moving in and out of the container, the bunker would have no reason to exist. Seen from this perspective, the bunker is 'only' a mass of concrete; a structure whose inherent materiality does not *do* anything in its fixed, solid state.

However, by passing through and temporarily residing in the container, people and objects are being transformed. This notion is particularly charged when considering the ways transformation occurs as materials are 'being put together'; for instance, how things passing through can be mixed, cooked, digested, assimilated, and so on, or they will be expelled, transformed into rubbish, or combined with other materials in other containers (Warnier, 2006: 193–194). Warnier's (and to some extent Virilio's) reflections suggest that the concrete bunker can be appreciated for its consistency and also for its spatial quality: the substance of its outer shell being transformed from liquid to solid form, while the materials and people that are combined become transformed through it. Symbolization from this perspective enables the bunker to be considered as a material object as well as how it may affect or be affected by other things and people it comes into contact with.

Part of the dilemma in addressing the presence of the bunker is to consider its meaning today. The next section examines the 'resurfacing' of the bunker through a contemporary art exhibition, and discusses the contingencies of vibrancy involved in assessing the heritage value of the bunker.

Containing vibrancy

During my PhD fieldwork in 2008–2009, a contemporary art exhibition took place in a bunker located in an occupied government office in the EUR (see Figures 2 and 3). The press release for the exhibition described it as 'an effort to transform a place associated with suffering and war to one that evokes culture, encourages tolerance and fosters the exchange of ideas'.[3] The exhibition lasted just over two weeks and was advertised in the national newspaper *La Repubblica* (Laurenzi, 2009).

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Figures 2 and 3. Office building housing Mussolini's bunker, and stairs leading down to the bunker. © Photographs taken by Nadia Bartolini on 26 March 2009.

It is not unusual for World War II bunkers to be used as museums and temporary art galleries, as some recent examples in England, Germany and Bosnia attest to.[4] In this case, the concrete materiality of the bunker is left in a decaying state (see Figure 4), even

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Figure 4. The artist's painting and a touch of infused lavender feature amidst decaying concrete walls and an original sign. © Photograph taken by Nadia Bartolini on 7 April 2009.

though this is considered to be one of the better conserved bunkers in Rome (Grassi, 2012).

The decaying state may be attributed to several factors, including neglect. But it is also possible to consider the vertical weight and the pressure on the bunker which is supporting the office building through time. Alternatively, decay may result from fissures and leakages that enable water and air to filter through the walls. While weathering is generally seen as how the forces of nature such as wind and rain may affect exposed buildings on the surface (Mostafavi and Leatherbarrow, 1993), the process does not preclude interred spaces from having seepage that may damage the structure (Von Meiss and Radu, 2004). Similar to other cases where decay is viewed through agency (see Edensor, 2005; DeSilvey, 2006; Pétursdóttir, 2013), there is merit in considering the state of concrete's materiality partly because it exposes some of the difficulties posed when determining heritage value. Furthermore, it

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stresses the social, legal and historical implications that are bound up in tangible heritage.

Pétursdóttir's (2013) case study featuring an abandoned concrete herring factory in Iceland offers a compelling example that exhibits the dualism involved in exposing the aesthetic versus the historic traditions of heritage in a given location. The presence of the abandoned factory in Eyri appears like a concrete 'eyesore', standing tall and grey amidst Iceland's inspiring natural landscape. The structures that make up the factory's concrete appearance stood 'in sharp contrast to the peripheral landscapes in which they obtrude in as well as to our preferred perception of those landscapes – as pristine, natural landscapes beyond anything but "authentic" traditional impact' (p. 40).

On the other hand, the herring factory was once an important employer in the local community. Pétursdóttir points to the aesthetic appeal of the decaying state of the factory and its discarded objects in reflecting history, identity and pride in the community (pp. 38–42). If Pétursdóttir's example focuses mainly on how the unattractive has merit when taking into consideration preservation of history, it also brings to the fore questions of how to select and manage heritage. In Italy, heritage protection is defined by time: anything over 50 years has the potential to achieve heritage status (Sandulli, 2006). Yet, in practice, tangible objects over 50 years are already protected because they are historically significant: one remnant carries the same historical weight as another (archaeologist interview, 21 April 2009). If one were to select an object while discarding another, there is a fear that this action would prevent future generations from carrying out further research and potentially selecting this discarded remnant (Ricci, 2006). The consequence of making remnants equal in value is an accumulation of objects and a shortage of archival facilities in which to store them (Ricci, 2006; museum curator interview, 11 February 2009).

It is easy to argue that Mussolini's bunker is a matter of heritage: it marks a period in Italy's contemporary history that had sociological, economic and political ramifications for the country. In addition, as a container, it acts as its own storage, therefore there is no need to disentangle and excavate it from the earth to archive it elsewhere: it solves its own storage issues. However, if one were to compare the bunker with Pétursdóttir's example of the herring factory, the bunker's aesthetics are of limited heritage value.

This suggests that in some circumstances, as in the case of this bunker, the concrete nature of this matter has no inherent properties that would lend it to 'act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own' (Bennett, 2010: viii). In order for the bunker to 'provoke transformation … to impede or block the will and designs of humans' (p. viii), it must be articulated through and embedded with the events surrounding World War II and, more importantly, Mussolini. This aspect is essential to spell out in a heritage context, for it illustrates how some materials do not have the capacity to act on their own, simply by being; they require context and social construction to produce vibrancy.

For the artists exhibiting their works in the bunker, the location inspired them to create art that reconnected in some ways with the social conditions of the time (exhibition curator interview, 8 April 2009). The objects of art become mediators between the historical context of Italy's Fascist period and the artists' emotional responses. Furthermore, other materials that were added inside the bunker act as mediators.

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Figure 5. A 1930s dress hangs from the ceiling amidst coloured lighting. © Photograph taken by Nadia Bartolini on 7 April 2009.

At the time of the exhibition, when one entered the bunker, an unexpected scent of lavender infused the air (Figure 4). Artist A could not work inside the bunker unless the air was purified, and therefore lavender was incorporated. For the artist, the entire area was full of ghosts and it had a negative aura that required a cleansing of energy (interview, 8 April 2009). Incense as well as coloured lighting was used to warm up the place in order to give it more harmony (interview, 8 April 2009). In addition, Artist A had scoured a variety of second-hand shops in Rome to find authentic women's dresses dating back to the 1930s to have a sense of what that period could have meant for those women (interview, 8 April 2009; see Figure 5).

Artist B considered the historical context through images of pregnant women as messages of hope for the future, while Artist C's works were titled 'Letters from the Front' (interview, 8 April 2009; see Figures 6 and 7).

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Figures 6 and 7. Other artworks from the exhibition. © Photographs taken by Nadia Bartolini on 7 April 2009.

Contemporary materials and artworks were added inside the bunker, fraternizing with the decaying walls and original materials such as the signs, the air-proof metal doors and the pipes. All these materials were inextricably bound by the presence and

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materiality of the bunker itself. In referring to objects as receptacles, Baudrillard (1968: 38) describes them as having an interior and an exterior, confirming their solidity as matter as well as having the ability to include other matter. Containers can house materials, providing a space where they have the potential to be transformed. Warnier's (2006) container argument suggests that in this case, art *inside* the bunker is imbued with the aura of the bunker. Hence, the 1930s dresses and the photographs of pregnant women have different connotations whether they are inside or outside the bunker. Similarly, the addition of incense inside the bunker is meant to change the air and purify it. Here, the incense is necessary to transform the air inside the bunker – to change the negative spirits into a positive aura. Whatever one may think of the means of dealing with disturbing pasts, both the container and the objects within it are conducive to making the bunker vibrant. The objects also bring a performative quality to the space (Pearson and Shanks, 2001), making them and the artists participants in instilling life into the bunker. In other words, there is reciprocity in the relationship between container and contained: the art is transformed because the bunker transforms it, and the bunker is transformed into an art gallery.

One may ask whether the artwork would have had any resonance to the Fascist era if it had been included in an innocuous art gallery on the surface. The sense is that it would not, for two reasons. First, the bunker possesses a quality of authenticity that links it directly with the Fascist period. In archaeology and heritage studies focusing on tangible pasts, authenticity refers to the value of the object or artefact itself as having an evidentiary basis of being true and credible to a certain use in the past (see, for example, Jokilehto, 1999; Jordan, 2006; UNESCO, ICCROM, ICOMOS, 1994). In the case of the *Confronti* art exhibition, the bunker's authenticity is essential in transferring meaning to the art. Take away the bunker, and the art would not be instilled with the power of, or the emotional link to, the Fascist period.

Second, the object of heritage here is inhabited, and it is located amidst other structures of the same materials and era. This is not a unique phenomenon; the Colosseum is also a past that is inhabited and surrounded by 'ancient' monuments. The main difference in this circumstance is that Mussolini's bunker is located outside Rome's historical centre in an area that was planned and initiated by the Fascist regime. From this perspective, the EUR's location and its architectural tradition cannot be undermined since remnants, like memorials, must be grasped through their local context (Young, 1993). If the shape and external appearance of the bunker may not have an impact on the surrounding landscape like Pétursdóttir's Icelandic example, it nonetheless contributes in giving meaning to the bunker. The EUR's development as well as its present (and potentially future) architectural influence is reminiscent of the Fascist period. The concrete bunker, were it visible, would meld with its concrete surroundings. The consequence of 'fitting in' and not clashing with the urban landscape suggests that while the bunker is associated with Fascism, it is not unique in doing so in the EUR. By breaking from the 'ancient' and baroque traditions of Rome's traditional pasts, EUR acts as a territorial enclave and becomes the accepted 'container' of memories of the fascist past, as evidenced through the old – and new – built environment populating the area. On the other hand, the underground nature of the bunker makes it hidden from view, keeping the more reluctant memories of Fascism and Mussolini buried.

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The politics of confronting the past

The fascination with the bunker itself may overshadow the reason why its presence was revealed in the first place. The art exhibition was a means of confronting the past, suggesting that visitors were invited to reflect on their views in relation to the memories that the bunker evoked and the contemporary art that was present. In the preface of *Vibrant Matter*, Bennett (2010: viii) asks: 'A guiding question: How would political responses to public problems change were we to take seriously the vitality of (nonhuman) bodies?' Bennett therefore also invites readers to consider the political effects of vibrant matter. In this case study, the matter cannot be dissociated from the social meanings that the bunker is imbued with: each visitor entering the bunker has a preconceived notion of the period in question. More broadly, heritage and city officials need to contend with public responses that draw attention to the bunker and its place in the city. This brings up two additional points that highlight the different ways that matter can be made vibrant: the politics of vibrancy, and the vibrancy of resurfacing the past during the exhibition's two-week duration.

Inside the bunker, original materials such as signs and dynamos contributed to give the space an authentic feel (Figure 8). Yet materials other than art pieces were added as well: in a small corner of the bunker, a mannequin with a military uniform and other war

Figures 8 and 9. Original dynamos and objects depicting the 1930s and 1940s. © Photographs taken by Nadia Bartolini on 26 March 2009.

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memorabilia from the Fascist period were displayed (Figures 8 and 9). The framed photograph on the wall is that of King Vittorio Emanuele III, with the World War II Italian naval ensign flag hanging from one of the pipes (Figure 9). The objects recollect Italy as a monarchy before it became a republic in 1946. Various maps and the calendar date of 8 September 1943 (Italy's unconditional surrender to the Allies) were pinned on the opposite wall.

The materials that were compiled in the collection reflected the period, but only insofar as it referred to general elements of Italy at that time. By titling the exhibition 'Confrontations', this assumes that there would be an engagement with events and experiences that refer to a difficult past, a collective trauma. Adding materials that are associated with the 1930s and 1940s in Italy to the space is only partly effective. To return to Warnier's point, materials and people passing through or temporally residing in a container are transformed, but only if these are combined in such a way that they provoke emotional responses, and hence create vibrancy. In other words, some matter *has to be made* vibrant. In this case, while the artists may have been able to consider the location and nature of the bunker and therefore 'confront' their perceptions in creating their work, the visitors have little to be confronted by. Examples of exhibitions associated with fascist memories in other locations (such as Holocaust museums) are artistic in nature, yet how materials are chosen and assembled suggests meaning and coherence (Carr, 2010; Young, 1993). Here, there may have been meaning and coherence, but because there is no narrative accompanying the art or the displayed materials, the visitor is prevented from actually confronting the past. Perhaps this is because the purpose may have been to let the visitor reflect upon the objects, rather than provide any descriptive or guiding narrative. With no translation of the materials, there is no provocation to spark a reaction. The small corner dedicated to evoking an atmosphere of the period would have been a discrete yet poignant place to trigger impressions of the events leading up to and the aftermath of the armistice.

If the bunker acts *as a container* and *in containing* the past, it does not extend the invitation to the visitors by letting them participate in expressing their feelings and challenging their preconceptions. In other words, this relates to the reciprocity of the relationship between the container and the contained. By focusing specifically on the artistic materials, the bunker's meaning and the extent to which the other materials are meant to reawaken the spirit of the concrete bunker take a back seat to the location as an exhibition space. The bunker's authentic space could have enabled the release of emotional registers. Instead, the bunker kept Mussolini, the elephant in the room, silent. Hence, the bunker, its heritage and the politics it is imbued with are not being discussed with the public as a two-way street. This, in my view, would have been a means to produce vibrancy in the present day, and would have enabled a broader political dialogue to take place where heritage and city officials could have engaged in the debate.

As Young (1993, 2000) has shown in his work on Fascist memorialization in Germany, there are examples of deliberately working against memory. For some artists, the concept of the countermonument is to conceive of memorial spaces that 'challenge the very premise of their being' (Young, 1993: 27). In this case, the *Confronti* art exhibition could be seen as working along the same lines as countermemory since the pieces challenge (or confront) the memory of Mussolini. The art, the accompanying materials as well as visitors' emotional registers – had they been asked to depict them in some fashion – could

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have worked together as textures of collected memories (Young, 1993), even if these were kept contained and buried under the city. However, it is also possible to argue that the concrete bunker is preventing any countermemory from occurring by trapping the artistic memories inside the bunker and within its fixed state. Here, matter can be vibrant, but vibrancy is 'stuck' inside the concrete and, again, this limits the possibility of the bunker's vibrancy to provoke a wider debate with city and heritage officials.

Nonetheless, there is still merit in having revealed the bunker and having facilitated access to it through a contemporary art exhibition. From this perspective, the resurfacing of the bunker gave it vibrancy by enabling people to glimpse inside it and to travel to the perhaps lesser-known EUR neighbourhood. In 2008–2009, when the exhibition was unveiled, the bunker was 'resurfaced': by drawing attention to it in the media, the exhibition had the effect of uncovering a past that was concealed, buried, ignored and perhaps forgotten. If Huyssen's (2003) work on Berlin uses the metaphor of the palimpsest to elucidate traces of the forgotten past, the same metaphor cannot be applied for this bunker (see Bartolini, 2014, for a further discussion on the palimpsest). The bunker is not a trace or a shadow as it is present and also part of the foundation of an office building, and it does not haunt the landscape since, as a shelter, it was never meant to be seen in the first place. Instead, this 'resurfacing' may have occurred at an opportune moment were one to question the ideological affiliations of some of the members of the centre-right wing government of the time (Andrews, 2005; Mammone, 2006; Orsina, 2010) as well as the political allegiances of the art exhibition's curator.

After attempting to visit the bunker in 2012, I was informed that the site had been closed for health and safety reasons and it was unclear when it could be reopened. Art was therefore the catalyst that enabled one to visit and reflect upon, even if superficially, the bunker's presence. But the bunker's resurfacing in the urban landscape gave it only a temporal vibrancy: today, the bunker remains ignored. There are no signs pointing to the location of the bunker or any public debates about how to address the presence of the bunker. This differs from the ways in which Hitler's bunker has been debated in Berlin after the German government unveiled its location and put up a sign in 2006, and also how the bunker's location has been a tourist attraction (Boyes, 2006; Finney, 2007). In its hidden presence, the EUR bunker stays physically underground, having yet to be excavated psychologically.

Conclusion

The article's aim discusses the processes that make things vibrant. Building on Jane Bennett's *Vibrant Matter* (2010), I have looked at ways that vibrancy can be explored beyond the concept of inherent vibrancy. Unravelling the ways in which matter gets to be vibrant and the different 'vibrancies' involved circumvents the dualism that opposes the active and the passive. By exploring materials such as concrete, uncovering the contingencies of vibrancy contributes to a richer understanding of what it means for matter to be vibrant, and takes into account elements from previous work that has touched upon the concept of the vitalism of matter. This is particularly relevant when examining urban tangible heritage. Rather than suggesting that all matter is vibrant, considering the geographical, social, political and natural forces at play makes it then possible to shed light on the impact of tangible heritage on cities and communities.

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The article focuses on one particular case study in order to assess the processes through which vibrancy is made. The *Confronti* art exhibition in Mussolini's EUR bunker in Rome enables a discussion of vibrancy through the nature and location of the bunker as well as through the materials that were exhibited inside the bunker. Firstly, the presumption that concrete is inherently vibrant downplays the processes involved in its creation. Understanding how concrete is made highlights its liquid form: concrete can be made 'stronger' by adding steel in its creation, and 'weakened' from the infiltration of natural forces.

Secondly, a concrete container located underground is not equivalent to identifying the structure as 'Mussolini's bunker'. It is important to consider social constructs to explore the production of vibrancy in tangible heritage. In this case, the hidden bunker needed to be 'resurfaced' to extrapolate the effects of the bunker's presence, and the ways through which the bunker is made vibrant: as a container, the bunker enables the transformation of materials passing through it, and the art is transformed by the bunker (and vice versa); by drawing attention and promoting the bunker through an art exhibition, the bunker is actively being remembered in people's psyche.

Thirdly, in the context of tangible heritage, some matter requires translation and participation in order to adequately address the politics of vibrancy. In this example, while artists may have 'confronted' the past through art, visitors had little opportunity to express their own views on the experience and the bunker, limiting the possibility of engaging in a wider debate of meaning-making with city and heritage officials.

Geographically, the EUR's distance from the historical centre of Rome tends to benefit the architectural tradition of the neighbourhood. With no other historical era competing for preservation, EUR continues to forge ahead as being the more modern, edgier 'city in a city' with concrete as the material that was originally meant to lay the foundations of a future empire. Spatially, EUR lends itself to being both part of Rome and territorially distinct from it, containing the memories of Fascism in situ.

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Notes

1. Another example in Rome is the Fosse Ardeatine memorial dedicated to the mass killing of 335 Italian male civilians by German troops in 1944. Available at: http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007940 (accessed 17 November 2014).
2. Visits to the bunker at Villa Torlonia have been possible since October 2014. Website available at: http://www.sotterraneidiroma.it/focus/bunker-mussolini (accessed 4 November 2014).
3. The original quote in Italian: 'si è voluto trasformare un luogo che evoca sofferenza e guerra, in un luogo di cultura, di tolleranza e di scambio di idee'. Website available at: http://www.undo.net/cgi-bin/undo/pressrelease/pressrelease.pl?id=1237846282 (accessed 16 February 2010).

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4. For examples, see Carr (2010), and the following websites accessed on 11 November 2013: http://artdaily.com/index.asp?int_sec=2&int_new=30918#.Umk7ShDhOSo; http://www.dw.de/artists-bring-light-into-dark-of-former-bunker/a-2812713;http://museums.nuremberg.de/art-shelter/; http://www.itv.com/news/westcountry/story/2012-09-02/art-exhibition-in-wwii-bunker/; http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/04/26/artists-turn-bosnian-nuclear-weapon-bunker-into-art-gallery_n_3163511.html

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Author biography

Nadia Bartolini is a geographer who previously worked in Aboriginal Affairs in the Canadian government. She is currently a Research Associate at the Open University working on the AHRC-funded project 'Spirited Stoke: Spiritualism in the everyday life of Stoke-on-Trent'. She is also a Co-Investigator on the AHRC-funded developmental award 'Re-configuring Ruins: materialities, processes and mediations'. Her research interests are in urban cultures, materiality and the built environment, heritage and memory, spirituality and wellbeing, aboriginal rights and land claims. Recent publications include 'Critical urban heritage: From palimpsest to brecciation' (2014) in the *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, and 'Rome's pasts and the creation of new urban spaces: Brecciation, matter, and the play of surfaces and depths' (2013) in *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*.

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