Fashion Benefaction: Luxury and Brand Heritage in the Eternal City

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Abstract In 2011, the exclusive Italian shoe and accessory brand Tod’s pledged €25 million towards the cleaning and restoration of the Colosseum. They were the first among several luxury fashion companies who have recently lent major sponsorship support to the restoration and upkeep of Roman monuments. The list of patrons grew longer after 2014, when Italy’s Ministry of Culture introduced the ‘Art Bonus’ programme. The act invited would-be benefactors to contribute to the restoration and maintenance of any one of dozens of archaeological sites, theatres and concert halls in the country, in exchange for a generous tax break. Fendi took on the Trevi Fountain and several other urban water features, as well as the Temple of Venus and Roma; Bulgari shouldered the bill for the refurbishment of the Spanish Steps and mosaics in the Baths of Caracalla. This patronage of iconic cultural heritage sites permits luxury fashion firms to centre their brand narratives and identities on Italy, monumentalise their reputation for good craftsmanship, cultivate exclusivity and create tenile and dynamic relationships to the past.

Keywords: branding, corporate social responsibility, cultural heritage, euergetism, fashion, luxury, patronage, philanthrocapitalism

The Art Bonus programme, introduced in 2014 by the Italian Ministry of Culture, offers tax incentives to any individual, non-profit, or business with interests in Italy in exchange for their donations to cultural sites.¹ The Art Bonus website offers a list of suggestions of archaeological sites, theatres and concert halls that could use upgrades or maintenance. These include the walls of the medieval city of Lucca; a fountain in Turin; a sugar factory-turned-museum in Ravenna; an oil painting in Perugia; the Uffizi in Florence; the giardini of Venice; and the library of Italian modernist writer Luigi Pirandello in Rome. Should this list fail to inspire a would-be patron to produce their chequebook, the donor may also propose their own target project sites. Among the listed sponsors are banks, insurance companies, hotels, restaurants, breweries, restaurants, pharmacies, universities, hair salons, legal offices, parish churches and private individuals. Corporations with interests in trucking and transportation, plastic and metals manufacturing, construction, cheese-, wine- and pasta-making and publishing join the nearly 24,000 patrons of various projects.

¹ Art Bonus 2014.
to renovate, restore or even build theatres, concert halls and other public performance spaces.

To find luxury fashion houses among the list of donors is perhaps no surprise, not only because of the range of agencies who have patronised the project but also because fashion has a history of making philanthropic gifts and investments. At the retail level, giving may take the form of goods-in-kind. Brands such as Bombas (socks) and TOMS (shoes) give an item for every item purchased, a matching donation programme that permits consumers the chance to view their purchases as acts of generosity. Other companies structure humanitarian aid into their manufacturing processes, for example employing women at fair wages to support their escape from forced sex work or homelessness. FEED, which describes itself as an ‘impact driven lifestyle brand’, takes this approach, but also sells items like canvas totes and leather cross-body bags that bear the name of the brand, fusing their philanthropic mission with the product they are selling. They congratulate the buyer: ‘Doing good looks good on you’, suggesting that the company’s philanthropic cause is the fashion statement.

This last is perhaps closest to the case studies discussed in this article, insofar as fashion houses sell style, while their philanthropy also concerns itself with aesthetics and beauty. This piece examines recent donations of Tod’s, Bulgari and Fendi to the costs of restoration, upkeep and in some cases excavation and study of ancient monuments in Rome. Many more examples could be cited. The department store Rinascente gave €3 million so that pavements in front of the store could be repaired and widened; Gucci gave €1.6 million to restore the Tarpeian Rock on the Capitoline hill; and, Prada built an arts complex in Milan following one in Paris opened by Louis Vuitton. The significance of the monuments renovated by Tod’s, Bulgari and Fendi, and in some instances the resulting promotional materials, make these three examples particularly compelling for study.

My analysis here focuses on luxury fashion (as opposed to fast fashion producers like Zara) because the heritage brands under discussion derive their prestige in part from having long-established roots and operating in continuity with the values, techniques and standards of the companies’ founders. The three brands under study all qualify for the restrictive ‘Made in Italy’ mark, akin to the appelation d’origine contrôlée designation that guarantees the authenticity of certain geographically limited food and spirits. Their value as heritage brands, then, depends not only on their exclusivity, like any luxury good, but

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2 For a review, see Morgan 2018, who dubs the phenomenon ‘fashionthropy’. The COVID-19 pandemic brought many fashion brands into the circle of donors: see Penrose & Weaver 2020.
on their connection to an Italian past. Italy has a long association with fashion, making the Art Bonus programme an appropriate venue for financial contributions by companies who trace their origins back to Italy’s history. This is part of my rationale for selecting luxury fashion, to the exclusion of other luxury items like alcohol or automobiles. Also significant is fashion’s preoccupation with the cosmetic. Fashion’s desire to adorn the body—particularly the female body—for display might productively be compared to the redressing of crumbling monuments for return to public view. The repair and renovation of a site like the Trevi Fountain or the Temple of Venus and Roma—both sites adopted by Fendi, and both sites of Fendi fashion shows—might be considered elaborate pre-production staging of a venue.

Critics of the Art Bonus programme have voiced concerns that the ‘corporate Medicis’ donating to such projects would turn the sites into gauche advertisements for their brands. The use of charitable giving for such marketing purposes and profit gains has been coined ‘philanthrocapitalism’, a term that binds together love of mankind with market forces in spite of the incongruity and total divergence of these two value systems. The companies expressed revulsion at the insinuation that donations might be motivated by self-interest. Tod’s CEO, Diego Della Valle, said the restoration project sponsored by their company was ‘for the country, with no commercial or marketing return’. Fendi’s then-CEO Pietro Beccari (who left the house for Dior in 2018) spoke as if the idea of profiting from their sponsorship efforts were distasteful: ‘Commercialising a monument is too cheap. We want to do sophisticated things’. These comments imply that for a fashion house to sponsor cultural heritage projects with an eye toward profit or branding opportunity would debase the image of the house and sully the purity of its aesthetic. This is not to say, of course, that these brands do not expect to accrue some benefit in exchange for their sponsorship. This article aims to elucidate that benefit, not through quantitative accounting or profit measure, but through an analysis of the coverage and marketing of the projects. What stake does fashion—an industry intrinsically invested in a swiftly-changing present—have in the past? I suggest that the patronage of archaeological sites and historic monuments allows luxury fashion corporations to inhabit two time scales at once: one charging briskly towards the future, the other anchored in an enduring past.

Case Study 1: Tod’s X Colosseum
Primarily a shoe brand, Tod’s also makes bags, belts and other accessories, working primarily but not exclusively in leather. Tod’s began its sponsorship of the Colosseum in 2011, even before the Art Bonus programme was launched, with a pledge of €25 million.

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6 Pianigiani & Yardley 2014.
7 Bishop 2006, 6.
9 Chen 2016.
The first five-year campaign focused on the cleaning of the façade. The second phase, launched in 2018, focused on the area under the Colosseum, the hypogea, including the construction of a 160 m walkway that permitted public access to this level for the first time. A third phase is anticipated, during which Tod’s will fund structural reinforcement and the construction of a more accessible visitor centre on the outside of the monument.

Tod’s web materials present the cleaning and restoration work in much the same way as they present their own production teams and processes. By spotlighting the tools of the job, the materials being shaped and the active hands of the employees and restorers, they posit a congruence between the artisanal production of their luxury goods and the skilled (re)construction and maintenance of one of the most famous monuments in the world. This correspondence simultaneously elevates to the height of luxury the tedious and dirty work of cleaning and mending the Colosseum, and serves to promote the Tod’s brand by associating its name with an amphitheatre so well known and enduring. Tod’s further positions itself as a designer working on behalf of the Colosseum, which we are invited to view as being a ‘brand’ in itself. The page that describes the project reads ‘Tod’s for Colosseum’ atop an image carousel. The same phrase is used in the marketing hashtag #TODSFORCOLOSSEUM. Tod’s marked the completion of phase one renovations by hosting a sound and light show for the public at the Colosseum, programming not unlike the splashy entertainments provided by a Roman magistrate upon accession to office. By hosting a celebratory spectacle, by fashioning their funding work as a collaboration with the Colosseum ‘brand’ and by playing up the tools of trade, Tod’s garners prestige, securing a benefit from their contributions apart from any profit gain and not measurable as such.

Tod’s promotional materials evince equal passion for two applications of skill and artistry: in the first instance, the artisanship of shoemaking, and in the second, the dexterous restoration of the Colosseum. Photo essays on each are brought together under the banner ‘Heritage’. One takes the user through a narrative about the company’s work on the Colosseum, while the other, labelled ‘Made by Humans’, shows Tod’s craftspeople at work on the various stages of production of the brand’s high-end goods. A comparison of the images in each section of the website makes clear that the Maison views these two endeavours as cognate. Just as the artisan lavishes time, care and expertise on any work that Tod’s markets, so too do the restorers of the Colosseum tenderly and meticulously scrape, soak and stabilise even the humblest corners of the monument. The photo essays

10 Tod’s n.d. ‘Tod’s for Colosseum - Restoration hypogea’.
12 It should be noted that this was the arrangement of their website in August 2021, which had by the time of this writing been changed. Images may be viewed at https://www.tods.com/us-en/tods-world/made-by-humans-we-are-our-people.html and https://www.tods.com/us-en/tods-world/tods-for-colosseum.html.
monumentalise Tod’s artisanship by association with the Colosseum, and analogue the Colosseum’s age and lastingness to the pedigree of the Tod’s brand. As the legacy of Rome, so too the lineage of Tod’s craft.

The ‘Made by Humans’ gallery is populated by photos that show artisans treating and shaping bits of leather, punching holes in belts by hand with an awl and hand-sewing the tongue of a blue suede shoe—all while seated beneath a picturesque olive tree, which
one would presume is not their usual *atelier*. One photo shows the leatherworker’s tools against blue sky, raised triumphantly by a hand unblemished by any actual use of those tools; another, a carefree heap of loafers on the back of a motorcycle. A handsome man, perched on the same motorcycle by the same olive tree, tosses a wooden shoe-form carelessly into the air (*Figs* 1–3).\textsuperscript{13}

The idyllic setting of this photo shoot is meant to showcase Le Marche, the region where the Tod’s factory is located. The web copy reads: ‘Knowledge is handed down over

\textsuperscript{13} Tod’s n.d., ‘Made By Humans We are our People | Tod’s’.
generations, and their spirit is our secret ingredient’. This statement highlights the longevity of the brand, which traces its history back over a century, and implies that the quality and prestige of the Tod’s products originates in the specialised expertise of this family and its protégés. Elsewhere on the website, the history of the brand is laid out to emphasise this:

*Fig. 3* An artisan-model in a Tod’s uniform tosses a shoe form breezily into the air. The scene overlooks Le Marche.

At the turn of the 20th century, Filippo Della Valle, Diego’s grandfather, set up a small shoemaking workshop, pursuing the ancient profession with care and dedication. Driven by his passion for the work, Filippo refined his shoemaking business over time, elevating it to a level of excellence and passing his skills down to his children. These authentic codes of style and quality have since become essential assets for the Group and still characterise its DNA today.\footnote{Italics mine}

By characterising Tod’s artisanship as a memetic transfer of skills, the brand pledges faithfulness to an original process, the authenticity of which is conveyed like code through genealogical branches. This narrative cultivates a sense of exclusivity—the ‘secret ingredient’ is limited—and ennobles Tod’s products by reference not only to the span of family lineage but also to the age of the very art of shoe-making.

The companion page to the ‘Made by Humans’ gallery, ‘Tod’s for Colosseum’, describes in text, statistics, images and cinematically scored video montages the interventions to the Colosseum that their funding supported. In these photos and clips, even scrubbing with a toothbrush takes on a heroic quality. One two-minute video, ‘The Tod’s Group Contributes to the Restoration of the Colosseum’, summarises in neat clips the phases of the work, which began in 2014 and ended in 2020.\footnote{The video can be viewed at \url{https://youtu.be/wXhvn5Ot6tc}.}

The close-ups of several tools used in the conservation project parallel the images of the shoemaker’s equipment on the Tod’s website. Unpretentious tools like a sponge, a paintbrush and a scraper are photographed in an array, like so many plates on a dining table at a fancy restaurant.\footnote{This image can be viewed at \url{https://www.todsgroup.com/sites/default/files/2021-06/tods-colosseo-strumenti-06.jpg}.}

Humble utensils like a trowel or chisel are pictured as the centre of a photographic composition, extensions of the hands who wield them.\footnote{This image can be viewed at \url{https://www.todsgroup.com/sites/default/files/2021-06/tods-colosseo-strumenti-05.jpg}.}

Inelegant gobs of materials like grout and pozzolana are dignified by their use at a major ancient monument, and presented, portrait-like, in the same way that Tod’s presents their own wares.\footnote{This image can be viewed at \url{https://www.todsgroup.com/sites/default/files/2021-06/tods-colosseo-restauratori-03.jpg}.}

Their tools monumentalised, the restorer is cast as a heroic figure, labouring serenely despite being crouched low beside a bucket.\footnote{This image can be viewed at \url{https://www.todsgroup.com/sites/default/files/2021-06/tods-colosseo-restauratori-08.jpg}.}

This pairing of these two pages under the heading ‘Heritage’ is intentional: Tod’s underscores the venerableness of its brand by associating their time-honoured craft
traditions with the adept interventions of the restorers at work on the Colosseum. I interpret this as an argument for brand fit; that is, Tod’s is defining craftsmanship as a higher-order category that unites them with the Colosseum.20

Moreover, this permits Tod’s to effectively extend its own legacy of artisanship into antiquity by this association, even suggesting an elision between the company’s artisans and the original builders of the amphitheatre. Tod’s CEO Della Valle has said as much in his remarks on the Colosseum project: ‘Italian style is very close to our DNA’, Della Valle says. ‘The artisans who worked on the Colosseum were just like those who work on our shoes and fashion today. The sense of good taste and the culture that we support make a lot of sense.’21

**Tod’s for Colosseum**

For Tod’s to cast itself in the role of designer creating for the Colosseum, in the same way that Isaac Mizrahi might design a collection for Target or Vera Wang for Wedgwood, puts the two entities in unexpected relationship, brand to brand. This formulation is typical for a design collaboration or ‘brand alliance’ in which the designer puts together a special collection for the store or manufacturer. Such brand collaborations can help a brand reach an audience they do not typically target, or boost name recognition for one brand through the other. Alternatively, brands may collaborate when their customer bases overlap and they share a goal. In either case, the collaboration is intended to be strategic for both brands.

This symbiotic arrangement could be said to apply to the Tod’s for Colosseum campaign: the Colosseum gets a makeover, courtesy of a stylish luxury brand; Tod’s gets prestige and the privilege of association. Tod’s marketing treats the Colosseum as if it, too, were a globally recognised brand, one whose identity is predicated on monumentality, age and grandeur. Unlike Tod’s, however, the Colosseum vends no product and yields no profit. The closest thing it has to offer is the chance to visit: an encounter with the massive concrete structure and an embodied experience of a space that so many others, from spectators to gladiators, emperors to executioners, have also passed through.

The brand collaboration framework might permit us to consider a visit to the newly-restored Colosseum as the jointly-produced product. This is significant in part because it allows visitors to the Colosseum to participate in the Tod’s brand experience at a price point more accessible to the average tourist. This is akin to one brand collaboration model that, like Isaac Mizrahi for Target, makes a designer item attainable by a broader customer base who would not ordinarily purchase products in the designer’s price range. Such a

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20 On perceived brand fit in brand alliances, Norman 2017. See also Hatch & Schultz 2017, 688 on ‘craft-based authenticity’.

21 Chen 2016.
collaboration has the effect of increasing the accessibility of an exclusive brand. The result is known as ‘accessible luxury’ or ‘masstige’, meaning perceived luxury is high but the price point is not.\textsuperscript{22} To call what Tod’s offers through the renovation of the Colosseum ‘masstige’ is a bit spurious, as they are not vending a lower-cost fashion item. They are, however, offering proximity to their own brand by way of a surrogate: the monument they repaired. Tod’s benefits because visitors to the Colosseum can develop some affinity to the luxury brand over the course of their visit, even as they are priced out of the products sold by that brand. The fact of simultaneously being able and not able to partake of the brand cultivates the consumer’s desire for the brand, resulting in increased brand value.

**Spectacle**

The completion of the cleaning project was feted with a gala dinner and orchestral concert given by the Scala Theatre Academy under the direction of Zubin Mehta.\textsuperscript{23} While this event was for high profile guests like the prime minister of Italy and numerous fashion names, the general public was also invited into the spectacle of the monument. Twice each week, Tod’s turned the Colosseum into ‘an arena of lights and colours’, offering several 20-minute shows throughout an evening to groups of spectators who were granted free admission. This show served to welcome the public back into the restored space of the Colosseum, and to very literally spotlight (in the colours of the Italian flag) the work done thanks to the fashion brand.\textsuperscript{24}

This was in some ways a kind of closing ceremony; but the spectacle was as much a public offering as the restoration project. It recalls the hundreds of games, contests and performances that have taken place there, one event in a millennia-long series in arguably the most famous entertainment venue in the world. As such, it made Tod’s the host of the people in the amphitheatre in the same way that a Roman emperor or patron was. The giver of games, the *euergetes*, became not only the giver of the spectacle but also the arbiter of reality for the day. By his order battles were reenacted, executions performed, largesse given. He was not only host, but also world-maker. To enter the Colosseum as a guest of Tod’s, then, is to take part in a spectacle of their creation.

\textsuperscript{22} Truong et al. 2009.

\textsuperscript{23} Tod’s 2016, “Tod’s for Colosseum - The concert - Video 360°”. Tod’s had an existing relationship with La Scala because of their work in Milan, where Tod’s funded two years of opera productions. The opera house then produced a ballet in Tod’s honour: ——— 2011, ‘Rebranding the Colosseum’.

\textsuperscript{24} A photograph of the event can be viewed at https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/a-culture-of-giving-htkk88l03d. Ng 2015 has written about the commemorative effects of ephemeral benefactions in antiquity. The cases she discusses are different in that their *euergetes* provided for spectacles at regular intervals, sometimes as a condition of their donation.
Case Study 2: Bulgari

Bulgari, primarily a jeweller but also a designer of handbags, watches and fragrances, has made numerous contributions through the Art Bonus program. In 2014, to coincide with the company’s 130th anniversary, Bulgari announced a pledge of €1.5 million for the renovation of the Spanish steps in Rome. Over the next two years, Bulgari funded work on the Baths of Caracalla, an early third century CE complex that provided a vital public service and played a significant role in social life. In early 2021, Bulgari paid for new lighting systems for the Ara Pacis, an Augustan-era altar housed in a Richard Meier building. This €120,000 project replaced halogen bulbs with new generation LED ones, allowing for greater efficiency and lower maintenance costs in the museum. As of this writing, Bulgari was also carrying out work on the Area Sacra of Largo Argentina (Fig. 4). Among the improvements to be made are the construction of walkways lit and elevated above the site, an elevator to move from street level to the site and a covered exhibition area. This is arguably the least glamorous of Bulgari’s undertakings; to many tourists, this area is most familiar as a cat sanctuary. To those more familiar with the ancient city of Rome, Largo Argentina is the site of the Theatre of Pompey, where the Senate met during the late Republic, and later the site where Julius Caesar was assassinated.

Components of Bulgari’s donation portfolio have centred—probably not incidentally—in the geographic areas near its landmark store and across from the planned site of a Bulgari luxury hotel. By targeting these locations, the company made them more attractive to their clientele, marrying magnanimity with strategic site improvements. Complementing this very concrete motivation is a pair of more abstract inducements. First, Bulgari identifies with the city of Rome, and has written Rome as birthplace into its brand narrative. Given this close affiliation, investment in the city has the effect of self-investment: renovating the past refreshes Bulgari’s own image. We shall see Fendi adopt a similar strategy below. Second, Bulgari’s communication strategy, entirely apart from its sponsorships, approaches time as a non-linear phenomenon. The Maison’s fashions are presented as simultaneously modern and timeless—a balancing act between contemporary and ancient to which Bulgari designers allude. Through association with the ancient past, Bulgari ‘eternalises’ its brand, which bolsters brand value through

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25 Turra 2015.
26 Museo dell’Ara Pacis 2021.
27 Ronchi 2021.
28 Haas 2021.
29 The Torre di Argentina Cat Sanctuary was founded in 1993: n.d., ‘Roman Cats: Torre Argentina Cat Sanctuary the oldest in Rome’.
perceived age and assumed futurity. Bulgari’s ‘Divas’ Dream’ collection, inspired by the fan mosaics at the Baths of Caracalla, operates through these conceptual motives. By deploying this shape, they make new use of an old, unaltered thing, using visual association to build up the congruency between their company and the city and its monuments, and spotlighting their contributions as guardian-protectors of those monuments.30

**Spanish Steps**

In 2014, Bulgari announced a €1.5 million contribution to the renovation of the Spanish Steps. The scala is a Baroque monument, not an antique one, but it claims a place in

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30 For a discussion of the several projects undertaken by Bulgari, and their relationship to Bulgari’s collections: Magdalino 2021.
company history because Bulgari’s founder often used the steps to go between work and home (Fig. 5). Undertaken in celebration of the 130th anniversary of the company’s founding, the sponsorship of this project was, in a sense, a birthday present from the company to itself. Bulgari’s marketing around the project is illustrative of the brand relationship they want to cultivate. The company’s CEO Jean-Christophe Babin said that ‘Rome’s rich archaeological, artistic and architectural heritage has always been an inexhaustible source of inspiration for our collections’.31 He called the monument ‘the

31 Turra 2015.
heart of our story’ and said the company’s patronage of the project evinced a bond between the company and the city of Rome.\textsuperscript{32} Babin’s comments make clear that Bulgari’s brand narrative is predicated on the company’s close ties to the city.

Bulgari celebrated the completion of the work with closing ceremonies on 22 September 2016. Like the spectacle hosted by Tod’s at the Colosseum, the evening was marked by an orchestral concert and light show, as well as a dance performance and light show.\textsuperscript{33} The steps were then re-opened to the public, though some Bulgari executives believed access should be limited to protect the newly restored monument.\textsuperscript{34}

**Baths of Caracalla**

Bulgari’s contribution allowed for the restoration of the geometric floor mosaics located at the entrance to the baths’ western palestra (Fig. 6).\textsuperscript{35} The company’s marketing around this sponsorship focuses on colour—a fitting spotlight given the jeweller’s use of similarly polychrome stones (albeit more precious ones) in its products. Bulgari launched a line called ‘Divas’ Dream’ that borrows the form of its settings from the fan-shaped fins of the restored floor. Editorial coverage coos that the line ‘captures the colours of Caracalla marble and the graceful curves of its mosaics.’\textsuperscript{36} The echoes of the monument in the jewellery are highlighted on Bulgari’s website. On one necklace, bejewelled fan shapes trace the wearer’s neckline, a large mother-of-pearl inlaid pendant hanging below the collarbone.\textsuperscript{37} Next to this photograph on the screen is an animation of a mosaic floor, the fan-shaped modules of which move in and out of the plane of the floor.\textsuperscript{38} ‘Gems cut like cobblestones recall the natural shapes that were rearranged by Romans to pave roads’, explains the caption—though this shape is not typical of Roman pavers at all.

The fact that the Divas’ Dream collection borrows from motifs seen at the Baths of Caracalla is not unusual. It is common for Bulgari’s creative design to take up large and small parts of Rome’s monumental landscape as inspiration for their jewellery. The

\textsuperscript{32} Turra 2015.
\textsuperscript{33} Bulgari 2016, ‘Spanish Steps Shining Again’.
\textsuperscript{34} Elbaor 2017.
\textsuperscript{36} Editorial 2017.
\textsuperscript{37} This image can be viewed at [https://www.bulgari.com/on/demandware.static/-/Library-Sites-bulgariSharedLibrary/default/dw2461f123/the_maison/bvlgari_and_rome/block2/410x410_1.jpg](https://www.bulgari.com/on/demandware.static/-/Library-Sites-bulgariSharedLibrary/default/dw2461f123/the_maison/bvlgari_and_rome/block2/410x410_1.jpg).
\textsuperscript{38} This animation can be viewed at [https://media2.bulgari.com/video/upload/f_auto,q_auto/v1581070876/maison/kein_bvlgari_natale-di-roma_2.mp4](https://media2.bulgari.com/video/upload/f_auto,q_auto/v1581070876/maison/kein_bvlgari_natale-di-roma_2.mp4). Note the congruity with the fan shapes of the polychrome mosaic illustrated in Fig. 6.
Parentesi collection, for example, was inspired by paving stones in Rome. The Octo watch collection was, like Divas’ Dream, taken from the Baths of Caracalla, as was the newer series of Divina Mosaica watches. With the cityscape as muse, Bulgari solders itself into the chain of Rome’s history.

**Ara Pacis**

This last project is striking for the way that the CEO presented it as something the jewellery brand was uniquely positioned to understand the need for: ‘As jewellers we know how essential light is, to shine with fitting brilliance upon the treasures of nature, and, in this case, on the treasures of history.’ Bulgari’s business is one where the right conditions

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40 Graver 2013.
41 Naas 2021.
42 Museo dell’Ara Pacis 2021. The original quote is in Italian, from an interview with Jean-Christophe Babin at Bulgari, 2021: ‘Bvlgari - Ara Pacis Revamping’.
of illumination are necessary to show the product to its best advantage. So too with the business of history, where light is necessary to uncover and reveal the past.

It was by the order of Benito Mussolini that the Ara Pacis was brought to light at the end of the 1930s. Located by Rodolfo Lanciani beneath a private building in Piazza Lucina, the altar was excavated, reconstructed, and then removed to its current site near the Mausoleum of Augustus for the 2000th anniversary of the birth of the first emperor. The new Piazza Augusto Imperatore, with the restored Mausoleum of Augustus and the Ara Pacis (housed at that time in a building designed by Vittorio Ballio Morpurgo), served as a ‘sanctuary’ of a ‘new “romanità of modernity”’, the visible threshold into a different dimension of time in which past, present, and future interpenetrated. Bulgari’s refurbishment of the lighting at the new Richard Meier building allows the company to become part of this interpenetration—an instance of the brand’s intentional collapsing of the contemporary and the ancient. The Bulgari-sponsored LEDs that now illuminate the Ara Pacis reenact it being brought to light, permitting Bulgari to take on the borrowed radiance of this emblem of romanità.

The brand has plans for a wider footprint on the neighbourhood: a luxury hotel across from the monument in Piazza Augusto Imperatore. It will take over the existing rationalist building designed by Vittorio Ballio Morpurgo, formerly the Istituto nazionale della previdenza sociale. Bulgari’s CEO calls the hotel a ‘remarkable achievement’ because the company ‘will finally have its own “temple” right in the city where the Company was founded and that still represents nowadays the beating heart of the brand’. The choice of the word ‘temple’ suggests brand worship, and puts us in mind of the manubial dedications of Republican era generals who built temples following their sack of foreign cities. Their patronage was outwardly an act of dedication to the gods, but it also accrued great glory to themselves as benefactors. Indeed, the hotel will have special features that link it to its builders, including a library for the study of jewellery, open by appointment. To celebrate the hotel, Bulgari designed a choker with ten jewels in it, each representing a city where the company holds a luxury hotel. Rome is the largest gem, and is at the

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43 Bulgari also funded the lighting system of the Palazzo Braschi’s staircase for the Maison’s 2016 exhibition on the imagery of the snake over time. See Museo di Roma 2016, ‘Serpentiform - Arte, gioielleria, design’.
44 Kallis 2011, 816. For footage of its inauguration in this space, Giornale Luce, 1938: ‘L’inaugurazione dell’Ara Pacis nel nuovo assetto urbanistico’.
45 Kallis 2011, 823.
46 Zargani 2020.
centre, suggesting the primacy of this city for Bulgari’s brand narrative.\textsuperscript{48}

In installing their hotel in this building, Bulgari has reappropriated a piece of Rome’s past. The building itself is from the 1940s, but by virtue of its inscription—‘This is the place where the Emperor Augustus’ soul flies through the air’—and proximity to the Mausoleum of Augustus and Ara Pacis, it evokes the earliest days of the Roman empire.\textsuperscript{49}

\textbf{Eternal(ising) City}

Bulgari’s ledger of contributions makes sense given the company’s close connection to Rome, a tie made explicit on a webpage filed under ‘Maison/Our Identity’.\textsuperscript{50} Under ‘Bvlgari & Rome’, the brand says it has been shaped by the forms of Rome, translated into jewellery.\textsuperscript{51} Even the printing of the company’s name is meant to call to mind Latin inscriptions. In this self-fashioning, Bulgari voices its desire not only to link itself to Rome, but to eternalise the company and its designs in a strategy that unites timelessness and modish contemporaneity.

For all its emphasis on Rome, the Bulgari story might also be said to have begun in Greece, the homeland of founder Sotirios Boulgaris, who learned the art of jewellery making from his father and grandfather. This is not to say that Bulgari is not entitled to claim Rome as its hometown, having put in well over a century there. But Boulgaris first opened a store with his father in Paramythia, and then was forced to move because of fire and danger to the shop that resulted from Ottoman-Greek tensions in the region.\textsuperscript{52} He took his family to Naples and opened another shop, but here again the store was subjected to break-ins.\textsuperscript{53} In a third attempt to establish his brand in 1884, he founded the Bulgari company in Rome and opened a shop in Via Sistina. He opened his shop at the top of the Spanish Steps in 1904.\textsuperscript{54} Bulgari’s renovation of the steps mobilises that piece of company history, so as to elicit an ‘emotive commitment’ to the company’s identity, not only for consumers but also for stakeholders inside the firm.\textsuperscript{55}

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{48 An image of the necklace design can be viewed at \url{https://www.bulgari.com/dw/image/v2/BCSG_PRD/on/demandware.static/-/Library-Sites-bulgariSharedLibrary/default/dwf412667e/magazine/bh-roma/Large_840x500-collana.jpg?sw=840}.}
\footnote{49 The Mausoleum of Augustus has opened to visitors following a restoration project sponsored by TIM, Italian telecommunications company.}
\footnote{50 Bulgari n.d., ‘Our Identity | Bvlgari’.}
\footnote{51 Bulgari n.d., ‘Bulgari and Rome | Our Identity | Bvlgari’.}
\footnote{52 NEO Magazine 2020.}
\footnote{53 NEO Magazine 2020.}
\footnote{54 NEO Magazine 2020.}
\footnote{55 On the rhetorical use of history as related to company identity, see Hatch & Schultz 2017, 690.}
\end{footnotes}
Bulgari insists on Rome as its heart\textsuperscript{56} and essence,\textsuperscript{57} identifying its patronage projects as ‘a tribute to the city’.\textsuperscript{58} These words put Rome at the heart of the company, such that the brand is constituted by the city. ‘For me this is just one of the many steps that Bulgari has taken towards eternity’, Bulgari’s CEO said, speaking of the company’s sponsorship of the Spanish Steps and the company’s unique capacity to contribute to this kind of renovation of ‘such an architectural jewel’.\textsuperscript{59} As in the case of the Ara Pacis lighting system, Bulgari emphasises expertise that positions them to understand and support the needs of the city. Moreover, they stake a claim to being eternal as Rome is.

Eternalising as a strategy has several knock-on effects. First, the brand, already a veteran firm at 130 years old, is perceived as having an even longer standing through association with an older entity. It retrojects its brand into the past, assigning to them a more prestigious origin.\textsuperscript{60} Second, association with a durable monument like the Colosseum brings customers to view Bulgari as lasting, immutable and perfect.\textsuperscript{61} Eternity is associated with luxury brands by way of assumptions about reliability and sturdiness. A consumer imagines a luxury product to be free of any flaw. This perfection means the product will last forever.\textsuperscript{62} Timelessness, then, applies not only to the style or aesthetic of a luxury object, but also to its durability.

As with Tod’s, there is a connection drawn between the craftsmanship of the ancient artist or builder and the contemporary maker of luxury items. As observed by a \textit{Vanity Fair} journalist, ‘the immense pride taken by Marina [Piranomonte, head of restoration at the Baths of Caracalla] and her team of archaeologists in the revealed mosaics is a reminder of the gratification taken by the Bulgari craftsmen working on the Diva Festa collections. While one uncovers the beauty of the past, the other creates the beauty of the future, with a common bond…’\textsuperscript{63} The jeweller has also been compared to

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\textsuperscript{56} B-B 2018: ‘…the Eternal City has always been at the heart of Bulgari…’; Burns 2014 reported Jean-Christophe Babin said the Spanish steps ‘are at the heart of our history, between via Sistina – where Sotirio Bulgari first opened its doors in 1884 – and the historic store in Via Condotti’.

\textsuperscript{57} Burns 2014: ‘It’s more than coincidence that the brand’s signature design somehow conjures up the essence of Rome in all its grandeur and romance.’

\textsuperscript{58} Bulgari n.d., ‘Bulgari and Rome | Our Identity | Bvlgari’.

\textsuperscript{59} Burns 2014.

\textsuperscript{60} This is meant to exploit what is known in marketing as the ‘longer is better’ effect, i.e. the consumer perception that longevity of a brand is an indicator of the quality of its products. The effect is not always linear, however: the age of a firm that sells cars or computers can be detrimental to consumer perception. In luxury industries, however, longer is better; Pecot & Merchant 2021.

\textsuperscript{61} As to brand immortality, Ewing \textit{et al.} 2009 argue that it ‘may well be an elusive chimera’ (337), and that brand death is not necessarily the result of poor management, but in some cases a natural end when a brand has run its course.

\textsuperscript{62} Cabigiosu, ‘Overview of Luxury Fashion’, 19.

\textsuperscript{63} B-B 2018.
\end{flushleft}
the restorer who is preserving the beauty of the past: ‘...[T]hree restorers could be observed painstakingly placing the tesserae—gray granite, yellow marble, and green and purple porphyry—piece by tiny piece, in a process not unlike that of Silvestri’s jewelrymaking’.

While these links are not being argued for by Bulgari’s marketing materials in the way that they are in Tod’s photo essays, the association is noted by outsiders, and lends validity to Bulgari’s charitable interventions.

Case Study 3: Fendi
Fendi, like Bulgari, is owned by parent company LVMH. Creating products from clothing to home decor, Fendi is best known for its leather handbags and for continuing to produce its fur lines, even as other brands and stylemakers reject the material on the basis of environmentalist and animal rights concerns. The Maison got its start in Rome, and, like Bulgari, conceives of its identity as closely aligned with its place of origin. Fendi’s patronage began with the establishment of their Fendi for Fountains programme in 2013. Around the same time, they undertook renovations of the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana, known to many as the ‘Square Colosseum’ in EUR, and moved into the building in October 2015. In 2019, they pledged €2.5 million for the restoration of the Temple of Venus and Roma, a second-century CE temple on the Velian Hill.

Fendi’s messaging around their sponsorship focuses on a sense of shared identity between the city and the Maison. ‘Fendi is Rome and Rome is Fendi’, is a mantra often repeated by the company’s executives. While some of their choices may be tied to the company’s specific historical interests (Fendi’s creative director Karl Lagerfeld exhibited his own photographs of fountains in the city of Rome in 2013, the same year Fendi announced their planned undertaking; he also produced a short film called ‘Histoire d’Eau’ in 1977), the projects as a whole seem aimed at creating a metonymic relationship between the city and the brand.

Fendi for Fountains
The Trevi Fountain was the first beneficiary of Fendi’s patronage, undergoing €2.1 million worth of work over 16 months. Upon completion, Fendi hosted a fashion show at the fountain to unveil their ‘Legends and Fairytales’ line and to celebrate the Maison’s ninetieth anniversary. One has to imagine Fendi’s sponsorship of the fountain removed any of the expected bureaucratic hindrances of obtaining permission for such an event.

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64 Keltner de Valle 2016.
65 Sutton 2019.
66 Morera Hernández 2015 looks at the media coverage of this project as an index of the success of the branding strategy.
This is nowhere mentioned, however, as a condition of or recompense for Fendi’s donation. For the show, Fendi installed plexiglass pathways across the fountain so that models would appear to be walking on water as they strode the runway—seeming to defy the physical rules of the very medium that Fendi’s intervention supported.69 Following

69 Images of the show can be viewed at https://www.harpersbazaar.com/fashion/fashion-week/news/a16573/fendi-couture-show-at-trevi-fountain/.
the completion of the Trevi Fountain’s restoration, four more fountains were adopted in a restoration campaign that cost another €280,000,\(^70\) in addition to the €320,000 Fendi put toward the repair of the Quattro Fontane at the same time as the Trevi project.

Fendi for Fountains makes a clever choice of project not least because the alliteration matches the brand’s double F logo, which Lagerfeld designed in 1965 to stand for ‘Fun furs’ (Fig. 7). Pietro Beccari, the company’s CEO and chairman, suggests another rationale for Fendi’s selection of the fountain project: ‘Water flowing, continuous, but always different, can have many significant meanings, but I like to think of inexhaustible renovation and creativity that gushes forth — just as it does at Fendi’.\(^71\) Such a justification insinuates a semi-mythical aetiology. A more straightforward impetus for the fountains campaign is the iconicity of the Trevi Fountain and the brand’s desire to be associated with a symbol as iconic as itself. The additional fountains have the effect of spreading Fendi’s patronage out across the entire municipality, so that across the city there are reminders of the company’s generous undertaking.\(^72\)

**Square Colosseum**

Fendi moved its headquarters into the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana in October 2015.\(^73\) The ‘Square Colosseum’ was constructed in EUR for the Esposizione Universale Roma, the World’s Fair planned for 1942. ‘E42’ was meant to exhibit the glories of Fascist Rome, and to celebrate the twentieth year of fascist rule, but it never came to pass because of World War II. For the forty years prior to this renovation, the palazzo had been unoccupied.\(^74\) Fendi has turned over the first floor of the palazzo to public art exhibitions.

I highlight this example despite it not being an act of sponsorship (except for the first-floor exhibition space) because the company’s choice of building and publicity around the renovations is illuminating. The building’s name alone, ‘Palace of Italian Civilisation’, is a lofty appellation to take on, to say nothing of the fascist symbolism. Fendi says the building ‘became a symbol of Italian creativity and savoir-faire’, and called the building ‘a symbol of our Roman roots and of the continuous dialogue between tradition and modernity’\(^75\) but denies the role fascist architects and visionaries played in that dialogue.\(^76\)

Just as Tod’s and Bulgari did following their restoration projects, Fendi hosted a spectacle to celebrate the re-opening of the building. The company hired Mario Nanni to

\(^70\) Lovazzano 2019.
\(^71\) Zargani 2015.
\(^72\) For a comparison to ancient patronage of fountains, see Longfellow 2011.
\(^73\) LVMH 2015.
\(^74\) LVMH 2015.
\(^75\) LVMH 2015.
\(^76\) Kirchgaessner 2015.
design a light show. ‘Poesia di Luce’ used light to re-animate the building, as if awakening it from a long slumber. Most notable was the treatment of the inscription at the top of the building. As guests poured into the palazzo, they walked over and around projections of letters scattered across the stairs.\footnote{77} At the end of the light show, these letters scaled the building’s several stories of travertine, as if lifted by an invisible hand, and one by one found their places over the inscription that had been erected in the 1930s: \footnote{78} ‘Un popolo di poeti, di artisti, di eroi, di santi, di pensatori, di scienziati, di navigatori, di transmigratori’.

In this re-enactment of the engravers’ original incision of this text, Fendi inscribed itself onto the history of the building as author and dedicant. The inscription operates as a performative speech act that lays claim to the building, declares their gift to Rome and re-inaugurates the structure for new ends. The content of the inscription was written as praise for what Fascists viewed as the superiority of the Italian race. Its re-writing may be read as turning the meaning to Fendi and its employees, claiming that they consist of poets, artists and heroes, all elevated to mythical status by the company’s intervention.

**The Temple of Venus and Roma**

Fendi’s most recent and most archaeological patronage project is the Temple of Venus and Roma. Renovations included the opus sectile floors, stabilisation of the wall surfaces and the reconstruction of the stucco in the apses. The project also calls for a new arrangement in front of the cella of Venus, so that this space, visible even from outside the archaeological park, can be used to display interpretive materials about the restoration project and the significance of the site.\footnote{79} The work has revealed new details about the temple and its decoration, such as the fact that different teams executed the decoration of each apse.\footnote{80} There are periodic live-streams to show the public the work being undertaken.\footnote{81}

The site is significant as a kind of origin point for Rome’s legends about itself: it housed the goddess Venus, from whom Julius Caesar claimed his lineage, as well as the goddess Roma, who personifies and protects the city. Fendi’s restoration project of the site, however, seems to have received far less attention in their marketing materials than their fountains projects, at least at this point, when the restoration is not yet concluded. The bulk of the press around this restoration belonged to the fashion show that coincided with the announcement of the partnership: in July 2019 Fendi used the site as the stage for a show titled ‘The Dawn of Romanity’, which introduced their Fall/Winter 2019-2020

\footnote{77} A video montage of this event can be viewed at \url{https://youtu.be/lvNi8nfUAGg}.
\footnote{78} Fendi 2008, ‘Poesia di Luce’.
\footnote{79} ‘Fendi Celebrates Rome’ 2019.
\footnote{80} Larcan 2021.
\footnote{81} Parco Archeologico del Colosseo n.d.: ‘The Temple of Venus and Roma’
collection. In a tribute to designer Karl Lagerfeld, who served 54 years with the company, Silvia Venturini Fendi, the granddaughter of Fendi’s founders, sent 54 looks down the runway.

**For the love of Romanity**
The title of the show, ‘The Dawn of Romanity’, announces Fendi’s investment in Romanness—both in claiming it through their looks, which referenced opus sectile modules, coffered ceilings, marble veining and tessellated floors—and in creating it, through dictating the direction of future fashion. Again and again, Fendi identifies itself with Rome, as if the two were fully aligned circles in a Venn diagram. The Maison’s history began in Rome, with the opening of a leather and fur workshop in 1918 by Adele Casagrande. The shop became Fendi when Casagrande married Edoardo Fendi. ‘Fendi is Rome and Rome is Fendi’ is a frequent refrain of the company’s top executives, including current CEO and president Serge Brunschwig: ‘Fendi has a deep connection with Rome, the city where the Maison was founded ... and from which it has always drawn inspiration’. The former CEO, Pietro Beccari, said the same, stating ‘I think it is important for Fendi to restate its Italian origin and this project [the Trevi fountain] is doing so’. There does not seem to be resistance to Fendi’s assumption of the transitive property when it comes to their identity and Rome’s, and at least some of Fendi’s partners are complicit in this characterisation. Alfonso Beccari, Director of the Colosseum Archaeological Park (inclusive of the Temple of Venus and Roma) noted the ‘synthesis of Italian identity’ brought about by the restoration project, saying that this work brings together the ‘charm and beauty’ of monuments like the Temple of Venus and Roma, with the ‘contemporary creativity’ of houses like Fendi.

Fendi’s position is that it is constituted by Rome; that ‘the streets, monuments, architecture and colours of the city’ make up its genetic code: ‘Rome is an integral part of the Fendi DNA and its artistic and cultural heritage is to be preserved for future generations,’ Brunschwig says. As such, this restoration project and other cultural

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83 Romanity translates to the Italian romanità, which has fascist resonances. See below, ‘What Fashion Needs from the Past.’
84 Talon 2019.
85 Talon 2019.
86 Fendi 2014, ‘The restoration of the Trevi fountain’.
88 Talon 2019.
philanthropy ventures are integral to the company’s identity: ‘It is increasingly a fundamental value, as well as a moral one, for Fendi to enhance, support and export Italian art and beauty in the world, its excellence and its talents,’ he notes, adding, ‘Supporting the arts has always been one of our brand pillars. Our aim, just as with our collections, is to share and spread beauty whilst promoting a refined cultural sensitivity’. If what Fendi is doing, both in its fashions and its philanthrocapitalism, are two vehicles both in parallel pursuit of spreading beauty and cultivating good taste, Rome might be viewed as another of Fendi’s collections, like so many monuments assembled in a lookbook. I would characterise Fendi’s relationship with Rome as rather proprietary, setting it as quite apart from the almost worshipful posture of Bulgari before Rome as source material and muse. Where Bulgari seems to want to magnify Rome’s treasures, mounting gems and joining findings so that they reflect their inspirational sources in the best light, Fendi seems instead to want to subsume Rome, to coalesce with its image so that the company and the città cannot be easily distinguished.

What fashion needs from the past
Fashion’s relationship to the past, and indeed to time more broadly, has been theorised in numerous ways. Caroline Evans and Alessandra Vaccari sketch out three types of time scales that regularly occur in fashion: industrial time, antilinear time and uchronic time. ‘Industrial time’ is the framework for the seasonality of fast fashion production. ‘Antilinear time’ refers to the way fashion ‘time travels’ by recalling or reviving something from the past, indulging in nostalgia or renovating an old idea. Uchronic time is a kind of timelessness, characterised by alternative or imagined futures.

Walter Benjamin’s ‘Tigersprung’, a leap into the past, which the author used to describe fashion pulling inspiration from or quoting a feature from history, is a phenomenon that falls under the designation ‘antilinear time’. Essentially the ‘tiger’s leap’ is a metaphor that describes fashion’s capacity to resolve the gap between the historical or eternal and the modern. Through ‘sartorial quotation’, fashion conjoins the present and past, so that it inhabits both at once, thus transcending time and periodisation. Fashion’s potentiality, however, makes it reliant on the past to achieve meaning in the present. In the analysis of Ulrich Lehmann, ‘Fashion and modernity . . . need the past as (re)source and point of reference, only to plunder and transform it with
an insatiable appetite for advance. Fashion and the modern must then continually re-examine and reference the past ‘with a profound sense of self-directed irony . . . in order to find an element of the eternal (perhaps sublime), against which to set its inherently fugitive and ephemeral characteristics.’ In short: it is the past that lends fuel to the ephemeral modern.

Several luxury fashion brands perform the ‘tiger’s leap’ by making ‘sartorial quotation[s]’ in their collections. Fendi’s ‘The Dawn of Romanity’ is one such example, but there have been several collections inspired by the ancient Mediterranean shown in the past few years, including Dolce & Gabbana’s Alta Moda 2019 (exhibited in the Temple of Concordia in Sicily), their 2019 Alta Sartoria collection and Christian Dior’s Spring couture collection for 2020. The case studies discussed here, however, cite the past not through quotation in a collection, but through philanthropic association with ancient monuments.

Such a strategy is adjacent to ‘retrobranding,’ a method whereby a company offers ‘a desired return to the past’ by linking their product to a specific historical period, or offering an updated product reminiscent of the original. In this way, they offer the customer access to the past, which is perforce inaccessible. Its unreachableness only adds to its desirability, which in turn increases the desirability of the product. In this way they conjoin two opposing ideas, ‘one based on the eternity of art . . . the other on the process of perpetual innovation’.

The binding together of these two dynamic forces serves the companies’ brand heritage, an aesthetic and cultural provenance that can be thought of as a Maison’s ‘story’, or a set of values and characteristics reliably associated with the label. Continuity is key to brand heritage, so these values or aesthetic codes must be transmitted with fidelity to the company’s historic narrative. New collections must ‘iterate, not innovate’, so that they align with the codes of the house. The new must be offset by the old, in a dance spoken of by Dior designer Maria Grazia Chiuri as ‘striking a balance between an iconic past and the need to be anchored to the present’.

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96 Lehmann 2000, 10.
97 Lehmann 2000, 10.
98 For a critique see Hinds 2020.
100 Hallegate 2014, K-14.
102 Urde et al. 2007 define ‘heritage quotient’ using five elements, including the use of mythmaking and considering history important to brand identity. See also Pecot & De Barnier 2017. For a fashion design perspective, see Borrelli-Persson 2020.
103 Borrelli-Persson 2020.
104 Borrelli-Persson 2020.
The cultivation of brand heritage is most explicit in Tod’s publicity; its website even includes ‘Heritage’ as a page. But the shaping of brand heritage through connection to the past—in these cases a specifically Roman past—is shared across these three fashion brands and well beyond: ‘Like nations, a brand constructs its heritage from an inherited past and borrowings from the collective past’. The inherited past is what makes each house unique—a look, a designer, a material (like fur), a logo—but these sponsorships point up the collective past that is reified by archaeological monuments. The marketing around the sponsorships then seeks to enmesh these two branches of heritage and blur the line between inherited past and collective past. A company can achieve this erosion of the individual-collective distinction either by writing its own history into the collective past (Bulgari has always taken its inspiration from the city of its birth) or by apportioning to itself some aspect of collective history for folding into its brand narrative (as in the case of Tod’s, where the claim is made that Roman builders were expert craftsmen, and that Tod’s somehow obtains this quality by affiliation). Stewardship or patronage of cultural heritage objects is leveraged to project desirable qualities of the ancient monuments onto the firm’s luxury objects.

In borrowing from the past, luxury fashion companies are not merely replicating, but renewing. Bulgari’s creative director, ‘digs as [sic] deeply into its archives for inspiration as the company enthusiastically preserves history itself’ (emphasis mine). The acts of preservation—be it through citation of ancient forms or renovation of ancient sites—constitutes an authentic use of the past and ‘keeps history alive by transporting it from past to future while expanding its material manifestation and meaning in the present.’ The act of reaching into the past is done for the sake of a durable future.

Luxury fashion brands also rely on the past to imbue their names and physical locations with a sense of sacredness, in keeping with branding advice to ‘seek integration with mythical places’. This integration is enacted each time a company claims affiliation with Rome, whether they cite brand history, artistic inspiration or national pride as the origin of that affiliation. This is best illustrated by Bulgari, whose flagship location by the Spanish Steps is a heritage store by virtue of its connection to the establishment of the company. Because Bulgari himself traversed the Spanish Steps each day, the monument is consecrated, tied indissolubly to the brand through the hagiography of the founder.

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105 Pecot & De Barnier 2017, 75.
106 For an example of how firms have used communal history, see Smith & Simeone 2017.
107 Owens 2021.
108 Hatch & Schultz 2017, 691.
109 Dion & Borraz 2015, 82. Though the study focuses on creating rituals and symbolic boundaries inside of heritage stores, the sacralisation of space can be expanded to locations outside the retail space: particular monuments, geographies like the city (for Bulgari, Rome), or the landscape (for Tod’s, le Marche).
Through its patronage, the brand further cements the tie and emphasises its connection to consecrated space.

There are practical expediencies as well as symbolic gains to be made by philanthropic affiliation with particular spaces. Bulgari’s renovation of the Spanish Steps did not only render concrete their brand’s story, but also made the area near their flagship store more accessible and attractive. So, too, their funding of the lighting system at the Ara Pacis Museum, just across the street from the planned Bulgari hotel, offers an improvement virtually at their doorstep. Fendi’s use of both the Trevi Fountain and the Temple of Venus and Roma for fashion shows around the time of work completion or sponsorship announcement suggests judicious selection of sites that would double as spectacular backdrops. Tod’s, too, was able to play host at the Colosseum, offering public entertainment in the mode of a munerarius. Even with limitations placed on the time period or scale of advertising at the target sites, these are substantive dividends on investment, with or without the incentive of the Art Bonus programme.

Apart from sacerlatation is metonymic identification. For Fendi especially, and Bulgari to a lesser extent, there is little separation between the city and the house itself. These blended identities might be read as indicating the extent of the pride and gratitude they feel for Rome as their font of inspiration, but it must be noted that they do not take on all of Rome’s past. Scantly addressed here are the Fascist appropriation of Rome’s landscape, its past and some of the particular monuments that fashion houses have renovated. Even when asked directly, Fendi denied any claim that the Fascist monument in which they have located their offices has any remaining charge or association in public perception. This seems willfully obtuse, particularly considering Fendi’s use of the concept of ‘romanity’ for their show at the Temple of Venus and Roma. ‘Romanity’ or ‘romanità’ refers to a distorted version of Romanness, a selective vision of Roman heritage channelled by fascist leaders to gain legitimacy and stir nationalist loyalty.\textsuperscript{110} Even though the show was titled in English, and evidently meant to play with the similarity between ‘Romanity’ and ‘humanity,’ this term cannot be used without evoking its fascist resonances.

In a similarly selective omission of Fascist history, Bulgari’s CEO has spoken of the rationalist building on the Piazza Augusto Imperatore, site of its next luxury hotel, as a memorial to the Emperor Augustus, whose ‘refined aesthetic sense drove the radical architectural and urban transformation of Rome’.\textsuperscript{111} Indeed the piazza and the building being taken over by Bulgari were built to honour Augustus—by a dictator who fancied himself made in Augustus’ image.\textsuperscript{112} The hotel’s website also emphasises the tie between

\textsuperscript{110} Giardina 2008, 70.

\textsuperscript{111} Cirinei 2020 quotes Babin in Italian; translation mine.

\textsuperscript{112} For a discussion of Mussolini’s use of Augustan imagery, see Follo 2013.
the site and the first emperor, citing the designers’ use of travertine and brick to conjure the imperial past. For all its reverential deference to Rome’s antiquity, the act of attributing architectural and urban transformation to an emperor who lived two millennia ago, while speaking of a site transformed in the not-so-distant past under continent-wide conditions of violence, displacement, and worse, reflects a willingness to elide the uncomfortable truths of history in favour of its aesthetic niceties. To discuss these monuments without confronting the associations of Fascist architecture, urban planning and social design trivialises the damage caused by authoritarian rule and the malignancy of state-sponsored violence.

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