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Statues that must stand not fall: the material agency of anarchism in the marble monuments of Carrara, Italy

Abstract: *Drawing upon international literature about breaking coloniality by removing its monuments that was inspired by movements such as ‘Rhodes Must Fall’ and ‘Black Lives Matter’, I address what can be defined a counter-case. While confirming the reasons for contesting the symbols of oppressive powers, this case exposes an alternative tradition of monuments that were not erected by states, churches or colonial companies but by combative workers. I refer to the some of the dozens of anarchist statues and marble plaques that are disseminated in Carrara (Italy) and in the surrounding villages to keep memory of facts and figures of local workers movements and antifascist resistance. The Italian capital of marble, Carrara is also a historical stronghold of class-struggle anarchism and anarcho-syndicalist unions of marble workers. These monuments often correspond to places of popular sociability in specific squares, neighbourhoods or villages, and are still places of memorial contentions. Based on the analysis of documents from Italian anarchist archives and on numerous field visits, this paper also extends literature on the material turn in cultural and historical geography, analysing the symbolic and material relevance of Carrara marble matter for local workers. I finally call for a militant historical geography of monuments, one that can be relevant to political and societal debates by boldly and outspokenly saying which statues must fall and which must stand.*

Keywords: Monuments; Anarchism; Decoloniality; Material Turn; Militant Historical Geography

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This paper is about marble. Addressing the material heritage of the anarchist movement in the Italian town of Carrara and surrounding villages such as Torano, Colonnata and Gragnana, I analyse a political experience that found a durable visual expression thanks to the material and symbolic links between a matter (marble) and several generations of humans who extracted, transported and shaped it. The numerous revolts of Carrara quarrymen organised in anarcho-syndicalist unions that occurred periodically since the end of the nineteenth century stand among the main local outcomes of the many-centuried history of marble production and its quickly increasing industrialisation since the second half of the nineteenth century.¹ This story intersected with some key moments in Italian modern history such as the birth of socialist movements since the First International (early 1870s), and antifascist resistance in the twentieth century.² The omnipresence of marble in the city landscape and the wide spread of related professional skills allowed local anarchists to abundantly use this matter to preserve their own heritage. This included the sculpting and placing of plaques and monuments dedicated to figures and events of their history, often challenging local powers when they were unwilling to grant administrative permissions. Importantly, the proverbial characteristic of marble, that is its hardness, was re-signified as an element of self-representation and pride for anarchist activists.³ The most famous anarcho-syndicalist leader in the history of marble unions, Alberto Meschi (1879-1958), signed his papers with the nickname ‘The Man of Stone’.

The relation between anarchism and geography has been widely studied in the last couple of decades.⁴ This paper specifically extends current scholarship on contesting statues, buildings and other symbols of coloniality by engaging geographical literature on agency and the ‘material

¹ R. Musetti, *I Fabbricotti, il volto di una dinastia del marmo tra '700 e '900 a Carrara*, Milan, 2005.

² U. Fedeli, *Anarchismo a Carrara e nei paesi del marmo: dall'Internazionale ai moti del 1894*, Carrara, 2004; P. Bianconi, *La resistenza libertaria*, Piombino, 1984.

³ M. Rovelli, *Il contro in testa: gente di marmo e d'anarchia*, Rome, 2012.

⁴ F. Ferretti, *Anarchy and Geography: Reclus and Kropotkin in the UK*, Abingdon, 2018; S. Springer, *The Anarchist Roots of Geography: Towards Spatial Emancipation*, Minneapolis, 2016; R. White, S. Springer and M. Lopes de Souza (Eds.), *The Practice of Freedom, Anarchism, Geography and the Spirit of Revolt*, London, 2016.

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turn'.⁵ My argument is twofold. First, this case provides new avenues for a militant historical geography that is not limited to deconstructing and criticizing discourses, being able to support decolonial agendas by also analysing counter-monuments that must not fall. Of course, deciding which statues must fall and which ones should stand may be considered as an intriguing dilemma. I will not enter the debates on whether statues of colonialists, slave drivers, rapists and war criminals that occupy city squares worldwide should be destroyed or preserved in specific spaces with didactic apparatuses.⁶ But I take a stand in favour of anarchist monuments for two reasons. First, if we join the field called 'critical' or 'radical' geography, this means that we are not neutral, and our side is with subversion rather than with the powers in place. Second, these Carrara monuments are a unique expression of radical histories from below, given that they were mostly built and funded by proletarian activists and unionised workers through voluntary work, constituting a significant exception to James Scott's idea of most acts of resistance being traceable only through 'hidden transcripts'.⁷ Rather, public monuments showcase the standpoint of the oppressed in the most possible open way.

As for my second main point, this case shows that 'materialist returns' in geography are not limited to analysing scientific laboratories and scholarly productions. They remain strongly associated with concrete human experience, as exemplified here by the peculiar agency of marble in becoming a part of resistance histories and a dialectic counterpart of workers from the 'marble regions' in their efforts for coming to terms with this hard material, which literally gave life and death to local people. As for life, marble was and is a powerful drive to local economies. As for death, it is a matter whose extraction and working is extremely dangerous. On the one hand, the metaphor for which marble demands its tribute of human lives is widespread in local literatures.

⁵ L. Choksey, 'Colston falling', *Journal of Historical Geography* 74 (2021), 77-83; J. Newsinger, 'Why Rhodes Must Fall', *Race & Class* 58, 2(2016), 70-78; S. Engelmann and D. McCormack. 'Elemental worlds: Specificities, exposures, alchemies', *Progress in Human Geography* 45 (2021), 1419-1439.

⁶ R. Davis, 'Look on my works ye mighty...: Iconoclasm, education and the fate of statues', *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 55, 3(2021), 534-544; A. Hobbs, 'In memoriam: The who, how, where and when of statues', *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 55, 3 (2021), 430-438.

⁷ J.C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. New Haven, 1990.

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The working conditions of marble labourers triggered strikes and the rising of class struggles to compel entrepreneurs to invest more in safety measures. On the other, this indissoluble relation of life and death, and of marble and people, led to an almost-apotropaic humanisation of the matter, usually defined as ‘the bleeding stone’ in the marble plaques commemorating the ‘Martyrs of Labour’,⁸ to which periodical floral tributes are brought by the participants to events such as the traditional May Day demonstrations (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1 – Torano. Marble plaque installed on 19 July 1912 on the local *Casa del Popolo* (People’s House). ‘Workers, bow down before this bleeding stone that remembers your comrades fallen during unrecognized labour’ (Photo Gian Maria Valent, 2022)

⁸ *Il Cavatore*, 11 May 1946. Imola, Archivio Storico della Federazione Anarchica Italiana (Hereafter ASFAI),

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This paper is based on a survey of Carrara anarchist press and related materials surviving at the archive of the Italian Anarchist Federation in Imola (ASFAl) and on numerous field recognitions carried out in the region. I inform my research method and philosophy to the well-established field of radical histories and ‘histories from below’.⁹ To this end, I selected a body of sources from anarchist press and archives to provide an anarchist standpoint on an this matter. To this end, I assume and claim my authorial positionality as an activist who is personally involved in the struggle for rescuing the historical and material heritage of anarchism in the region. For the specific case of Brescia’s monument, I selected a sample of clippings from the mainstream Italian press, surviving at the FAI archive, to stress the national political relevance of that case.

In the first section below, I define my theoretical framework and the strands of scholarship that this paper wishes to extend. In the second part, I introduce the Carrara historical and political context for the international reader, addressing the anarchist landscapes of stone that celebrate the tradition of social struggles, in association with the very materiality of marble. In the third part, I address the case of monuments that (materially and metaphorically) fight back, exhibiting figures and facts of antifascist resistance and glorifying the hard ‘natural’ shapes of the marble mountains surrounding Carrara, historical shelter of partisans and rebels. In the fourth part, I discuss the public controversies for displaying heritage that were related to the history of some of the major anarchist monuments in Carrara.

1. Material contentions over political landscapes

Building monuments has been a traditional occupation for states, typically serving the invention of the nation, which needs to sanctify its *Lieux de Mémoire*.¹⁰ The importance of such places for signifying politically, culturally and religiously national landscapes, including their more or less ‘natural’ features, is well recognized by cultural and historical geographers and historians of

⁹ L. Febvre, *Combats pour l’histoire*, Paris, 1953; EP Thompson, *The making of the English working class*, Harmondsworth 1964; R. Samuel, *Theatres of memory: past and present in contemporary culture*, London, 1994.

¹⁰ P. Nora, *Les lieux de mémoire 3 vols.*, Paris, 1997.

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culture.¹¹ Cognisant of this scholarly tradition on symbolical landscapes and of developments such as object biographies, cultural and historical geographers highlight the effectiveness of considering materiality in its relational assemblages to tell object-oriented and post-phenomenological stories that can make sense of objects and places.¹² According to Veronica Della Dora, ‘Infrasecular’ geographical scholarship also stresses the political impacts of ‘desacralization, desecration and resacralization’¹³ of material landmarks carrying symbolical meanings. Many of these studies address ‘sacred’ spaces, unlike Carrara’s anarchist sites that explicitly display secularist freethought. However, their approaches can be broadly applied to political monuments and buildings that are strongly charged with symbolical and emotional meanings and that likewise endured material processes of construction, destruction and reconstruction.

According to Duncan Light and Chris Young, the material and symbolic use of statues was generalised in ‘socialist’ countries of Eastern Europe, where statues were: ‘Key elements of cultural landscapes linked to the political inscription of public space, nationalism, commemoration, and memory’.¹⁴ The authors note that the monuments celebrating state socialism were and are ‘instable cultural signifiers’.¹⁵ Indeed, many of them were variously re-signified, and sometimes reinstalled after vandalization or removal, in the decades following the end of communist regimes, resulting in: ‘Not static but ... dynamic sites of meaning’.¹⁶ Conversely, anarchist monuments, in Carrara and in other Italian cities, mark public landscapes with quite unambiguous messages, although several battles were fought about their standing. This took place

¹¹ D. Cosgrove, *Social formation and symbolic landscape*, Totowa, 1984; D. Hooson (Ed.), *Geography and National Identity*, Oxford, 1994 ; F. Walter, *Les figures paysagères de la nation*, Paris, 2014.

¹² T. Rossetto and G. Peterle, ‘Buildings as non-human narrators: Between post-phenomenological and object-oriented architectural geographies’, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 46 (2021), 642–658.

¹³ V. della Dora, ‘Infrasecular geographies: Making, unmaking and remaking sacred space’, *Progress in Human Geography*, 42 (2018), 44.

¹⁴ D. Light and C. Young, ‘Socialist statuary as post-socialist hybrids: following the statues of Dr Petru Groza in Romania’, *Journal of Historical Geography* 37 (2011), 493.

¹⁵ Light and Young, ‘Socialist statuary’, 494.

¹⁶ B.S. Osborne, ‘Constructing landscapes of power: the George Etienne Cartier monument, Montreal’, *Journal of Historical Geography* 24, 453.

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especially during the fascist regime, which was responsible for the removal of pre-existing artefacts from 1922 to 1945, of which most were reinstalled after 1945.¹⁷

As for radical movements, it is often through the contestation of statues that they deal with material heritage, especially associated with the colonial past. As several authors note, tearing down material artifacts to change material landscapes was paramount for decolonization movements in erasing colonial public discourses towards a ‘decolonization of history’. Maria Paula Meneses has recently studied the restructuration of squares in Mozambique, which included: ‘Changing toponyms and modifying infrastructures’, following ‘the political projects that pushed the decolonization of ... monumental landscape[s], as a signal of the incoming epistemic change’.¹⁸ This included ‘removing statues’ with the explicit pedagogical aim of countering colonial histories.¹⁹ Yet, these restructurings did not always address deeper matters with epistemic decolonisation, and the resignification of decolonised spaces remained often instable as well.²⁰

For instance, Laragh Larsen discusses the case of decolonisation in Kenya, where ‘statues were removed’, but this process was also the result of negotiations between the new Kenyan authorities and the British Crown.²¹ This led to the selection of monuments which could stand and ones which ‘would be likely to cause provocation’,²² which implied the permanence or the rebuilding of some colonial monuments. In other African countries, after the most ‘iconoclastic’ phases of decolonisation, some monuments that had been initially removed were later reinstalled to favour commercial and diplomatic relations with Northern countries. It was the case with the statue of Leopold II in the Democratic Republic of Congo and with some ‘French colonial monuments in

¹⁷ F. Bertolucci, ‘Documenti di pietra 1’, *A Rivista anarchica*, 400 (2015), 129-165.

¹⁸ M.P. Meneses, ‘As estátuas também se abatem: momentos da descolonização em Moçambique’, *Cadernos Naui*, 10, 18 (2021), 108.

¹⁹ Meneses, ‘As estátuas também se abatem’, 121.

²⁰ W. Mignolo, ‘Epistemic disobedience and the decolonial option. A manifesto’. *Transmodernity* (2011), 44-66; B. Sousa, *Epistemologies of the South: Justice Against Epistemicide*, London, 2016.

²¹ L. Larsen, ‘Re-placing imperial landscapes: colonial monuments and the transition to independence in Kenya’, *Journal of Historical Geography* 38 (2012), 45.

²² Larsen, ‘Re-placing imperial landscapes’, 45.

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Mali'.²³ In most of these cases, contestations followed these choices, showing how significant is the construction of public spaces for what Don Mitchell calls 'culture wars'.²⁴

Today, contested memories of colonialism, racism and slavery constitute a compelling field for fighting memorial battles. Prominent campaigns have been carried out by movements such as Black Lives Matter and Rhodes Must Fall to contest monuments of people directly or indirectly implicated with empire and colonial genocides. Engaging with the ongoing struggles over memorial places, including contesting colonial monuments but also denouncing attacks to monuments of anti-slavery activists, the editors of the *Journal of Historical Geography* called for: 'A fuller, inclusive memorialisation of all citizens and all humanity assuming this call for activism, not limited to anti-racist themes'.²⁵ The need for what may be defined as intersectional solidarity is an agenda that this paper wishes to foster.

As the case of Carrara well exemplifies, classical state strategies for building official sites of memory can be subverted to create what Stephen Legg calls 'sites of counter-memory'.²⁶ Often associated with decolonization, these cases can nourish 'effective historical geographies'²⁷ and inspire a plurality of ways for 'staging resistance'.²⁸ Effective historical geographies should also raise the matter of the protection of monuments of counter-memory from possible attacks. This was the case with monuments that deal with objects memorialising particularly shameful chapters of human history, such as slavery and the Holocaust, with the explicit political aim of avoiding forgetfulness of these facts, and that were often subject to threat.²⁹

²³ Larsen, 'Re-placing imperial landscapes', 54.

²⁴ D. Mitchell, *Cultural Geography*, Oxford, 2000.

²⁵ D. Tolia-Kelly, D. de Carvalho Cabral, S. Legg, M. Lane and N. Thomas, 'Historical geographies of the 21st century: Challenging our praxis', *Journal of Historical Geography* 69 (2020), 1.

²⁶ S. Legg, 'Sites of counter-memory: the refusal to forget and the nationalist struggle in colonial Delhi'. *Journal of Historical Geography* 33 (2005), 197.

²⁷ S. Legg, 'Sites of counter-memory', 197.

²⁸ S. Legg, 'Reviewing geographies of memory/forgetting', *Environment and Planning A*, 39 (2007), 460.

²⁹ S. Cooke, 'Negotiating memory and identity: the Hyde Park Holocaust Memorial, London', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 26 (2000), 449.

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Derek Alderman notes how, in the South of the United States: ‘Commemoration of slavery is not only a contentious issue for Whites but also African Americans, who differ with each other over how best (or even whether) to narrate these difficult memories’.³⁰ Eventually, this is connected with the refuse of self-commiseration, as also exposed by works on immigration memorials.³¹ This includes the need for public memory not being delegated to others but first addressed by the people who are directly implied. As I discuss, the anarchist marble memories in Carrara display numerous episodes in which anarchists were the victims of state repression and Fascism. Yet, they tried to avoid the trap of self-commiseration by claiming the ways in which they fought back, especially referred to the heroic myths surrounding the anarchist partisan militias operating in the mountains around Carrara in 1943-45.

Furthermore, one cannot refrain from addressing the implications of my case from the standpoint of material agency, as Carrara anarchist monuments are made and signified through a specific matter, that is marble. Geographers argue that earth’s materiality is not the mere ‘scene’ for human activities, but something that is ‘itself living’ and capable of ‘performativity’.³² For Ben Anderson and John Wylie: ‘Materiality is never apprehensible in just one state, nor is it static or inert. Materiality is not glue, binding and holding other, less material, things (social relations, cultural meanings) together. ... Materiality is always already scored across states (solid, liquid, gaseous) and elements (air, fire, water, earth). As such, as variously turbulent, interrogative, and excessive, materiality is perpetually beyond itself’.³³

³⁰ D.H. Alderman, ‘Surrogation and the politics of remembering slavery in Savannah, Georgia (USA)’, *Journal of Historical Geography* 36 (2010), 90.

³¹ A. Bashford, P. Hobbins, A. Clarke and UK Frederick, ‘Geographies of commemoration: Angel Island, San Francisco and North Head, Sydney’, *Journal of Historical Geography* 52 (2016), 16-25.

³² S. Whatmore, Materialist returns: practicing cultural geography in and for a more-than-human world’, *cultural geographies* (2006), 605.

³³ B. Anderson and J. Wylie, ‘On geography and materiality’, *Environment and Planning A* 2009, 41 (2009), 332.

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Alongside established engagements with materiality in studying visual cultures and ‘the embodied present in the everyday material world’,³⁴ landscapes are understood as ‘events’ carrying a consubstantiality of human and material agency, engendering relational dynamics of which politicization is a key component.³⁵ As Chris Otter notes, in studies on urban landscapes the link between materiality and the symbolic is addressed by overtaking cultural/artificial and natural/unbuild dichotomies, considering the very life of things.³⁶ Moreover, intellectual history is increasingly considering the plurality of ‘connections between knowledge and their places of production’.³⁷ As such we should not merely perform ‘histories of objects detached from the discourses they were embedded in. Rather, new ways need to be found to combine material and discursive elements of objects’ at the ‘interplay of human actors, objects, and places’.³⁸ I extend these studies by addressing the living and relational nature of marble as a hybrid and socio-natural emergence, being at the same time a stone naturally abundant in Carrara and a maker of centuries of local culture, including a naturally and socially intertwined anarchist heritage.

That is, although the use of similar materials and visual languages can be re-signified for very different political aims, in terms of material agency the anarchist case is especially fit to show that marble acts. It acts in taking the lives of people who extract and shape it, in a sort of Earth’s vengeance against extractive exploitation, which acquires a class connotation as its human victims are not the exploiters, but the exploited. It acts in giving to Carrara its characteristic landscapes that traditionally inspired a strong identification between local dwellers and their mountains of marble. It acts in operating resistance to cut and to clumsy ways of manufacturing it.³⁹ It acts, through its durability, in eternising the political messages brought by marble manufactures that are

³⁴ G. Rose and D. Tolia-Kelly, ‘Visuality materiality, introducing a manifesto for practice’, in G. Rose and D. Tolia-Kelly (Eds.), *Visuality/ materiality: images, objects and practices*, Farnham, 2012, 1.

³⁵ M. Duineveld, K. Van Assche and R. Beunen, ‘Reconceptualising political landscapes after the material turn: a typology of material events’, *Landscape Research*, 42, 4 (2017), 375.

³⁶ C. Otter, ‘Locating Matter: The Place of Materiality in Urban History’, in T. Bennett and P. Joyce (Eds.), *Material powers, history and the material turn*, Milton Park, 2010, 38-59.

³⁷ P. Schillings and A. Van Wickeren, ‘Towards a material and spatial history of knowledge production. An introduction’, *Historical Social Research/Historische Sozialforschung* 40, 1 (2015), 205.

³⁸ Schillings and Van Wickeren, ‘Towards a Material and Spatial History’, 206, 209.

³⁹ Rovelli, *Il contro in testa*.

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displayed in the region of Carrara. In the anarchist case, these messages are especially strong. Carrying these messages sculpted in itself, marble acts in overtly revealing a history which is otherwise hidden in most of mainstream communication. This material history is simultaneously technological, political, environmental and physiological. Marble has its politics.

2. Anarchism's landscapes of stone

Carrara was a place for marble extraction and trade since the Roman period. Since the second half of the nineteenth century, and also stimulated by international demand, the growing industrialisation of the sector provided a speed increase of the workforce needed. This eventually led to massive proletarianisation of local dwellers, most of whom previously lived off of agriculture and sheep farming in the numerous mountain villages surrounding Carrara.⁴⁰ While these matters are addressed by an established literature in economic history, it is worth noting that these processes favoured the meeting between a new industrial working class and the tradition of radical activist groups and clandestine organising in the radical Risorgimento.⁴¹ Locally, this mood was characterised by the Carbonari secret societies and then by Mazzinian and Garibaldian radicalism.⁴² These conspirators' groups found a direct continuity within the International and early socialism, especially in areas like Carrara, which were among the cradles of the 1848-49 revolts.⁴³

Carrara was a very emblematic case, because it was one of the localities in which Risorgimento had a proletarian rather than bourgeois base of consensus, and it is no coincidence that Carrara was the stronghold of anarchism in Italy throughout the twentieth century.⁴⁴ As Pietro Lorenzini observes, anarchist organisation was traditionally grounded in local communities and families. Thus, early activists were not only interested in classical trade union claims, as they also advocated

⁴⁰ P. Lorenzini, *Tyranny of stone: Economic modernization and political radicalization in the marble industry of Massa-Carrara (1859-1914)*, Chicago, 1994.

⁴¹ F. Ferretti, *Geographies of Federalism during the Italian Risorgimento*, Cham, 2022.

⁴² M. Finelli, *L'edera e il marmo: 160 anni di mazzinanesimo a Carrara (1831-1992)*, Pisa, 2013.

⁴³ L. Gestri, *Capitalismo e classe operaia in provincia di Massa-Carrara*, Florence, 1976.

⁴⁴ Lorenzini, *Tyranny of stone*; Gestri, *Capitalismo e classe operaia*.

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for social transformation, including a recovery of the ancient institution of the *vicinanze*. These were local commons, which were stolen from local communities and commodified by the powerful families leading the extraction, which gained to anarchism ‘wide and deep sympathy among those who worked Carrara stone’.⁴⁵ Recent scholarship on historical geography has demonstrated through cartographic samples that the expropriation of commons was an ongoing process since the first half of the nineteenth century,⁴⁶ which shows why anarchist protests were deeply rooted in local social histories and the related ideas were transmitted from one generation to another.

Manipulating marble led to ideas of using it in different ways than building monuments for state heroes or villas for wealthy people. Since their beginnings, anarchist monuments were strictly associated with a specific secular ritual that Emanuela Minuto defines as ‘politics and spectacle’. Minuto especially refers to anarchist leader, folksinger and poet Pietro Gori (1865–1911), who was one of the speakers for the inauguration of the earliest anarchist monuments, especially in Carrara and coastal Tuscany. For Minuto: ‘Gori’s oral and visual forms of expression coincided with the popular sentimental universe: singing, theatre, poetry, speeches, and conferences were the fora for intense contact’.⁴⁷ As also discussed by authors such as Marco Manfredi, anarchists’ engagement with expressions of popular folklore and a ‘wide range of charivari-like rituals’⁴⁸ was very intense and marked their stronger closeness to popular masses in comparison to other socialist schools that rather tried to domesticate popular expressions. As these scholars note, anarchism’s penetration in popular cultures in the early decades of the Italian workers’ movement was confirmed by authors who were far from having anarchist sympathies such as Antonio Gramsci. The celebration of the May Day became a central moment for these popular expressions, exemplified by one of the most famous of Gori’s songs, *Inno del Primo*

⁴⁵ Lorenzini, *Tyranny of stone*, 118.

⁴⁶ N. Gabellieri and M. Grava, ‘Per una geostoria delle attività estrattive di Carrara: la cartografia digitale delle Cave de’ Marmi descritte all’impianto del Nuovo Catasto Estense (1821-1824)’, *Bollettino dell’Associazione Italiana di Cartografia* 159 (2017), 43-54.

⁴⁷ E. Minuto, ‘Pietro Gori’s anarchism: politics and spectacle (1895–1900)’, *IRSH* 62 (2017), 430

⁴⁸ M. Manfredi, ‘Italian anarchism and popular culture: history of a close relationship’, in I. Favretto and X. Itcina (eds) *Protest, popular culture and tradition in modern and contemporary Western Europe*. London, 2017, 118.

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Maggio (May Day Anthem), written on the music of the Nabucco choir by Giuseppe Verdi to celebrate the victims of work and social struggles. This song was and is periodically sung before statues and significant anarchist memorial places.

In a series of papers titled ‘Documents of Stone’, historian Franco Bertolucci has made a first tentative inventory of anarchist monuments surviving or historically documented in Italian public spaces. Although Bertolucci’s list is not exhaustive, up to 2016 it listed 243 monuments, plaques and steles nationwide.⁴⁹ Most of the inventoried monuments were inaugurated between 1945 and 2000, the oldest being: ‘The plaque commemorating the Internationalists from Rimini who died fighting with Giuseppe Garibaldi in France, inaugurated the 12 November 1871 by ... the local section of the First International’.⁵⁰ Unsurprisingly, the region where these monuments are most represented is Tuscany, owing the 35% of the national pool, of which a big share is located in the town and surroundings of Carrara.

In Carrara, one finds more than twenty monuments scattered in public squares in the centre and in the surrounding villages, plus almost the same number of comparable monuments among the sculpted graves of Carrara’s Monumental Cemetery in Turigliano, a section of which is entirely dedicated to anarchists. While the case of Carrara is peculiar for the abundance of marble and for the presence of activists such as ‘partisan Ugo Mazzucchelli (1903-1997), universally known for his battle for the monument to Gaetano Bresci ... who made [of building marble monuments] almost a life philosophy’,⁵¹ Bertolucci identifies some regional and national trends in the purposes of anarchist monuments’ builders. These trends clearly included an intentional and pedagogical association between monuments and ‘anarchist rites’⁵² such as the May Day demonstration. That day, in Carrara, a long collective walk is performed every year to deposit flowers to the most possible of anarchist monuments within the town. Nationwide, most of the artifacts are dedicated

⁴⁹ F. Bertolucci, ‘Documenti di pietra 2’, *A rivista anarchica* (2016) 156-173.

⁵⁰ Bertolucci, ‘Documenti di pietra 1’, 131.

⁵¹ Bertolucci, ‘Documenti di pietra 1’, 135.

⁵² Bertolucci, ‘Documenti di pietra 2’, 156.

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to a person: '(Pietro Gori, Francisco Ferrer, Errico Malatesta, Carlo Cafiero etc.), while [as for the themes] the 9% concerns the history of the First International, the 23% Anticlericalism, the 32% Antifascism, the 20% Resistance, the 7% the victims of political repression, the 5% the Spanish Civil War',⁵³ plus several scattered themes.

However, in Carrara, what strikes is the matter, and its specific sceneries. In the brightness of a day of July (Fig. 2) the shining whiteness of marble emerges from the pictures taken during an excursion that the Italian Anarchist Federation (FAI) of Reggio Emilia organised in 2019 with the collaboration of local marble workers belonging to the Carrara and Gragnana FAI and to the *Lega dei Cavatori* (Quarrymen League). This visually chimes with the monument dedicated to the most famous leader of quarrymen unions, Meschi. Made of the same material and located in the centre of Carrara, right at the bottom of the dirt roads that serve to carry the mineral from the mountains to the plain, this monument has an epigraph claiming that the once-more humanised 'troubled marble' should forever carry Meschi's name for exploited people (Fig. 3).

⁵³ Bertolucci, 'Documenti di pietra 2', 156.

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Fig. 2. A marble quarry near Carrara during a visit organized by the Anarchist Federation of Reggio Emilia in July 2019 (Photo Claudio Neri, 2019)

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Fig. 3. Monument to Alberto Meschi in Piazza Gramsci, realized by sculptor Ezio Nelli, 1965. ‘Nobody shall forget that this troubled marble is named after freedom, kinship and faith of Alberto Meschi, anarchist and syndicalist, builder of better times, magnificent worker among the workers and the wretched, open hearth to the wounds of men and of society. He conquered the reduction of the working day. In our lands, and for all pure people, the sunshine of his honesty irradiates from here a sun that will never set. The people of Carrara’ (Photo Gian Maria Valent, 2022)

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Born in Fidenza, Alberto Meschi was a bricklayer and one of the numerous Italian workers of his generation who undertook economic migration in the New World. He settled eventually in Argentina, where a strong anarcho-syndicalist union, the FORA (*Federación Obrera Regional Argentina*) was active since the beginning of the twentieth century.⁵⁴ Expelled from the South American country due to his political engagement, Meschi came back to Italy and settled in Carrara in 1911.⁵⁵ That year, the ‘young anarchist from the province of Parma’⁵⁶ was impressed and devastated by the news of the ‘Bettogli massacre’, the collapse of a block of marble that killed fourteen quarrymen. From that moment, organised workers in the hard and dangerous labour of marble extraction, found in Meschi an intransigent union organiser.⁵⁷ After long and hard strikes in which Meschi took leading roles between 1913 and 1914,⁵⁸ the quarrymen of Carrara conquered the reduction of daily working time to 6 hours and a half, something that was unequalled in the following century of the Italian workers movement history.

As anarchist antifascist and post-war organiser of Carrara FAI Alfonso Failla proudly stressed in the anarchist journal *Il Cavatore* (The Quarryman), founded by Meschi and resumed for inaugurating his monument in 1965, these accomplishments were not the fruit of concertation or masters’ liberal concessions. Indeed, they came after violent strikes during which workers could materially survive only thanks to ‘big common kitchen[s]’⁵⁹ that anarchist unions organised for mutual aid. Failla stressed that, while his monument in stone was in preparation, Meschi had already ‘his monument in the conquests for which he struggled in the first line’⁶⁰ like the Martyrs of Chicago. This was a telling comparison, as it was during the 1886 struggle for the ‘eight hours’, that is for workers’ right to time for life and dignity, that the five anarchists of Chicago famously lost their lives.⁶¹ At the origin of May Day celebrations, the Chicago events are evoked each year

⁵⁴ A. Lopez, *La FORA en el movimiento obrero*, Buenos Aires, 1987.

⁵⁵ A. Failla, ‘Meschi e le lotte dei cavatori’, *Il Cavatore* 16 May 1965, ASFAI.

⁵⁶ U. Marzocchi, ‘L’opera di Alberto Meschi’, *Il Cavatore* 16 May 1965, ASFAI.

⁵⁷ Gestri, *Capitalismo e classe operaia*.

⁵⁸ Fedeli, *Anarchismo a Carrara*.

⁵⁹ A. Failla, ‘Meschi e le lotte dei cavatori’, *Il Cavatore* 16 May 1965, ASFAI.

⁶⁰ Failla, ‘Meschi e le lotte dei cavatori’.

⁶¹ G. Ferrari, *Primo Maggio, Storia di un giorno di lotta internazionale sovversivo scomunicato*, Milan, 1986.

F. Ferretti, 2022, “Statues that must stand not fall: the material agency of anarchism in the marble monuments of Carrara, Italy”, **Journal of Historical Geography**, special issue *Contesting monuments: heritage and historical geographies of inequality*. Early view: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0305748822000779>

by the speakers of the anarchist May Day demonstration in Carrara, one of whose key and most ritualised moments is the visit to the statue of Meschi. Before Meschi's monument, in addition of placing flowers as it is done with all plaques and steles reached by the demonstration, attenders sing together the aforementioned Gori's *Inno del Primo Maggio*.⁶²

Since Meschi's death in 1958, the anarchist press released numerous claims for building his monument, in which marble was defined as the accomplishment of a symbiosis between the 'Man of Stone' and the Apuan Alps in highly symbolised terms. Armando Borghi (1882-1968) namely announced that Meschi, like other deceased fighters: 'Will have soon a piece of the white mountain carrying his name'.⁶³ Indeed, the inauguration of Meschi's monument took place on 16 May 1965, being announced by the FAI national journal *Umanità Nova*, which released Meschi's own slogan: 'Quarrymen, quarries are yours!'.⁶⁴ The speakers of the event were Failla, anarchist historian Gino Cerrito and the Mayor of Carrara, which shows the importance of Meschi's figure for public memories of the town. According to *Cavatore*, a wide fundraising that led to collect 5,477,027 *lire* to buy the marble, a considerable sum for that time.⁶⁵ 1965 was also the twentieth anniversary of another key date for the stories that are told here: the liberation from Nazi-fascism, to which anarchist partisan formations gave a decisive contribution in the area of Carrara. After that date, several anarchists and antifascists who were exiled since the establishment of Mussolini's regime in the 1920s could come back to Carrara. It was the case with Meschi, whose engagement as an international fighter in 1936-39 Spain was recollected by Umberto Marzocchi.⁶⁶ Thus, in the afterwar, a matter such as marble was increasingly charged with symbolic significations for anarchists, who translated these into the building of monuments, whose materiality was intended to be performative as it had to showcase their history and ideas for current and further generations.

⁶² Carrara, May Day 2010 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oKaA9xGrSLE>

⁶³ *Il Cavatore* 23 December 1958, ASFAL.

⁶⁴ I. Garinei, 'Cavatori, le cave sono vostre', *Umanità Nova*, 23 May 1965.

⁶⁵ 'Sottoscrizione pro monumento', *Il Cavatore* 16 May 1965, ASFAL.

⁶⁶ Marzocchi, 'L'opera di Alberto Meschi'.

F. Ferretti, 2022, "Statues that must stand not fall: the material agency of anarchism in the marble monuments of Carrara, Italy", **Journal of Historical Geography**, special issue *Contesting monuments: heritage and historical geographies of inequality*. Early view: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0305748822000779>

3. Resistant stones and graves that fight back

In September 1945, back from antifascist exile and partisan resistance, Italian anarchists celebrated their first post-dictatorship national congress in Carrara, where they constituted the *Federazione Anarchica Italiana* (FAI), which ideally continued the *Unione Anarchica Italiana* formally created in 1920 under the inspiration of activists such as Luigi Fabbri and Errico Malatesta, and then forbidden under Fascism.⁶⁷ Carrara was chosen due to the strength of local anarchism, organised in the partisan battalions that liberated the town before the Allies entered it in April 1945. In Carrara, the anarchists were protagonists in resuming civil life in post-war years, including the organisation of cooperatives for food distribution which led them, in inviting their nationwide comrades to choose Carrara for the national meeting, to claim that: ‘We are the propelling centre of all activities, contributing to the problems of both citizen and partisan life with our sense of responsibility and libertarian models’.⁶⁸ A marble plaque surviving in a quite obscure corner of Carrara well exemplifies the constructive spirit of social anarchism in targeting direct control of organised workers over production: the so-called *Ponte FAI* (FAI Bridge) (Fig. 4).

⁶⁷ G. Sacchetti, *Con l'amore nel pugno. Federazione Anarchica Italiana 1945-2012*, Milan, 2018; L. Di Lembo, *Guerra di classe e lotta umana: l'anarchismo in Italia dal biennio rosso alla guerra di Spagna, 1919-1939*, Pisa, 2001.

⁶⁸ Federazione Comunista Libertaria, ‘Da Carrara’, *Umanità Nova*, 10 June 1945.

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Fig. 4. Carrara, San Martino. Anarchist plaque placed in 1946 on the bridge of the Marble Railway that was destroyed by the Nazis and immediately reconstructed by anarchist partisans: ‘Stronger than the explosive that destroyed it, the initiative of Carrara FAI anarchists and of the local Hall of Labour reconstructed this bridge as the indispensable vessel to the wealth of the country’ (Photo Gian Maria Valent, 2022)

Actions such as reconstructing the bridge of the railway used to transport marble from the mountains to the port proved the strength of Carrara anarchists in 1945.⁶⁹ This impressed the delegates proceeding to the Congress from other regions, who noted how the entire town was mobilized for that event. In the recollections of Roman activist Renato Gentilezza, one can appreciate a long lasting aspect of the ritualization of public space which currently appears during the May Day events: that is, music. In 1945, during a big demonstration in downtown streets, a

⁶⁹ U. Fedeli, ‘Carrara e i suoi problemi, 1. La lotta per la liberazione’, *Umanità Nova*, 23 May 1948.

F. Ferretti, 2022, “Statues that must stand not fall: the material agency of anarchism in the marble monuments of Carrara, Italy”, *Journal of Historical Geography*, special issue *Contesting monuments: heritage and historical geographies of inequality*. Early view: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0305748822000779>

brass-band: ‘Played the hymns of anarchist partisans’.⁷⁰ The walk ended in the central square of Carrara, where the FAI headquarters were located at that time, defined by Gentilezza: ‘The great square entitled to the hero Gino Lucetti’.⁷¹ Gino Lucetti (1900-1943) was a Carrara anarchist who tried to kill Mussolini in September 1926. Imprisoned, he died in a 1943 bombing while he was trying to join Resistance in his town. Then, the most famous formation of anarchist partisans in Carrara famously took his name: the Lucetti Battalion.⁷²

Thus, it looks unsurprising that this square, named Piazza Alberica after the former dukes of the region, was rebaptized ‘Piazza Gino Lucetti’ from 1945 to 1960, and refurbished with monuments that fascism had removed in previous years. It was elderly Meschi who publicly exposed this symbolic and pedagogic strategy in a *Cavatore* paper that he published in 1953, showing that early activists were completely aware of the performativity of monuments and of the strategic political role of re-signifying this way the entire urban landscape of Carrara, as they endeavoured to do. Stressing how Piazza Alberica was the centre of public life and of all workers’ gatherings since the previous century, Meschi noted that, when: ‘In 1902, the anarchists wanted to dedicate a marble tribute to the martyrs of labour, they placed it in Piazza Alberica, where it was inaugurated by an erudite speech of Barrister Pietro Gori, before a flood of people’.⁷³ Today, this is the first plaque on which flowers are deposited at the beginning of each May Day demonstration (Fig. 5).

⁷⁰ R. Gentilezza, ‘Cinque giorni a Carrara’, *Umanità Nova*, 30 September 1945.

⁷¹ Gentilezza, ‘Cinque giorni a Carrara’.

⁷² *Dizionario Biografico degli Anarchici Italiani*, ad nomen.

⁷³ A. Meschi, ‘Piazza Alberica: oggi piazza Gino Lucetti’, *Il Cavatore* 20 December 1953, ASFAI.

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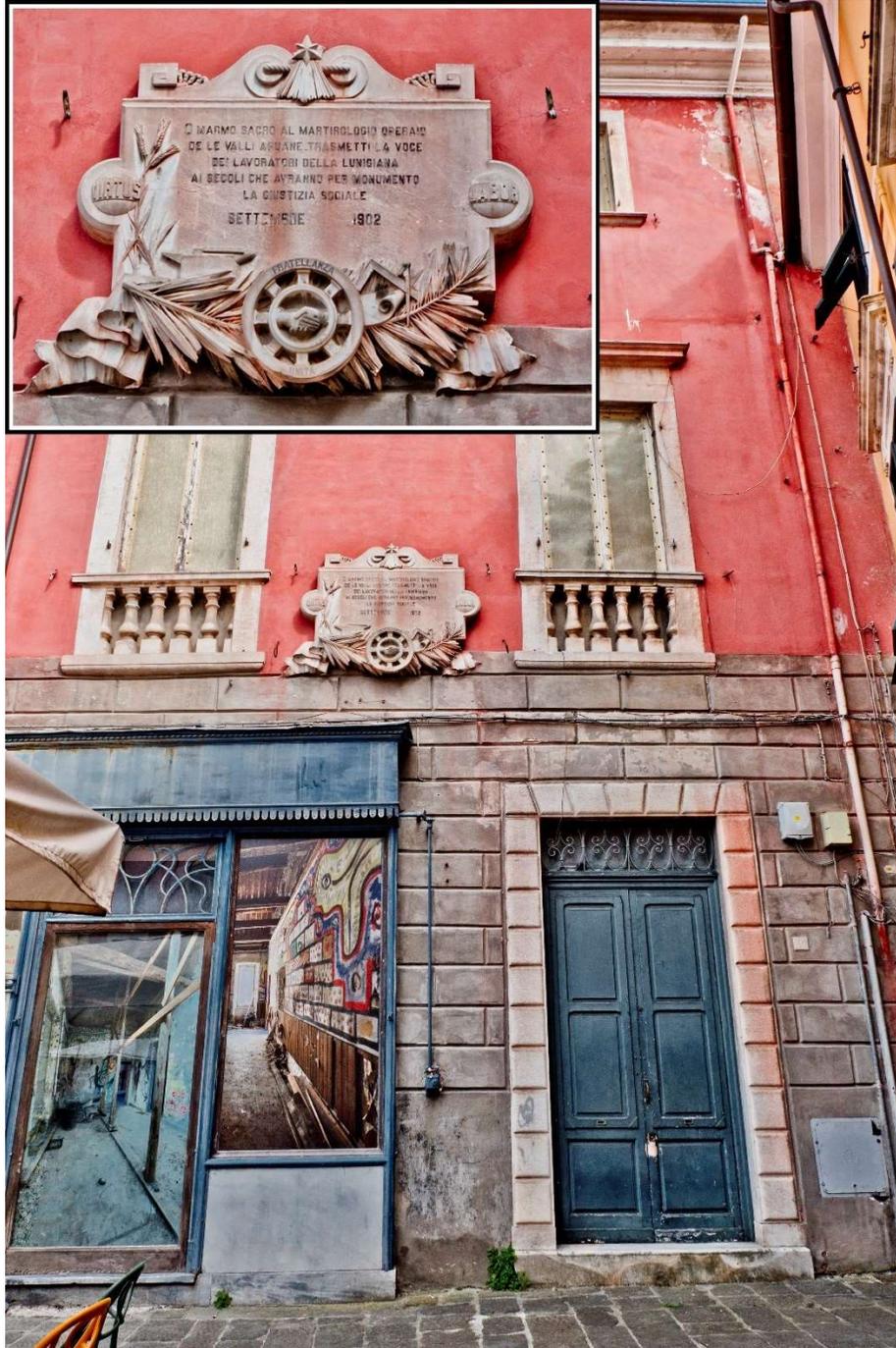


Fig. 5. Carrara, Piazza Alberica. ‘Oh, Marble sacred to workers’ martyrdom, from the Apuan valleys bring the voice of Lunigiana workers for the centuries that will enjoy social revolution as their monument. September 1902’ (Photo Gian Maria Valent, 2022)

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Regarding such a strategic and historical location, Meschi could then proudly claim that: ‘Today, Piazza Alberica became Piazza Gino Lucetti’.⁷⁴ Moreover, on the opposite side of the square, there was a monument, inaugurated in 1913, that the fascists had removed in the 1920s and the anarchists reinstalled in 1946: ‘The bust of Francisco Ferrer, with the epigraph authored by Ceccardo Roccatagliata Ceccardi’⁷⁵ (Fig. 7), that is one of the numerous poets and novelists from the region whose works were inspired by the troubled relations between humans and marble.

⁷⁴ Meschi, ‘Piazza Alberica’.

⁷⁵ Meschi, ‘Piazza Alberica’.

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Fig. 6. Carrara, Piazza Alberica. ‘Educating the plebs to civic rescue, Francisco Ferrer paid his teaching with his life. The anarchists, 1946’ (Photo Gian Maria Valent, 2022)

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Spanish anarchist educator Francisco Ferrer y Guardia (1859-1909) was assassinated by the Spanish government due to his anarchist and secular teaching. This unjust death sentence raised a strong emotion worldwide in those years. As Bertolucci notes, especially in regions such as Lazio and Tuscany, Ferrer became ‘a symbol of freethought’⁷⁶ together with philosopher Giordano Bruno, sent to the stake by the Church in 1600, to whom dozens of monuments and marble plaques had been dedicated until 1909, when such monuments started to be also dedicated to Ferrer. Thus, the very central Piazza Alberica can be considered as a memorial complex for anarchism, with marble in the backdrop showing its naked materiality in the surrounding mountain. The setup of this square was negotiated through several historical phases and its anarchist component is today represented by two permanent insights (Fig. 6 and 7). Then, temporary happenings such as the May Day demonstration build a scenery where tributes are paid to these monuments.

Indeed, in 1953 Meschi lamented that, in Piazza Lucetti: ‘There is still an absence: Giordano Bruno, whose plaque was destroyed during the dictatorship. We have not yet arranged for replacing it where the fascist barbarity has removed it’.⁷⁷ Again, Meschi clearly indicated a conscious long-term political project for public communication through marble symbols. As for Bruno, this was finally done in 2000 at the occasion of the forth centenary of his assassination (Fig. 8).

⁷⁶ Bertolucci, ‘Documenti di pietra 1’, 132.

⁷⁷ Meschi, ‘Piazza Alberica’.

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Fig. 7. Carrara, Piazza Duomo. ‘To Giordano Bruno, sent to the stake by the Papacy on 16 February 1600, the philosopher of free thought and of the infinite worlds populated by infinite intelligences, in the ever-possible harmony. The anarchists. 17 February 2000’ (Photo Gian Maria Valent, 2022)

Today, the Giordano Bruno plaque is located at the right side the provisional headquarters of the Anarchist Federation. These locals are occupied since 2008, when the historical FAI building popularly called ‘Germinal’ in Piazza Matteotti became inaccessible after internal collapses relatedly due to a building speculation that a private enterprise tried on the upper floor. This occurred in the context of the multiyear struggle of Italian anarchists to defend the historical buildings that they obtained since 1945 based on their participation to the Resistance and related agreements with the other antifascist parties on the restitution of their historical patrimony

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destroyed by Fascism.⁷⁸ Now, it is before the Germinal building, still closed, that all demonstrations end, drawing an ideal itinerary among anarchist sights in the centre town of Carrara.

A survey of the archives of anarchist press demonstrates that this kind of rituality started to be codified in current forms since May Day 1946. That day, for the first time after the Liberation, proceeding from the town and the neighbouring villages, groups of workers: ‘Took possession of the streets ... converging in Piazza Gino Lucetti’.⁷⁹ In that year’s report, one clearly recognizes elements that would have characterised further celebrations such as: ‘The brass-band playing the Spanish hymn ‘Kids of the People’ (*Hijos del Pueblo*) ... the proletarian hymns, and accompanying the chorale which had sung the [Primo Maggio] song by Pietro Gori’.⁸⁰ The sense of the report’s author was that: ‘Apuan workers resume today class-struggle, temporarily interrupted by fascist arrogance in 1921’.⁸¹

The importance of the liberation from Nazi-fascism in 1945 was not limited to the possibility of restarting public activism. It also allowed for claiming the effectiveness of partisan struggle in fighting back against Fascism. In the afternoon of that same May Day 1946, FAI members went to the village of Torano, on the mountain road leading to the quarries, to inaugurate a marble plaque celebrating two anarchist partisans from that village who had died during the struggle, Oreste Belloi and Giocondo Marchetti. Their double plaque was placed at the two sides of the pre-existing plaque of the victims of First World War, in a symbolic wish to end wars (Fig. 8). This complex is just aside the plaque dedicated to the martyrs of labour mentioned above (Fig. 1) where, that same day: ‘Preceded by the music of proletarian hymns, a big crowd deposited flowers’, to listen then the public speeches of Failla and of Valdarno anarcho-syndicalist leader Attilio Sassi.⁸²

⁷⁸ A. Morabito, Non son l’uno per cento, anarchici a Carrara (2006): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7qdxg8Sj85E>

⁷⁹ *Il Cavatore*, 11 May 1946, ASFAL.

⁸⁰ *Il Cavatore*, 11 May 1946, ASFAL.

⁸¹ *Il Cavatore*, 11 May 1946, ASFAL.

⁸² *Il Cavatore*, 11 May 1946, ASFAL.

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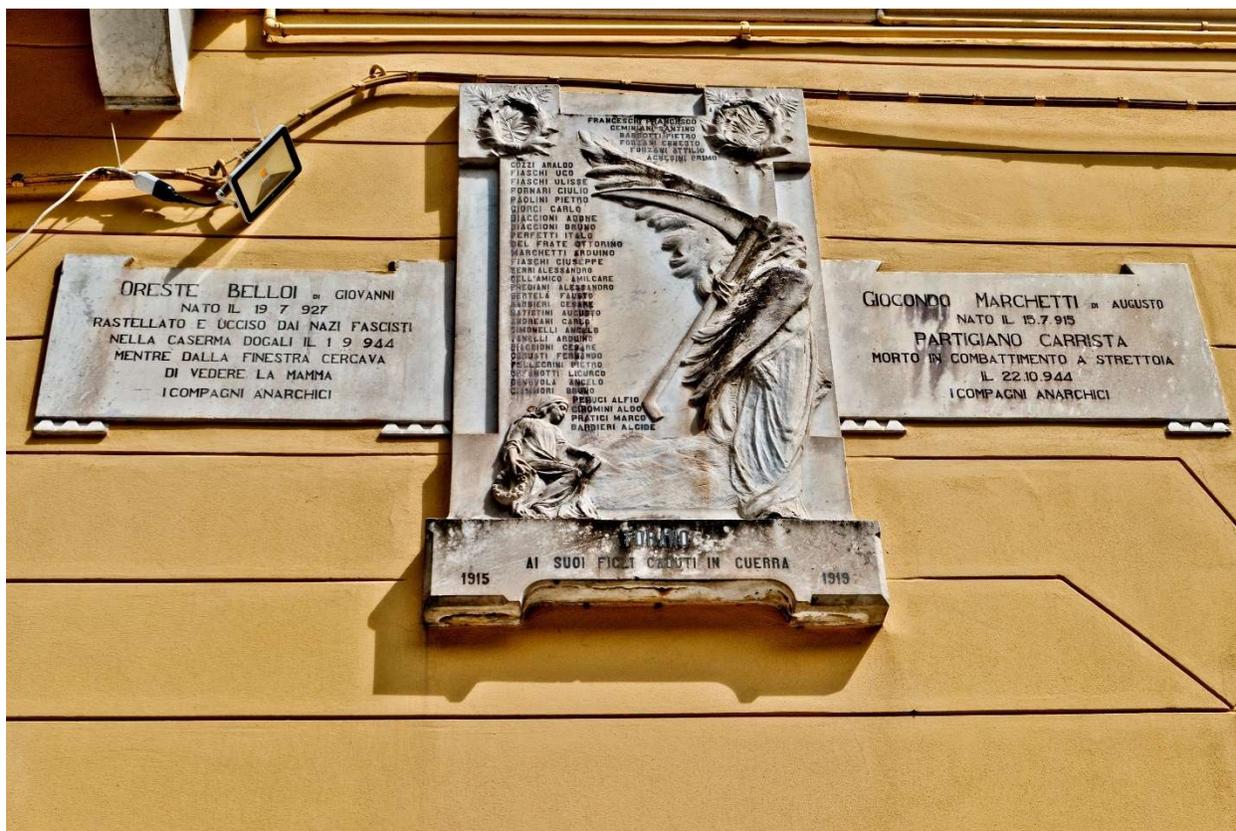


Fig. 8. Torano, plaque to the partisans Belloi and Marchetti, 1946 (Photo Gian Maria Valent, 2022)

In the anarchist section of the Monumental Cemetery of Turigliano one can appreciate how marble graves were literally intended to fight back in the unaccomplished revenge over Fascism. It is the case with some graves whose guests wanted to be forever portrayed in stone with the machine-guns that they used during partisan struggle, such as Giovanni Mariga ‘Padoan’ (1899-1979) (Fig. 10). Mariga was one of the numerous cases of partisans who were imprisoned by the ‘antifascist’ Italian Republic for many years after 1945 with the charge of having performed armed struggle before or after the dates covered by amnesties and ‘recognized’ resistance, despite the support of their fellow anarchists and intransigent antifascists.⁸³

⁸³ ‘Per Giovanni Mariga. Appello ai compagni’, *Umanità Nova*, 26 June 1960.

F. Ferretti, 2022, “Statues that must stand not fall: the material agency of anarchism in the marble monuments of Carrara, Italy”, *Journal of Historical Geography*, special issue *Contesting monuments: heritage and historical geographies of inequality*. Early view: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0305748822000779>

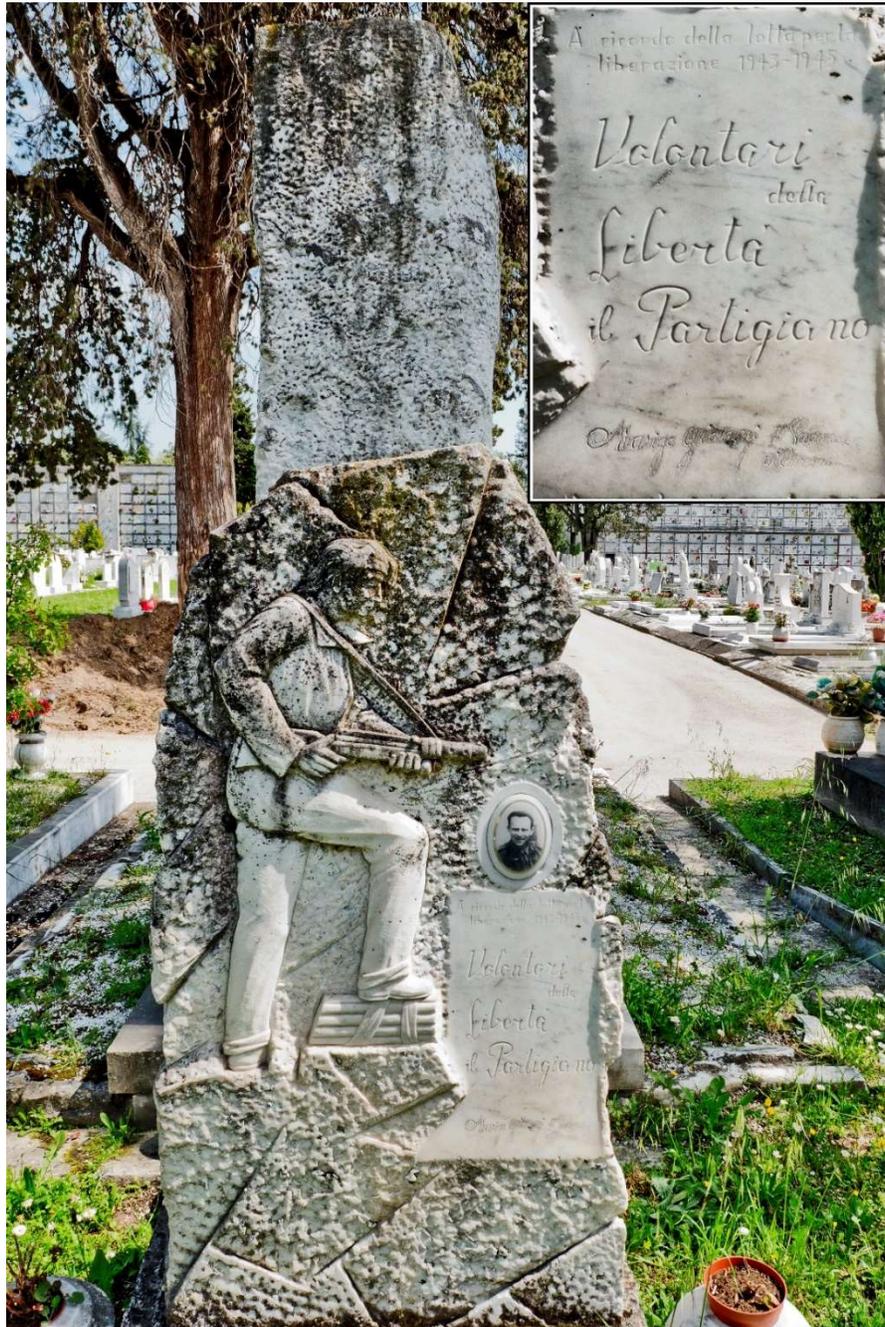


Fig. 9. Cemetery of Turigliano, graveyard of Giovanni Mariga ‘Padoan’ (Photo Gian Maria Valent, 2022)

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The hard treatment reserved to these partisans, and the contested 1946 general amnesty that was granted to former fascist officers who often resumed positions in the Administration without any effective purge, were among the reasons for the persisting idea of Resistance as unfinished business. Today, the feeling that the victims of Fascism did not have all the reparations that they deserve is still strongly perceived. The mountain village of Gragnana is the place of a FAI Circle Malatesta whose activists are proud of being ‘the oldest anarchist circle in the world’. Indeed, the presence of an Internationalists’ hideout in the same narrow street where the Circle is currently located was witnessed by police sources since the 1880s, with only the parenthesis of Fascism breaking the geographical and generational continuity of that extraordinary presence. Traditionally settled by anarchist families such as the Musettis, Borghinis and Secchiaris, most of whom still live in the village, the upper neighbourhood of Gragnana was burnt by the fascists in the 1920s. In this place, there is a small square that was dedicated to Giselda Borghini and her son Santino Secchiari, who were both assassinated by the fascists amidst the awful persecutions that members of their family such as Paolo, Silvia and Dante Luigi Secchiari⁸⁴ had to suffer during the dictatorship (Fig. 10).

⁸⁴ *Dizionario Biografico degli Anarchici Italiani*, ad nomen.

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Fig. 10 Gragnana. ‘Square Secchiari and Borghini, martyrs of fascism’ (Photo by the author 2022)

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One of the biggest monuments of the Carrara area, and one of those around which the most ‘heated’ controversies took place, was namely dedicated to all the victims of Fascism, as I discuss in the next section.

4. Material (and explosive) contentions on public spaces

Historical geographers have abundantly analysed the political meanings of exhibitions and their places and circulations, including processes of musealisation.⁸⁵ In the 1970s, similar concerns inspired the anarchists who joined the Italian Federation of Partisan Associations (FIAP), in launching a public call for projects among artists of marble to realise a big monument to ‘all the victims of Fascism’. Eventually, it was decided to place the artifact in the popular locality of Marina di Carrara, a seaside place that attracts huge numbers of tourists during the summer. The winning project, presented by architects Arturo Locatelli, Agnese Bangrazi, Piergianni Locatelli and Giuseppe Scudellari, was composed by five big blocks of marble containing human silhouettes, of women, men and children, whose material bodies were lying behind but were visible in the cut-out, to symbolise the idea that the victims of Fascism are still living in everybody’s memory thanks to their ideas and their examples (Fig. 11). This was also one of the few Carrara anarchist monuments that were not ideated and realised by artisans and proletarians, but by professional artists making a formal intellectual reflection on shapes and symbols of antifascism, matters that cannot be dealt here but are well discussed in the official book of the event.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ F. Driver, M. Nesbitt, and C. Cornish (Eds.) *Mobile Museums: Collections in Circulation*, London, 2021.

⁸⁶ FIAP e Comune di Carrara, *23-9-1979 in ricordo di tutte le vittime del fascismo*, Carrara, 1983.

F. Ferretti, 2022, “Statues that must stand not fall: the material agency of anarchism in the marble monuments of Carrara, Italy”, **Journal of Historical Geography**, special issue *Contesting monuments: heritage and historical geographies of inequality*. Early view: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0305748822000779>



Fig. 11. Marina di Carrara. Monument to all victims of fascism, 1979. In the detail, the inscription added to the block that was tore down by a fascist dynamite attack in 1981: ‘1921-1981. The bomb that devastated a part of this monument is the criminal continuation of fascism’ (Photo Gian Maria Valent, 2022)

The monument was inaugurated in 1979 with speeches by the Mayor of Carrara and by elderly Umberto Marzocchi and Ugo Mazzucchelli. Both universally renowned as FAI exponents, they were respectively representing ANPPIA and FIAP, that is two of the partisans’ associations in which anarchists were present.⁸⁷ Chillingly, two years later, a dynamite attack that was attributed to Far Right thugs tore down one of the five blocks. Reinaugurating the artifact after that criminal attack, the promoters of the monument decided not to change its current state to keep that event as an admonishment against the coming back of Fascism for future generations.⁸⁸ This shows once

⁸⁷ A ricordo di tutte le vittime del fascismo [brochure], ASFAL.

⁸⁸ FIAP e Comune di Carrara, 23-9-1979.

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more that monuments are also the result of complex assemblages and controversies in the struggles for public space, as discussed above. Amazingly, this fascist attack materially embodied the falsity of commonplaces on ‘anarchists and dynamite’, as this explosive was used against anarchism and antifascism in the very city where it is arguably most common, being traditionally used in the quarries.

Once more associated with contentions on what ‘terrorism’ is, a striking case of publicly displayed controversies literally demonstrated that, as Whelan argued: ‘While public statues are dynamic sites of meaning which transform neutral spaces and help to legitimise authority, equally they can be used to challenge authority’ (Whelan 2002, 509). This was the case with the most famous of Italian anarchist monuments. That is, the enormous stele deposited in 1990 in the gardens outside the Turigliano cemetery to commemorate Gaetano Bresci (1869-1901), who famously killed King Umberto I on 29 July 1900 (Fig. 12). As noted above, this monument, on which a considerable folder of documents and press clippings survives at FAI Archives, has also the characteristic of being indissolubly associated with an individual and his peculiar story: Ugo Mazzucchelli.

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Fig. 12. Carrara. Stele to Gaetano Bresci, 1990, by Carlo Sergio Signori (Photo Gian Maria Valent, 2022)

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A marble worker and the commander of the Lucetti Battalion, Mazzucchelli became an entrepreneur of marble after the war and, since he started to dispose of some personal wealth, he became a generous funder of several activities of Carrara anarchism. This included the fundraising for the monument to Meschi, and donations of marble for realising monuments in the region and elsewhere in Italy. It is exactly from some remarks on the link between ‘Carrara’s anarchist inspiration [and] the bowels of the mountain’,⁸⁹ a ‘natural’ emergence that was once more profoundly humanized in his interviews to Italian daily press, that Mazzucchelli started his campaign to dedicate a monument to Bresci. The initial opposition of public powers to concede the necessary authorizations, and the following battle that Mazzucchelli and his comrades fought stubbornly for almost a decade, were at the origin of a ‘case’ that raised the interest of national press and of the highest levels of Italian politics, interesting even the Premier Minister and a couple of Presidents of the Republic.

Mazzucchelli’s proposal was extremely pragmatic. As he could personally guarantee the supply of the matter and of the workforce that were needed, he just requested to the Mayor of Carrara that the municipality defined a possible place, and: ‘We will deal with all the remainder’.⁹⁰ Yet, that idea was not unanimously supported by the antifascist political front with which Mazzucchelli had just inaugurated the monument to the victims of Fascism. The only political party that was overtly favourable was the Republican Party. It is worth noting that, in that context, ‘republican’ still meant ‘leftist and antifascist’ in the aforementioned tradition of Mazzinianism, Garibaldianism and radical Risorgimento,⁹¹ in which republicans and anarchists had traditionally a special feeling in towns like Carrara. While individual members of the Socialist Party and even some Catholics supported Mazzucchelli’s bid, a strong opposition to the Bresci monument came first from the Communist Party, to which the Mayor belonged, and which led the Municipality to deny

⁸⁹ *La Stampa*, 23 July 1981, ASFAI.

⁹⁰ *Il Tirreno*, 8 October 1981, ASFAI.

⁹¹ Ferretti, *Geographies of Federalism*.

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permission in April 1982.⁹² A heated debate followed, being first echoed by local and regional press, with exchanges of heavy accusations from all parts.⁹³ This pushed the anarchists and their sympathisers to form a public Pro-Brescia Committee, which included local intellectuals and activists of different political inspiration to make pressure on politics and public opinion for reopening the dossier and realising the Brescia monument.

Initially the main issue was arguably the dogmatism of post-Stalinist PCI, a party that was always ready to excommunicate those who were not aligned with their official positions, especially in the ‘Extreme Left’, but the debate was soon inserted in the peculiarities of Italian history. In the 1980s, Italy was living the so-called ‘Years of Lead’, in which the Red Brigades, and in general ‘terrorism’, were considered the public enemy number one. While everybody knew that Italian anarchists did not have anything to do with the Red Brigades or similar groups, the fact that Brescia had killed a King was instrumentally compared to the kidnapping and murdering of Premier Minister Aldo Moro by the BR in 1978, which gives another example of how monuments and public spaces can provide very contentious resignifications of public debates.

Mazzucchelli had to clarify to the national press that: ‘One cannot compare Gaetano Brescia to a Red Brigatist’ or to a simple ‘terrorist’.⁹⁴ Inserted in a many-centuried tradition that was first republican and performed as an individual action, so-called ‘tyrannicide’⁹⁵ could be hardly equated with bomb attacks striking randomly. Even less it can be confused with the Leninist idea of an armed vanguard party fighting the state to take its control that inspired the Red Brigades. Meanwhile, Milanese sculptor Carlo Sergio Signori volunteered to realise the stele, presenting a draft project for an object occupying ‘3,75 meters in height, 2,5 meters width, 1,2 meters of depth’⁹⁶. Then, the Committee finally succeeded to convince the Municipal Council to vote in

⁹² *Il Tirreno*, 28 April 1982, ASFAI.

⁹³ *La Nazione*, 3 May 1982, ASFAI.

⁹⁴ *Il Secolo XIX*, 3 March 1983, ASFAI.

⁹⁵ S. Brincat, “‘Death to Tyrants’”: The political philosophy of tyrannicide—Part I’. *Journal of International Political Theory* 4, 2 (2008), 12-240; M. Turchetti, *Tyrannie et tyrannicide de l'antiquité à nos jours*, Paris, 2013.

⁹⁶ *La Nazione*, 2 October 1983, ASFAI.

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favour of the monument in early 1985. Yet, it was at that moment that the harshest controversies occurred, as a nationwide campaign against Bresci was launched by monarchist associations and by members of the post-fascist *Movimento Sociale Italiano*, who tried to raise a ‘scandal’ with public opinion for this decision of the city of Carrara. Monarchists even came to report the Carrara municipal councillors to the Tribunal with the charge of ‘apology of crime’, a serious offence in the Italian criminal code.

This charge did not raise special concern among the councillors who were summoned by the Tribunal.⁹⁷ But an emotional wave of comment in the national press followed the earliest ‘denunciation’ of catholic journal *Avvenire*, which published an article titled ‘Glory to the murderer’.⁹⁸ This mediatic indignation, also fostered by journals considered as ‘progressive’,⁹⁹ contained implicit requests for national public powers to intervene. From that moment, Mazzucchelli’s project had numerous stops and restarts, being first blocked because the chosen place was not approved by the superintendence for heritage.¹⁰⁰ Then, when also for the *Belle Arti* everything was okay,¹⁰¹ the area before the cemetery was allocated and the building site could start,¹⁰² to be soon stopped again by the Tribunal as a precautionary measure, given that the Court had still to decide on the ongoing trials over ‘apology of crime’.¹⁰³ What is intriguing is that, among these appeals and counter-appeals, the highest authorities of the state wanted as well to have their say on the matter.

The Ministry of Interior (and future President of the Republic) Oscar Luigi Scalfaro (belonging to the *Democrazia Cristiana*), in agreement with Premier Minister Bettino Craxi (puzzlingly, a Socialist),¹⁰⁴ intervened requesting the Government to cancel the decision of Carrara’s

⁹⁷ *Il Tirreno*, 29 Marzo 1985, ASFAL.

⁹⁸ *La Stampa*, 1 April 1985, ASFAL. *L’Avvenire*, 28 March 1985, ASFAL.

⁹⁹ *La Repubblica*, 29 March 1985, ASFAL.

¹⁰⁰ *La Nazione*, 28 April 1986, ASFAL.

¹⁰¹ *Corriere della Sera*, 13 July 1986, ASFAL.

¹⁰² *La Nazione*, 26 July 1986, ASFAL.

¹⁰³ *La Nazione*, 21 August 1986, ASFAL.

¹⁰⁴ *Corriere della Sera*, 15 August 1986, ASFAL.

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municipality. Interrogated on whether the Government had effectively the power to impose such a decision, the State Council sent favourable advice.¹⁰⁵ Nothing less than the President of the Republic, Francesco Cossiga (*Democrazia Cristiana*), wrote a letter to the Mayor of Carrara ‘suggesting’ that the city gave up the Bresci project.¹⁰⁶ In the following years, the project remained suspended amidst this intricate situation. Meanwhile, the definitive acquittal for all the accused of ‘apology of crime’ only arrived in late 1987,¹⁰⁷ and sculptor Signori passed away the following year, leaving the manufacture unaccomplished. Moreover, some dissensions between Mazzucchelli and his FAI comrades started to be echoed by the public press.¹⁰⁸

The reasons for which elderly Mazzucchelli quitted the FAI, and successively abandoned anarchism in his very late years, are not ascribable to the Bresci affair and were related to different views on the future of anarchism.¹⁰⁹ Yet, for 87-year old and already relatively isolated Mazzucchelli, the problem was then how to make something to unblock the situation before it was too late. The solution that he chose was amazingly easy, a little illegal but very clever in its way. In the night between 3 and 4 May 1990, Mazzucchelli and his collaborators, with a truck and a crane like those that are normally used for moving blocks of marble and were not suspicious in Carrara, went to the Turigliano garden and simply placed there an enormous block of marble. It was indeed the unaccomplished but fully telling work of Signori, with the name of Bresci inscribed. The day after, Mazzucchelli went to the authorities to self-report himself, hence launching a sort of last challenge of the kind: ‘Let’s see who is now taking the responsibility of removing these tons of matter’, betting on another material and performative characteristic of marble.¹¹⁰ That is, its heaviness, and the costs for handling, transporting and storing it in big volumes (letting alone the inefficiency of bureaucracy). His plan was successful, and that big piece

¹⁰⁵ *La Repubblica*, 4 November 1986, ASFAl.

¹⁰⁶ *La Stampa*, 14 September 1986.

¹⁰⁷ *La Repubblica*, 4 September 1987, ASFAl.

¹⁰⁸ *La Nazione*, 27 September 1988, ASFAl.

¹⁰⁹ *Dizionario Biografico degli Anarchici Italiani*, ad nomen.

¹¹⁰ *La Repubblica*, 4 May 1990.

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of the so loved, humanised and contentious matter that made the history of Carrara and of its anarchism is still refreshing there the memory of regicide Gaetano Bresci.

Conclusion: why some statues must stand

This paper has further confirmed the effectiveness of monuments for ‘staging resistance’ in public space, embodying effective political, social and pedagogical factors of mobilisation. Unlike the colonial monuments established by states and powers in place that are currently contested by decolonial and anti-racist movements, anarchist monuments challenge the powers in place. Therefore, the most apparent controversies occurred rather around their conception and location than about their very conservation (with the exceptions mentioned above). Once they are in place, local authorities tend to consider them as part of local material heritage just like any other marble manufacture, also hoping to undermine this way their subversive signification. Yet, contentions are still ongoing on the parts of the anarchist heritage that are more directly associated with everyday activism such as the Germinal building. Recently, in the process that is ongoing over the building’s internal collapses, the firm that is under trial has surrealistically tried to argue that the fault was the weight of books and archival materials that were held by the anarchists, to which the Anarchist Federation has replied with a comment titled sarcastically: ‘The burden of culture’.¹¹¹

Marble statues and material processes of monumentalising are far from being an exclusive characteristic of anarchist or radical memory. Yet, the peculiar characteristic of marble’s uses in Carrara anarchist monuments is in its re-signification as a relational matter constituting a materialisation of labour and the very social relations framing its extraction and shaping, and a rhetoric which is replete with metaphors making its physical characteristics as a symbol of both the difficulties workers face before marble and at their harshness and determination in carrying out struggles. If one considers the evolution of artistic styles between the earliest surviving monuments built at the beginning of the twentieth century and some of the latest ones (namely the

¹¹¹ *Il Tirreno*, 26 September 2021.

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Marina di Carrara artifact and the Bresci stele) one can observe an evolution of their visual languages from some classical realism to more abstract themes. It can be said that the choice of these languages depended on the need of appealing to publics with the most common aesthetics of the day to communicate political contents, then amplifying the potential performativity of matter.

In addition to pleading for a militant historical geography providing a political standpoint on why certain monuments should fall or stand, this paper has extended scholarship on the co-constitution of visuality and materiality and on performativity in the material turn. It has done so by showing how marble and its hardness are traditionally humanised and styled as historical agents, consubstantially accompanying the braveness of marble workers who claim to have ‘opposition in [their] head’ [*il contro in testa*].¹¹² This refers to the direction in which each block of marble opposes the hardest resistance to cut. This metaphor embodies the concept of invincible resistance that marble, and humans working it, oppose to those who do not deal with them in the right way. Finally, key characteristics of marble such as hardness, weight and durability have contributed to these stories rendering possible the long-standing of anarchist landscapes in Carrara.

¹¹² Rovelli, *Il contro in testa*.

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