

QUOTATION: What does history have in store for architecture today?

Sleeping Beauty

Aesthetics of Ruin, Corruption and Rome

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Abstract

This paper analyses the concept of the ruin, which has been transformed over time from the image of an ancient, former beauty, characterized by the romantic aesthetic of decadence and consumption, into a “bachelor machine”. The timeframe within which this transformation can be examined is the stage of architectural Postmodernism, which began before the 1980 Biennale, with the exhibition “Roma Interrotta” (Interrupted Rome). This event introduced new ways of understanding Rome’s ruins and the image of the city itself.

*Rome n'est plus: et si l'architecture
 Quelque ombre encor de Rome fait revoir,
 C'est comme un corps par magique savoir
 Tiré de nuit hors de sa sepulture.*¹

The image of Rome has gradually shifted away from the idea of sublime beauty that had characterized its past, as if the city itself were slipping into a slumber. Today, the proof of this distance is provided by the city's ruins, which can be understood as the *dislocated apparition* of this former beauty – its *citation*. In the ruin, the short-circuit between its original beauty and the corruption of Rome today surfaces, as it emerges from the starting passage above, extracted from a sonnet by Joaquim Du Bellay.

Although the backdrop for this investigation is the eternal city, the object of analysis is the concept of the ruin, which has been transformed over time from the image of an ancient, former beauty, characterized by the romantic aesthetic of decadence and consumption, into a “bachelor machine”, a device that transforms love into a death mechanism, according to Michel Carrouges' definition. The timeframe within which this transformation can be examined is the stage of architectural Postmodernism, which began before the 1980 Biennale, with the exhibition “Roma Interrotta” (Interrupted Rome). This event introduced new ways of understanding Rome's ruins and the image of the city itself, which appears as a *physical body* devoid of meaning that can, at this point, be only consumed or placed at the center of savage linguistic games.²

Ruins

In the essay “The Modern Cult of Ruins”, Alois Riegl recognized nature's reappropriation of all manmade things as a necessary action, in a sort of positive appreciation of decadence, of corruption, of consumption: “From men we expect accomplished artifacts as symbols of a necessary, human production; on the other hand, from nature acting over time, we expect their disintegration as the symbol of an equally necessary passing”.³ Read through this lens, the slow erosion of time and the continuous transformation of manufactured elements became positive attributes for Riegl: culture's mortality is, without a doubt, one of its advantages.⁴

The ruin can be read as an imprint of the past, a monument suspended between presence and absence, a sort of materialization of memory.⁵ However, in order for the landscape and the pre-existing entities connected to it to become “an operable and dialectic element”,⁶ as Vittorio Gregotti claims, it is necessary that we add to our collective memory those “efforts of imagination” that are explained and realized through artistic works, through a design.⁷ In this way, through the analysis and subsequent theoretical re-founding of the concept of the ruin, it is possible to delineate new methods of operating on the past.

"Ma, confessiamolo, è una dura e contrastante fatica quella di scovare pezzetto per pezzetto, nella nuova Roma, l'antica; eppure bisogna farlo, fidando in una soddisfazione finale impareggiabile. Si trovano vestigia di una magnificenza e di uno sfacelo che superano, l'una e l'altro, la nostra immaginazione. Quando si considera un'esistenza simile (...) ci si sente compenetrati dai grandi decreti del destino; tanto che da principio è difficile all'osservatore discernere come Roma succeda a Roma; e non già soltanto la Roma nuova all'antica, ma ancora le varie epoche dell'antica e della nuova sovrapposte l'una all'altra. Roma, 7 novembre 1786"⁸.

[However, let's admit it, it takes a difficult, conflicted effort to uncover, bit by bit, the ancient Rome under the new one; and yet we must do it, trusting in an unparalleled satisfaction in the end. We have found vestiges of magnificence and deterioration that surpass, in both directions, our imagination. When we consider such an existence (...) we feel permeated by

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the great decrees of destiny; so much so that at first it is difficult for the observer to discern how Rome succeeds Rome; and not only new Rome as compared to ancient Rome, but even the various epochs of the ancient and the new city superimposed upon one another. Rome, 7 November 1786.]

The ruin, the place where beauty and imperfection coincide, is a device that is capable of guarding the memory of the city, which, in turn, incorporates the ruin in a number of different ways: setting it in the gears of the new, like the remains of the Circo Agonale, which are incorporated into a background building in Piazza Navona; preserving it and making it an active part of monumental complexes, as in the two-faced structure that looms over the Capitol – on one side the *Tabularium*, on the other the Senatorial Palace; repurposing it, like Trajan's Market, which lives on, demonstrating form's capacity to reabsorb its function. The ruin has also been a place of reinvention – we have only to think of the critical or imaginative reconstructions of architectural, urban, and landscape layouts. Villa Tusca and the *Laurentinum*, revisited by Schinkel, are an example of this, and the latter, in particular – Pliny's residence on Rome's seafront – has been the subject of a number of reinterpretations. Leon Krier probably supplied its most sophisticated reconstruction, although it is absolutely unscientific, representing it as a fortified stronghold on a hill: the postmodern compendium of an acropolis, a medieval town, and a Renaissance city.

The ruin possesses the dual nature of the fragment, which, on the one hand, evades the idea of wholeness – according to Adorno's definition of the *fragmentary* – while, on the other, is understood as a portion of the complete work that still contains the larger work's matrix or *genetic code*, and thus can assist us in reading the ancient characteristics of the whole.⁹ In this regard, we can think of the technical representations and conjectural reconstructions of Roman ruins carried out by Giambattista Piranesi, the initiator of a proper narrative surrounding the ruins: their citation is precisely thanks to their dual nature as isolated images, fascinating and mysterious, and, at the same time, scientific sources.

Despite the fact that Piranesi understood the ruin as the location of the sublime – his etchings are, in fact, suspended between lack of scale, instability, and magnificence – the word's etymology indicates scission and separation, as if the ruin expressed, with its dismembered body, the crudest image of the fragment. Think, in this regard, of buildings that have been drawn as ruins, like the *Bank of England as a Ruin*, by Joseph Michael Gandy for John Soane (1830), and the “*progetto di ruderizzazione*” (“ruinization project”) of the Altare della Patria by Ludovico Quaroni and Carolina Vaccaro (1985).

Let us consider how many ways the ruin has been reinterpreted, altered, and corrupted, until we reach the total *desacralisation* of the ruin itself, which occurred in Postmodernism, when the commodification of the ruin was complete. The post-war period introduced a concept of ruins as fracture, in reference to the urban fabric of many European cities that had been hit during bombings in World War II. These deep wounds showed, for the first time, the *disiecta membra* of the city that influenced a number of architects: the fragmented, severed, and torn bodies of cities, dissected houses and uncovered, offended, violated fragments of family life became, for a long time, *the ruin*.

In reference to the rubble of the stages on which the war had played out and also the contemporary ruins of abandoned buildings, an idea of the ruin as a discarded element developed. We can think of the rags that cover Michelangelo Pistoletto's *Venere* (1976), the image of a lost classical purity. But we can also think of those *cities in the form of ruins*, like the now-abandoned historical centers of Matera and of Civita di Bagnoregio, and the theaters of disaster, like the city of Beirut in Gabriele Basilico's photographs. Or even the concept of *wreckage* that now commands our attention because of the shipwreck of the Costa

Concordia, the gigantic cruise ship that, run aground in front of the Isola del Giglio, must now be dissected.

If, on the one hand, a process of *desacralisation* has allowed the concept of ruin, which has now acquired new meanings, to distinguish itself from the concept of monument – thus allowing architects greater liberty in their relationships to the past – on the other hand this process has generated the appearance of either strident or completely mute projects that treat the occasions to interact with ruins as talent shows. Instead, when we operate in the presence of archeology, the architectural project should conceive of itself as a moment of reflection, a pause in which to meditate on the logic upon which the city is founded, a momentary suspension of the action of transformation, almost like a repentance for such an action. This condition does not entail a halt of the design project or a concession in the realm of *vision*, but rather reestablishes a knowing, *critical distance* from the city. In the “Progetto per la sistemazione dei ruderi del porto romano di Testaccio” (Plan for the arrangement of the ruins of the Roman port in Testaccio) by Franco Purini, the antique presupposes the existence of an impenetrable threshold of indecipherability, one that makes only memory possible. Here, the ruin is raised up to a pre-textual level, shedding light on an *origin landscape* from which the contemporary project can, at this point, only measure its distance.

Quotation, Translation, Corruption

In 1979, Jean-Francois Lyotard, who originated the critique of the *classic* theories of the Modern Movement, theorized the Postmodern Condition, which eventually became a cultural movement.¹⁰ This movement was characterized by an aesthetic of play and entertainment, based on the fall of the so-called “terrorist” motions of the Modern Movement and on their replacement with the representation of the desire to break off from certain “repressive systems”, countered by a “disalienating excitement of the new and the unknown, as well as of adventure, the refusal of conformity, and the heterogeneities of desire”.¹¹ Hence, the postmodern movement started with a *constructive deformation* of the canons of the Modern Movement, a sort of *corruption*.

But what do we mean, exactly, by corruption? Corruption manifests, generally, as the slow, gradual process of degeneration of a previous *status*; the Latin term *corrumpere* means, in fact, “to damage, to alter, and to shatter” In this sense, we can consider the postmodern consumption of the image – its mediatisation and subsequent ingestion – to be corruptive processes, especially when the act of corruption is understood as the necessary alteration of a pure original form, aimed at preventing it from being degraded and confined to a museum, and thus becoming a *hibernating* body. And yet, corruption can also be interpreted as an act of breaking the canon, of sudden unhinging or of interruption.

Corruption can be read as a *linguistic technique*, or, even better, as a process of deformation, analogous to other *techniques of invention* like translation or citation. Translation techniques aim at reinterpreting the original form through transliteration and transfer, or through the generation of variations in scale, aberrations, or specular images; citational works do so by reproducing or replicating a referent, as a way of creating copies and homages – a widely-used technique in Postmodernism since its canonisation by Robert Venturi, who gave the citation a ludic character. But although the concept of corruption is interpreted as a synonym for moral decadence, there is nothing intrinsically negative in the meaning of citation, insofar as citation means the exact repetition or reproduction of the original, and such a reproduction is not a wrongful appropriation, since the citation is explicitly attributed to its source. Citation is not imitation, in that it admits that the clone or replica faithfully refers to the original: citation is, in fact, always literal. For this reason, the citation attributes an *aura* to the original itself, toward which it then constructs a distance that is necessary to confer a value judgment on the original. Nevertheless, the citation can be viewed as a process of deformation, insofar as it places the copy in improper contexts: it eradicates the object from its original context, it *dislocates* it. Even if one cites the original without

modifying its form or structure, the simple act of moving it generates a variation, a deformation that produces an effect of alienation, analogous to what we see in front of us when we find ourselves facing the ruins of ancient Rome within the contemporary city: the ruins appear to be a dislocated object.

These techniques of deformation – citation, translation and *corruption* – were utilized in the last act of that process of *desacralisation* of the ruin's sublime image and that of the Eternal City itself: the exhibition "Roma Interrotta" (Rome Interrupted). As we will see, the projects presented through this initiative liberate the physical body of the ruin from its meaning, through complex linguistic games, in order to view it as a mere object or a "bachelor machine".¹²

Infected Venus

"Rome is an interrupted city because there came a time when it was no longer imagined", wrote Giulio Carlo Argan in 1978, launching the exhibition "Roma Interrotta". It came out one year after the publication of Charles Jencks' text "The Language of Post-Modern Architecture", and one year before the premises that were at the foundation of the book *La Condition postmoderne: rapport sur le savoir*, by Jean-François Lyotard. Conceived by the architect Piero Sartogo and located in Trajan's Market, the initiative was, in fact, born as a *corruption project*, which reduced the city to a playing field for intellectual games, in which the heritage of the city is altered, manipulated, or violently modified by different authors – or, better put, *interpreters*.

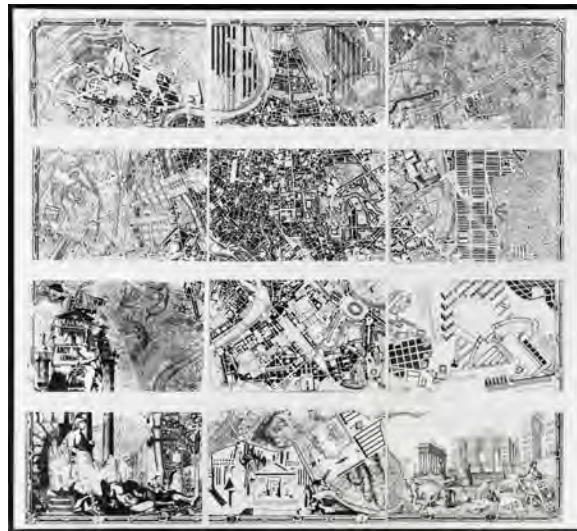


Figure 1. Rivisitazione della Nuova Pianta di Roma del Nolli (1748)
(MAXXI Museo nazionale delle arti del XXI secolo, Roma. Collezione
MAXXI Architettura)

Piero Sartogo staged this event through the Associazione Incontri Internazionali d'Arte (IIA, or the Association for International Art Meetings), whose founder and general secretary was Graziella Lonardi Buontempo, a fundamental player in the organization of this initiative.¹³ The idea was to reformulate a new and visionary image of Rome, starting with Giambattista Nolli's plan, the "Nuova Topografia di Roma" (New Topography of Rome, 1748), and to reset the image of the Eternal City to the one given in the plan; in other words, to erase all the later additions that had polluted the organic image of its urban installation. The exhibition was carried out, then, as a process of *demolition*, followed by a post-traumatic *reconstruction*. The result was a mosaic of city plans that gave life to a sort of *collage-city* highlighting its urban fragmentation. It came to light less from Nolli's plan than from Giambattista Piranesi's

Iconographiam Campi Martii Antiquae Urbis (1757) – for that matter, with the analogous effect of “semantic void due to an excess of visual noise”, observed by Manfredo Tafuri.¹⁴ But apparently Piranesi was not Sartogo’s only source of inspiration: in fact, as Léa-Catherine Szacka notes, from the Sixties onward he cultivated a close relationship with Cornell University and, in particular, with Colin Rowe – so much so that the Roman architect applied Rowe’s methodological approach to the project.¹⁵ In *Collage City* (1978), Rowe had proposed *bricolage* as an alternative to scientific methods of urban planning, based on Claude Lévi-Strauss’ notion of bricolage as a mental structure.

Rome was redesigned by twelve architects who were invited to conceptualize the city without the deformations it had undergone after the Unification of Italy, without the wounds left by bombings, and without the demolitions that had occurred during Fascism, resulting in what Argan defined as “a series of gymnastic exercises for the Imagination, whose course runs parallel to that of Memory”.¹⁶ Memory, then, not history: in fact, Rome’s new city plan, made up of twelve plans, was displayed alongside Nolli’s original, creating the effect of the historical city’s translation into an evocative, oneiric landscape.

The designs that were displayed subject the ancient image of the city to various processes of deformation, using complex geometrical and formal procedures alongside logical leaps and visual and conceptual associations. Piero Sartogo, Costantino Dardi, Antoine Grumbach, James Stirling, Paolo Portoghesi, Romaldo Giurgola, Robert Venturi, Colin Rowe, Michael Graves, Leon Krier, Aldo Rossi, and Robert Krier all intended to *design against* or to unhinge the image of the contemporary Rome, to turn back time to a past in which it is still possible to tell *subjective stories*. Nevertheless, these projects, lacking a structural utopian vision, are configured as pure visions, which do not contribute in any way to the delineation of an adequate thought process regarding the future of the city. Although some of these designs did not give up on reading the city as archeological text or *palimpsest* that is still capable of transformation, others took refuge in the design to more or less voluntarily escape reality. But since these architects were working on Rome, and thus confronting the theme of the city’s prior forms and its ruins, what did they propose as a theoretical re-foundation of the very concept of the ruin, in their attempt to repurpose it in their plans?

Before we venture into the knots of some of these proposed designs, it is necessary to remember that during those same years two other planning initiatives based on the revision of the concept of the ruin – attempts to formulate new proposals on how to *construct on the constructed* – took place in Rome. The first was the cultural event “Estate Romana” (Roman Summer), curated by Renato Nicolini, which took place in a number of the capital’s monumental places starting in 1977, and which introduced the theme of the ephemeral as a strategy of intervention on these monuments. The second was the exhibition of the city plans for “Le Città Immaginate: Un Viaggio in Italia. Nove Progetti per Nove Città” (The Imagined Cities: A Trip Around Italy. Nine Projects for Nine Cities), organized by the XVII Milan Triennale in 1987 and curated by Pierluigi Nicolini.¹⁷ In particular, the Roman section of this exhibition, curated by Franco Purini, represented the desire to re-conceptualize the image of ancient Rome using, as a starting point, the plans and the maps that depict it. What were the results of these two initiatives?

“Estate Romana” gave architects and artists a chance to redesign certain portions of the city by envisioning monuments and ruins as spaces that could be *used* in the depiction of ephemeral scenes. Consider, for instance, artists such as Christo and Jeanne-Claude, who reinstated the symbolic value of certain monuments, from Porta Pinciana to the Arco di Costantino, by temporarily hiding them under ample wrappings. In his wrapping of these monuments to protect them from pollution, Christo was inspired by the cleaning campaign for Paris’ monuments, carried out thanks to André Malraux. Thus, a number of Roman monuments were covered to the point of becoming invisible, in order to sarcastically

denounce how, often, the needs of protection and conservation end up manifesting as an ineffective imprisonment.

In the exhibition “Le Città Immaginate”, Ludovico Quaroni’s “timid proposal” for Piazza Venezia, in which Sacconi’s *Altare della Patria* is partially demolished in order to give it the semblance of a ruin is, in a way, a project that runs opposite to Christo’s ludic *overwritings*.¹⁸ We must preface this statement by noting that Rome’s current urban texture appears as a continual citation of the urban layout of ancient Rome, upon which, in fact, the modern city rests, using the older city as a foundation. But wherever this continuity is not respected, like in Piazza Venezia, where the insertion of the *foreign object*, the monument to Vittorio Emanuele, blocks the sight of Via del Corso, Quaroni’s plan intervenes to underline, or to denounce, this abuse.



Figure 2. Ludovico Quaroni with Carolina Vaccaro, Proposal for Piazza Venezia, “Le Città Immaginate”, 1987. (courtesy Carolina Vaccaro)

Quaroni wrote that the goal of his project was to “desecrate” the Altare della Patria, transforming it into a modern ruin, in order to *cleanse* it of any rhetorical memories of the Risorgimento. By corroding the monument and demoting it to the status of ruin, it would lose its triumphant symbolism:

«In queste condizioni il passato di Roma può addirittura mostrarsi come un impaccio, un vincolo irremovibile: né mi sembra che lo spirito e la cultura europei dei giovani architetti romani sia tale da aver superato l’invisibile ma solida barriera “storica” che impone la città. Mi sembra anzi che i lenocini del Cinquecento e del Seicento siano tali da *corrompere* in tutti noi, non appena si affaccino alla mente, i buoni propositi».¹⁹

[In these conditions, Rome’s past can show itself to be a hindrance, an unmovable shackle: nor does it seem to me that the European spirit and culture of young Roman architects is strong enough to have overcome the invisible but solid ‘historical’ barrier that the city imposes. Rather, it seems to me that the little Cinquecento and Seicento flatteries, whenever they surface in our minds, are strong enough to *corrupt* all our good intentions.]

An element of exceptionality, a *monstrum*, the ruin seems to be – within the changing and hyper-transformable space of the contemporary city – the out-of-place object, the intruder, the *Nosferatu*. But in Rome the sublime monster, the *memento mori* – which has become, by now, repulsive in an eternally

youthful, surgically young world – is transformed into enchantment of the past. And the magnificent immutability of the Eternal City becomes a devastating barrier against any action that propels us forward.

The twelve architects of “Roma Interrotta” seem to oppose this view: they want to liberate the ruin from its status as object imprisoned by its own conservation. Only the ruin’s cited, translated, and somehow *corrupted* image still allows it to be, to circulate freely, according to these planners, some of whose proposals will be analyzed here.

If we compare Antoine Grumbach’s plan to James Stirling’s, we can see how both these architects work on the theme of citation, but whereas the former cites the urban planners that passed through Rome, the latter cites himself. For both, the process of *collage*, addition, and subtraction are the components of urban rhetoric, but Grumbach’s plan is based on an idea of permanence, understood as obligatory citation, and thus based on the sedimentation of urban plans over time. The design unfolds through the use of imaginary sections, through *fictions*. One in particular, the fiction of Via Nomentana, seems inspired by the theme of the *inventory*: in his made-up story, the author imagines that the greatest architects that passed through Rome each left a piece of their plans there, giving life to a sort of *hybrid aqueduct*, where the ruins of the past support pieces of the future. This stratified architecture, built on citations, is made up of stratified fragments: from the dome of Bruno Taut’s glass pavilion in the exposition of Werkbund in Cologne to Pierre Chareau’s *Maison de Verre*, up to the designs of Le Corbusier.



Figure 3. James Stirling, with Michael Wilford, Russ Bevington, Barbara Weiss, *Correzioni alla pianta di Roma del Nolli (la soluzione MAF)* e note in merito all'abdicazione postbellica della professione progettuale, Roma (MAXXI Museo nazionale delle arti del XXI secolo, Roma. Collezione MAXXI Architettura)

Unlike Grumbach, James Stirling makes use of a double citation, insofar as on the one hand he cites the procedures of the collage, in reference to Colin Rowe and Oswald M. Ungers, and on the other hand he cites his own designs, which he places on top of the map of Rome like fragments of a bombed city. These designs make up a narration that is contaminated with what came before: the buildings cited are inserted into the texture of actual, existing buildings and ruins, reconstructing the Freudian image of Rome as a *psychic entity* in which all eras coexist simultaneously. But even if the coexistence of the real and the

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imagined is documented, albeit through references and citations of other projects, this montage of fragments has an obvious ludic nature.

Upon closer inspection, the proposal follows the same procedure adopted a few years prior by Carlo Aymonino, who, along with Costantino Dardi and Raffaele Panella, came up with the “Proposal for East Rome”, a plan that was presented at the XV Milan Triennale in 1973, organized by Aldo Rossi. The three Roman planners took their inspiration from the plan “La città analoga” (The analogous city) and worked on the materialization of Rossi’s idea, which, in contrast to Stirling’s, took as its starting point the montage of “pieces and parts” as an aspect of the ruin.



Figure 4. Carlo Aymonino with Costantino Dardi and Raffaele Panella, Proposal for East Rome, “XV Milan Triennale”, 1973 (Università luav di Venezia, Archivio Progetti, fondo Costantino Dardi)

Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown, Rob Krier, Aldo Rossi, Leon Krier, and Michael Graves – who intervened on the quadrants of Nolli’s plan whose etchings had been made by Piranesi – gave a number of different interpretations of the *landscape of ruins*, transforming it into a personal *theoretical landscape*: for Venturi the ruins are reduced to a billboard on Las Vegas’ Main Street – his fragment of Enlightenment in the desert, according to Kenneth Frampton – and for Krier they are reduced to emblems, to icons.²⁰ But regarding Venturi’s proposal, as Reinhold Martin noted, the photograph of the Caesar’s Palace casino in Las Vegas, pasted onto a facsimile of the Nolli map of Rome, gives a double message: the popularization of classical iconography and the classicizing of popular culture. Martin provocatively wrote that “there can be no Caesar’s Palace and, indeed, no ‘learning from Las Vegas’ without the earlier academic lessons learned from Rome and its monuments”.²¹

The proposal that least adheres to the exhibition’s premises and yet is probably the most founded, despite its unconventional connections to the larger project, is Aldo Rossi’s. He does not accept Sartogo’s instigation to intervene on one of Rome’s quadrants through a city plan, and he checkmates this idea by deciding to plan only one building, that of the baths. His proposal is openly “indifferent to the relationship with the city/or in particular with the city of Rome or of Roma Interrotta. Also because”, Rossi writes, “every interruption presupposes a historical and psychological link that the authors cannot evaluate well in any specific case”.²² His designs for the *Ricostruzione delle Terme Antoniane e dell’antico Acquedotto* (Reconstruction of the Antonian Baths and of the ancient Aqueduct) propose three images of ruins at the

same time: Piranesi's archeological city, Giorgio de Chirico's metaphysical city, and Gabriele Basilico's Rome, which *relocates* leftovers of the industrial age within the postmodern landscape. According to Rossi, he collected the forms of some buildings freely "from other projects; others have been adapted, and others still have decidedly been invented".²³ A few aspects of the plan are the fountain, the teahouse with a promenade and a trampoline, the cabanas for changing or protection from the sun and, finally, the "water house". This last element, a celebration of the classification of the thermal systems, brings far away springs, foreign to Rome and originating in the Swiss Alps, into Nolli's plan. From the drawings of the plan, the water house seems to act as the threshold, the conceptual entrance to the landscape of ruins. But these remains are selected, transcended, and their meaning is amplified, like in Fellini's *Satyricon* (an adaptation of Petronius' original), restoring the image of the city through the themes of the irrational, the oneiric, the analogous.



Figure 5. Aldo Rossi with Max Bosshard, Gianni Braghieri, Arduino Cantafora, Paul Katzberger, Ricostruzione delle Terme Antoniane e dell'antico acquedotto con modernissime apparecchiature di riscaldamento e refrigerazione ad uso dei nuovi impianti balneari per svago, amore, e ginnastica, con annessi padiglioni in occasione di fiere e mercati, Roma. (MAXXI Museo nazionale delle arti del XXI secolo, Roma. Collezione MAXXI Architettura)

As if to say, a loud noise cannot awaken a sleeping beauty like Rome's, which is tired of the current ruckus and, having been trained in moderation, needs to be awoken calmly to the warmth of a pacified vision of art, by architecture that renounces shouting excess in order to rediscover a sense of the classic. The ruins of Rome themselves represent a timeless beauty, a beauty that has not been buried but, rather, is only momentarily asleep, waiting to be rediscovered; a pure beauty, which has lost its *firmitas* and its *utilitas* and is now only *venustas*. The Roman ruins lie, stretched out and naked, and they represent true beauty, that of ancient Rome trapped in modern Rome, which moves us in its uncovered, fragile, defenseless appearance.

What were the after-effects of "Roma Interrotta"? It seems relevant to cite at least one here. Peter Eisenman did not participate in the initiative, but around ten years later Franco Purini did invite him to the Roman leg of the exhibition "The Imagined Cities: A Trip Around Italy. Nine Projects for Nine Cities". Eisenman came up with a plan that perfectly aligned with the *spirit* of the project, a plan, we could say,

pervaded by the *syndrome* of “Roma Interrotta” Focusing on the area around Via Flaminia and Piazza del Popolo, Eisenman works on the concept of dislocation, which proposes a way of liberating Rome from the repressions of place, time, and scale. In the explanation of his plan, Eisenman writes that he was influenced by the text *Civilization and Its Discontents*, where Freud asserted that, in mental life, nothing that has been formed can be erased by memory, because it is saved in some way and in certain, particular circumstances it can be brought to light. The father of psychoanalysis decides to verify this assertion through a comparison with the history of the Eternal City: “Now let us, by a flight of imagination, suppose that Rome is not a human habitation but a psychic entity with a similarly long and copious past – an entity, that is to say, in which nothing that has once come into existence will have passed away and all the earlier phases of development continue to exist alongside the latest one”.²⁴ Peter Eisenman’s vision uses Freud’s famous passage as a jumping off point to imagine a Rome freed from relations and meanings, made only of signs and figures that can be altered, superimposed, repeated, translated. An imaginary and labyrinthine Rome, where Piazza del Popolo’s “trident” appears more than once, scaled differently and rotated on itself; the part of Rome enclosed by the Aurelian Walls is also scaled differently and dislocated; the empty spaces between city blocks are cross-sectioned and become abstract grids that are then superimposed on the compact city. Through the use of different instruments – of scale models – Peter Eisenman stages the *obsession with possibility* belonging to a form of writing that is separate from the meaning of the very signs that constitute it.

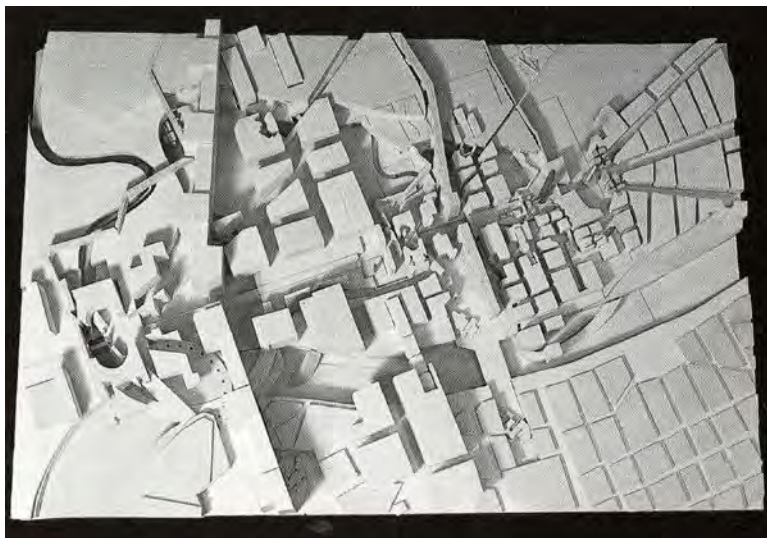


Figure 6. Peter Eisenman, Proposal for Piazza Del Popolo, in “Le Città Immaginate”, 1987. (Peter Eisenman archives, CCA Montreal)

“Now that language and dialect have died, Esperanto remains”, writes even Portoghesi. “Once the channels of cultural continuity have been interrupted, retying the conversation between the ancient and the new means going back to understanding the ancient’s profound structures: it’s a little like deciphering a language without knowing its grammar or vocabulary; but it is the only possible way”.²⁵ However, if Portoghesi, despite his anguish for the present time, seems to provide a direction for the future, the letter that Raphael addressed to Pope Leo X in 1519 leaves us speechless:

“Considerando delle reliquie che ancor si veggono delle ruine di Roma la divinità di quegli animi antichi, non istimo fuor di ragione il credere che molte cose a noi paiano impossibili che ad essi erano facilissime. Però, essendo io stato assai studioso di queste antichità e avendo posto non picciola cura in cercarle minutamente e misurarle con diligenza, e,

leggendo i buoni autori, confrontare l'opere con le scritte, penso di aver conseguito qualche notizia dell'architettura antica. Il che in un punto mi dà grandissimo piacere, per la cognizione di cosa tanto eccellente, e grandissimo dolore, vedendo quasi il cadavere di quella nobil patria, che è stata regina del mondo, così miseramente lacerato".²⁶

[By considering the remains of the ruins of Rome that can still be seen, we see the divinity of those ancient souls, and I don't believe it to be unreasonable to believe that things that seem impossible for us were easy for them. Therefore, since I have long studied these pieces of antiquity, and since I have placed more than a little care in examining them minutely and measuring them with diligence and, through reading the great authors, in comparing their works of art with their writings, I think that I have achieved some understanding of ancient architecture. Which on the one hand gives me great pleasure, in the knowledge of such an excellent thing, and on the other great pain, in seeing, almost corpse-like, that noble homeland, which had been queen of the world, so miserably torn.]

With this image of a "torn corpse" Raphael brings us back to the starting sonnet by Joaquim Du Bellay, by reminding us of the inescapable defeat of every project for the city of Rome. Ultimately, what is left of Rome in Rome, of the ancient in the contemporary? A chasm separates the two worlds, which can no longer meet in the way they did in Freud's vision, where he imagined Rome as a *psychic entity*. What is Rome, then? The memory of Stendhal's and Goethe's walks in Moravia's and Giorgio Montefoschi's novels? Or is Rome, by now, a mere *surrogate*, a decadent *simulacrum* of an image of eternity? Or, even worse, a commercialized citation: a *souvenir*?

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Endnotes

¹ Joachim Du Bellay, *Les Antiquités de Rome*, Paris: Federic Morel, 1558, sonnet V: *Les Celle qui de son chef les étoiles passait*.

² See Antony Vidler, "Architecture Dismembered", *The Architectural Uncanny*, Cambridge, Massachussets: The MIT Press, 1992, 69-84.

³ Aloïs Riegl, "The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Character and Its Origin", (partially transl. by Kurt W. Forster and Diane Ghirardo in) *Oppositions*, n. 25, Fall 1982, pp. 21-51. Quoted in K. Michael Hays (ed.), *Oppositions Reader. Selected Readings from a Journal for Ideas and Criticism in Architecture 1973-1984*, New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1998, 621-650.

⁴ See Kurt W. Forster, "Monument/Memory and the Mortality of Architecture", *Oppositions*, n. 25, Fall 1982, 2-19. Quoted in K. Michael Hays (ed.), *Oppositions Reader. Selected Readings from a Journal for Ideas and Criticism in Architecture 1973-1984*, New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1998, 18-35.

⁵ Memory itself appears as a *materialized concept*. For Aristotle, memory was a contracted, synthetic, and summarized *imprint* of the past, whereas in Proust's *Recherche* it assumed the attributes of "the immense building of memory" See the entry *Memoria*, in AA. VV., *Enciclopedia Filosofica*, Bompiani, Torino 2006, vol. 7, 7236-39; G. Froio, *La componente archeologica nel progetto moderno*, Rubettino, Soveria Mannelli 2013, 24-29.

⁶ Vittorio Gregotti, *Il territorio dell'architettura*, Feltrinelli, Roma 2008 (I ed. 1966), 72.

⁷ Gregotti, *Il territorio dell'architettura*, 61.

⁸ Arturo Farinelli (ed.), Johann Caspar Goethe, *Viaggio in Italia* (1740), Roma: Reale Accademia d'Italia, 1932-33.

⁹ See Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetische Theorie*, vol. 7 of the *Gesammelte Schriften*, Frankfurt am Main, 1970, 74.

¹⁰ Jean François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997 (I ed. *La Condition postmoderne: rapport sur le savoir*, 1979).

¹¹ Fredric Jameson, *Foreword* in Jean François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, op. cit., p. XX.

¹² See Michel Carrouges, *Les Machines Célibataires*, Paris: Arcanes, 1954.

¹³ See Léa-Catherine Szacka, 'Roma Interrotta': *Postmodern Rome as the Source of Fragmented Narratives*, in Dom Holdaway and Filippo Trentin (eds.), *Rome, Postmodern Narratives of a Cityscape*, London: Pickering & Chatto, 2013, 155-169.

¹⁴ Manfredo Tafuri, *La Sfera e il Labirinto*, Torino: Einaudi, 1980, 48.

¹⁵ Szacka, *Roma Interrotta*, 155-169.

¹⁶ Giulio Carlo Argan, *Foreword*, (1978), in Piero Sartogo (ed.), *Roma interrotta: twelve interventions on the Nolli's plan of Rome: in the MAXXI architettura collections*, Monza: Johan & Levi Editore 2015, 23.

¹⁷ AA. VV., *Le città immaginate: Un viaggio in Italia. Nove progetti per nove città*, Electa-XVII Triennale, Milano 1987. The section on the projects regarding the city of Rome was edited by Franco Purini.

¹⁸ Ludovico Quaroni, Carolina Vaccaro, *Una timida proposta per Piazza Venezia*, project description, in AA. VV., *Le città immaginate: Un viaggio in Italia. Nove progetti per nove città*, Electa-XVII Triennale, Milano 1987.

¹⁹ Quaroni and Vaccaro, *Piazza Venezia*, 38.

²⁰ See Kenneth Frampton, *Storia dell'architettura moderna*, Zanichelli, Bologna 1993 (I ediz. *Modern Architecture: a critical History*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1980), 343.

²¹ Reinhold Martin, *Utopia's Ghost: Architecture and Postmodernism, Again*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010, XIX.

²² Aldo Rossi, *Progetto: Ricostruzione delle Terme Antoniane e dell'antico Acquedotto con Modernissime Apparecchiature di Riscaldamento e Refrigerazione ad Uso dei Nuovi Impianti Balneari per Svago, Amore e Ginnastica, con Annessi Padiglioni in Occasione di Fiere e Mercati* (project description), in Piero Sartogo (ed.), *Roma interrotta: twelve interventions on the Nolli's plan of Rome: in the MAXXI architettura collections*, Monza: Johan & Levi Editore 2015, 184.

²³ Rossi, *Progetto*.

²⁴ Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, London: The Standard Edition, 1989 (I edit. 1930), I.

²⁵ Paolo Portoghesi, *Roma interrotta* (project description), in Piero Sartogo (ed.), *Roma interrotta: twelve interventions on the Nolli's plan of Rome: in the MAXXI architettura collections*, Monza: Johan & Levi Editore 2015, 100, 104.

²⁶ Raffaello Sanzio, Baldassarre Castiglione (1519), *Lettera di Raffaello D'Urbino a Papa Leone X. Di nuovo posta in luce dal cavaliere Pietro Ercole Visconti*, Roma: Tipografia delle Scienze, 1840.

