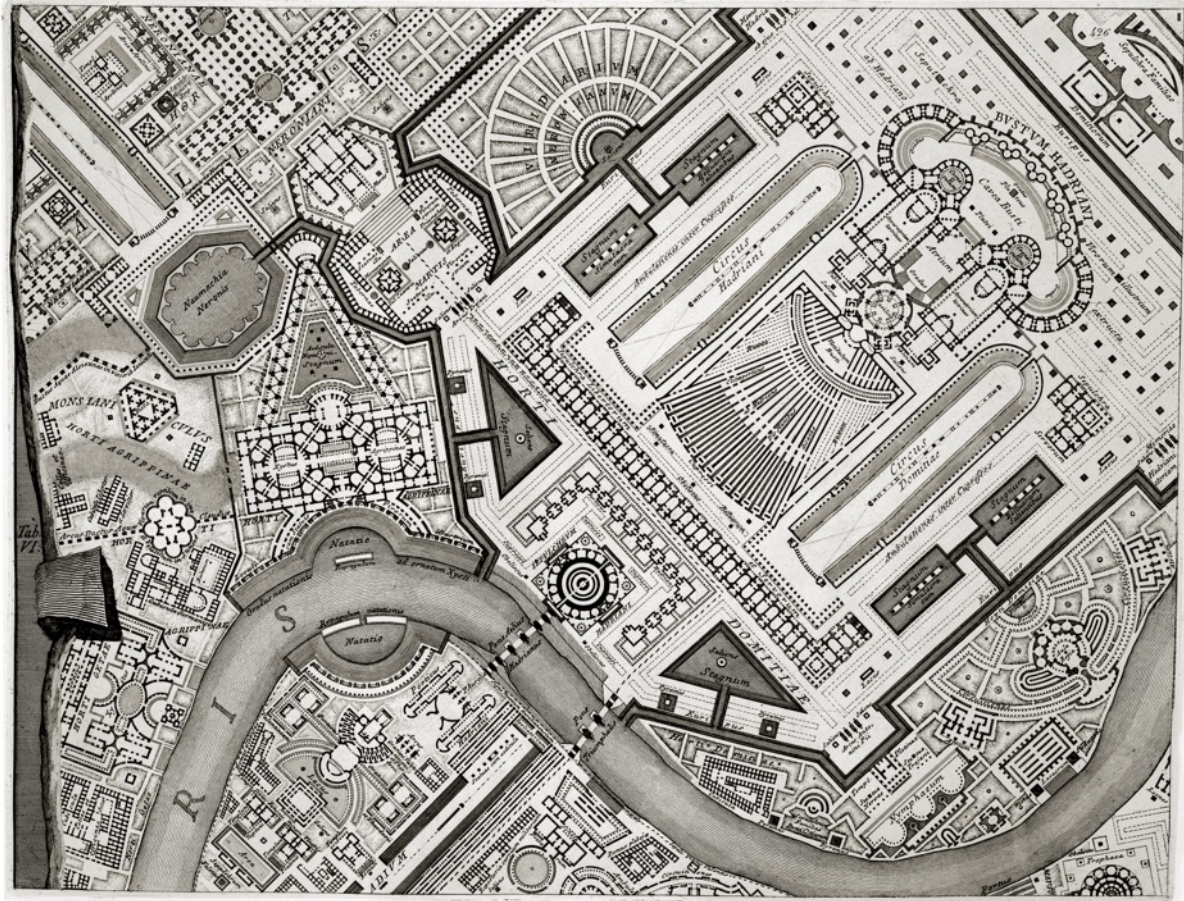


PROMENADES DANS ROME
ASSEMBLY PRACTICES BETWEEN VISIONS, RUINS AND RECONSTRUCTIONS
EPFL LAUSANNE



Giovanni Battista Piranesi and Robert Adam, *Il Campo Marzio*,
in: “La gran pianta di Roma antica”, 1756

“It is immediately apparent that this structure (the Campo Marzio) is composed of a formless heap of fragments colliding one against the other. The whole area between the Tiber, the Campidoglio, the Quirinale, and the Pincio is represented according to a method of arbitrary association (even though Piranesi accepts the suggestions of the Forma urbis), whose principles of organization exclude any organic unity.”

Manfredo Tafuri, *The Sphere and the Labyrinth*, The MIT Press Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, 1987, p.34, from “The Wicked Architect”.

THE CITY AS A PROJECT

For five centuries, from early Humanism to the dawn of Modernity, the journey to discover the monuments of Classical antiquity has been an essential experience for every European artist. For some an initiation, for others the apogee of a luminous career, the “Roman walk” represented a sublime moment in which intellectual dreams met their concrete reality.

Since the diffusion of the first Italian treatises, the descriptions and drawings of the Roman monuments fed the literary and artistic imagination of the whole of Europe. Although

these fantastical narratives and dreamlike representations were counterbalanced by antiquarians' reports and architects' surveys, the monumental ruins of Ancient Rome kept their aura intact, continuing to generate new dreams and illusions.

For artists and poets, the "Roman walk" was a sublime experience, where the emulation of ancient splendour produced an inner catharsis. Meanwhile, for architects it became fertile territory for the imagination, in which the accumulation of layers and objects provided the material and opportunity for the project of a new city.

Since the early Renaissance, in front of these ancient ruins, architects have asked themselves how to develop the critical design thinking necessary for founding a new culture. From quarrying stone to constructing new defensive works, the ruin became a means and instrument for the creation of a renewed architecture.

The perpetual presence of antiquity—temples transformed into churches, houses built on pre-existing substructures, fragments recovered, exhibited and redefined—triggers a unique method to interpret and read history, inherent to the city itself. Rome allows no orderly succession of 'rebirths', no vanished civilizations. Rome, the eternal city, privileges continuity. Its essence, although fragmentary and mutilated, is built on uninterrupted coexistence with antiquity. Rome always emerges and re-emerges under different guises. Its ruins represent the intersection between the visible and the invisible. Their concrete presence is testament to their eternity; the loss of every practical function enshrines their monumentality. Ruins fascinate us because they return to their original, elemental nature: only form and only matter. The vestiges of ancient buildings sit outside the flow of events, exempt from their rules, therefore immortal. Rome is archaeology in reverse, where it is the city itself that reassembles its own singular, disparate fragments.

In this way, the eternal city appears as an interrupted dream, suspended in a time in which past and future have no sequence. As Giulio Carlo Argan pointed out half a century ago in the introduction to the "Roma interrotta" project, we can only conceive the space of fragments and ruins by starting from a profound understanding of its essential nature. By now it is evident that Modernity's techniques of urban design and planning have not been able to deal with this complexity. The results of this disconnection are visible in the contemporary city and urgently call for a substantial rethinking of the ways and mean to imagine it anew. In this historical moment, such urgency seems even greater. The fragmentary nature of Rome is not a specific and peculiar character, but the inevitable condition of every contemporary metropolis. The shape of the city today looks progressively less like a Cartesian plan and more and more like a stratification of history and memory. The discourse on Rome as a collage or assemblage of fragments is not only still valid for the city itself, but becomes a paradigm for a much broader and general understanding. Rome is therefore a prototypical city that is impossible to design, but instead must be perpetually reimagined. It is not only an illustrious historical precedent, but an allegory for all contemporary cities.

FRAGMENTA URBS ROMÆ

The main purpose of the seminar is a continuous comparison between the archive offered by the real city, its figurative representation and its literary vision. Besides the inevitable influences of history, other demons and spectres will haunt our “Roman Walk”, which becomes an operative way to address discourse on the method and practice of architectural design. No longer, or at least not only, archaeological, the walk will become a method for imagining the form of urban space, analogous to the space of memory. In fact, Rome offers the unique possibility of full immersion in the temporal depths of the city and to find new possible meanings.

From the early 1400s until the last century, a single great theme linked the artistic and literary spheres of all of Europe to Italy: the universe of the monuments of antiquity. Italy, and of course Rome, became a coveted travel destination and an open-air laboratory. Over centuries, a rich imaginary of architectural visions and ideal projects developed from its form and elements. Rome is not only this imaginary city, recomposed from the ruins, but also a real city built over the millennia upon the ruins. Every discourse must start with Vitruvius and with the *Severan Marble Plan*. Vitruvius’ *De Architectura*—the only Latin text on architecture to survive the ravages of history—stands in direct relation to the ruins, becoming the starting point for studies and investigations capable of suggesting a new interpretation of architectural orders and formal typologies. Prints and translations of the Latin treatise allow a comparison between what was described in the text, what could be observed in open-air excavations, and what was drawn on the marble fragments of the *Severan Marble Plan*, found in 1562 in the garden of the church of Saints Cosmas and Damian.

Later, it was the treatise writers themselves—above all Sebastiano Serlio and Claude Perrault, due to their diffusion and influence—who explicitly proposed antiquity as an infinite repository for a reborn architecture. Rome is the triumph of the fragment. A fragment that, freed from the antiquarian dimension of quotation, finally rose to the dignity of a constituent element in the system of architecture. In his *Duodecim fragmenta* of 1550, Jacques Androuet du Cerceau had already sensed this in his personal search for the poetics of the ruin and the imagined restoration of ancient architecture, as a bridge between classical antiquity and the modern condition. Between 1552 and 1561, Pirro Ligorio made plans of contemporary and ancient Rome at the same scale. The two plates became the basis for the “great reconstructive plan

of ancient Rome”, confusing discovery, scholarship and invention in a premonition of a Piranesian dream. By then, the idea of a city composed of parts abstracted from reality had been launched. In 1612, the engraver and printer Giacomo Lauro published his *Antiquae Urbis Splendor*. Once again, it was a city in fragments.

In the seventeenth century, Louis XIV’s minister, Jean-Baptiste Colbert, sent Antoine Desgodetz to Rome to survey the Augustan temples in detail. In 1673, he commissioned Claude Perrault to produce a modern, illustrated and annotated translation of Vitruvius’ treatise.

With the publication of his survey in 1682 as *Les Édifices Antiques de Rome*, Antoine Desgodetz offered a scientific method of representing antiquity, effectively introducing the possibility of studying architecture through the travel reports, engravings and *carnet de voyages* that, from this time, began to multiply throughout Europe.

In the same period, the Jesuit Athanasius Kircher broadened the horizon of his interest in antiquity to include the territory around the city, which he surveyed, reconstructed and represented in the engravings that accompany his *Latium*, published in 1671. Athanasius Kircher’s work tends, once again, towards hybridity, mixing scientific, archaeological and topographical precision with the freer invention of architecture and design.

In this climate, young architects were obsessed with Italy, and Rome in particular, leading them to conceive their architecture as often-confused aggregates of recollections and memories linked to a mythical past. In the 18th century, antiquity became a state affair, and for European architects and artists the Italian *Grand Tour* was also prestigious. The renewed interest in antiquity began to manifest in what would become, shortly afterwards, an autonomous discipline, endowed with a series of rules and techniques, based on a defined working method: the graphical and pictorial representation of the ancient. Giovanni Battista Piranesi, who had learned the art of perspective and the poetic sensitivity of images in Venice, became the epitome of the visionary restlessness of the eighteenth century.

On his arrival in 1740, Rome was still largely a medieval city, with its dense labyrinth of alleyways, at times interrupted by wide streets, with ancient remains half-buried by vegetation or besieged by modest dwellings. From the ground of Rome, the remains of a glorious past resurfaced every day. Two years earlier, in 1738, Jean-Laurent Le Geay had also arrived, an important figure known

for his inventive ‘great assemblies’. Giovanni Battista Piranesi worked with drawing as well as with memory. In 1748—the same year in which *La nuova Topografia di Roma* by Giovanni Battista Nolli was printed—Piranesi worked on one of his most significant works, *Le antichità romane*. These did not evoke decline and decadence. In fact, his visionary mind reasoned by juxtapositions, creating scenes haunted by time, in a collage of memories always on the verge of breaking apart, but never really lost. His *Frammenti di Roma*, its ruins like islands of marble, rewrote a new geography of the ancient city.

The young boarders of the Académie de France had to discover and interpret this wealth of memory and knowledge. Housed in the Villa Medici from 1803, the *Académie de France* became an obligatory stop on the study path of all the most brilliant architects. The tangible result was the *envois*: the graphic works that the *pensionnaires* were required by regulation to send to the central office in Paris at the end of each of the four years of their stay. Among these we find the splendid plates dedicated to the *restaurations*: the inventive, creative graphic reconstructions of ancient monuments. The preparatory work involved discovering and studying the ‘authorities’: the documents, ancient testimonies and previous restorations that constituted the foundation on which to base the graphic restoration of the monuments. These included classical sources such as the treatises of Palladio, Serlio, Canina and Vitruvius, but also the works of *antiquarii* such as Pirro Ligorio. To these were added Giovanni Battista Piranesi—the main exponent of the dramatic game between man, memory and ruin—and the marble fragments of the *Forma Urbis*, which became the inspiration for many stylistic exercises dedicated to architectural invention.

Even the twentieth century, with its avant-garde movements, did not interrupt the crucial relationship between the discipline and Rome, with its fragmentary nature. We need only think, for example, of Tony Garnier, who conceived and developed the urban planning project for his *Cité Industrielle* in Rome at the Académie de France in Villa Medici, where he stayed from 1899 to 1903 after winning the *Prix de Rome*. Tony Garnier conceived the project alongside the surveys of antiquities that he was required to carry out every year as *pensionnaire* of the Academy: the *Tabularium*, the Arch of Titus, the church of Santa Maria in Cosmedin, and the ancient city of Tusculum. In a similar way, the most radical impulses of modern architecture continued to alternate and overlap

with a fascination for Roman antiquities throughout the century.

Tony Garnier stayed at the Academy in the same period as Paul Bigot who, in those years, laid the foundations of his *plan-relief*. This colossal model of Imperial Rome, developed over the next forty years—and certainly influenced by the coeval reconstruction of the *Forma Urbis* by Rodolfo Lanciani—perfectly represents the fertile union between scientific reconstruction and free design interpretation: a crucial aspect in distinguishing the disciplinary approach to antiquity since the early Renaissance.

In these years of great social transformation and building expansion, antiquity was sometimes charged with different rhetorical, political and ideological connotations, first with the unification of the Kingdom of Italy, and then with Fascist propaganda. In fact, it was in this context that Mussolini commissioned Italo Gismondi in 1933 to create the model of Constantine’s Rome, now preserved at the Museum of Roman Civilization at EUR. This is a fundamental artefact which, beyond its ideological implications, draws on and develops the precedents of Rodolfo Lanciani and Paul Bigot.

The great masters of modern architecture such as Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and Le Corbusier referred more directly to Greek architecture and, in particular, the Parthenon: the paragon of form as an abstraction of a constructive principle and, therefore, independent from any possible urban context. After the Second World War, however, the attention of the discipline soon returned to the eternal city.

In their 1978 book *Collage City*, Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter transposed this fundamental dialectic and expressed it visually as a crucial tension between figure and background. It is a tension between the Athenian Acropolis—where the figure emerges as an autonomous and independent object—and the Roman Forum, where a continuous and totalizing background simultaneously encompasses and determines every possible figure. In this dialectic, we find the two fundamental models of the city that we can still see clashing dramatically today. On the one hand, there is the “ideal” city—now understood in even its most controversial and problematic aspects—on the other hand, there is the “real” city, composed of infinite layers and overlapping fragments.

The classical architecture that the so-called Post-Moderns looked to was also Roman, in its urban, hybrid and fragmentary essence. They invoked Roman, and especially Baroque, architecture in clear opposition to that neo-Platonic

Hellenism that had marked the first humanism and, through multiple transformations, had informed the roots of Modern thought itself.

It is perhaps Manfredo Tafuri who grasped in the widest and deepest way the scope and duration of this duality. In *La Sfera e il labirinto* (The Sphere and the Labyrinth) of 1980, he analysed its implications and retraced its trajectory starting from the work of Piranesi. It is not only the urban condition that is fragmentary and stratified, but also—through a substantial epistemological reversal—historical knowledge itself.

At the same time, the project of “Roma Interrotta” called on architects to reconsider the methods and premises of the dramatic urban development that was taking place with the unregulated speculation of the post-war period.

Like Tafuri, Argan—in his double role as mayor of the city and promoter of the “Roma Interrotta” exhibition—returns to the same immanent dialectic: imagination versus project, “providence” versus utopia, memory versus history. These different words describe the same opposition. Argan concluded his beautiful introduction to the exhibition with a plea: if you want to save Rome, you have to stop designing it (badly) and start imagining it again. In doing so, he brought the city back into focus: no longer as a theoretical model for the discipline, but as a real object of study. Only after this careful study could earlier theories be finally reapplied. It was an invitation that was poorly understood by the participants themselves in the exhibition, and seems to have remained substantially unheard today.

SEMINAR OBJECTIVES

The summer school is organized as an experimental research seminar, comparing different disciplinary approaches to the theme of the “city assembled in fragments”.

Today, the fragmentary nature of the city has become a metaphor for the contemporary metropolis which—investigated through this rhetorical filter—could also reveal a “unitary design”, a coherent logic, a linear perspective with which to recompose a possible significance. As much textbooks and treatises represent the classical city as a logical and complete system, Rome appears in its many different stratifications as a shapeless accumulation of fragments that clash against each other, tied together by arbitrary associations.

The subject of the seminar will be the city of Rome, in its role as an eternal archive of references for the practice and theory of architecture. Understood as a monumental *Wunderkammer*, Rome contains a marvellous patrimony of fragments ready to be recomposed in new architectures. But it also reveals the ways these fragments have been assembled over the millennia, becoming the largest and most complex work of art in the world. In fact, the seminar makes a critical reading of urban phenomena prompted by the theory of art, in both its written form and the practical dimension of artistic production and manual technique.

A tacit analogy binds the form of the city to the books that represent it, and to the architecture produced from studying and frequenting it. Crucial references will include the reconstructions depicted in Renaissance treatises, the “great reconstructive plan” of Pirro Ligorio, the fantastical engravings of Athanasius Kircher, the graphic work of Giovanni Battista Piranesi, the *Nuova Topografia* by Giovanni Battista Nolli, the *envois* of the Académie de France, the critical writings of Manfredo Tafuri, the archaeology of Rodolfo Lanciani’s *Forma Urbis Romæ*, Colin Rowe’s theory of Collage, and the architectural visions promoted by Giulio Carlo Argan’s “Roma Interrotta”. Based on these references, and others from external contributions, the seminar is conceived as a moment of study, production and comparison between scholars of different origins. In this way, the city of Rome simultaneously constitutes the subject of the summer school and, through the history of its representations, its main theoretical and methodological reference.

RESEARCH, GRAND FINALE AND PUBLICATION

During the week, scholars and researchers residing at the Swiss Institute in Rome will produce a collective work, bringing together the specific contributions of their respective disciplines. The work will address issues of Rome as “city built in fragments”, “model of additive practice”, “atlas of affinities” and “repertoire of analogies” through dialectical approach confronting history, theory, criticism, photography and architectural design.

The week of research will find its synthesis and conclusion on Saturday, July 24th with the presentation of the collective work and the organization of an open roundtable, where external guests will be invited through the call for papers below. At the end of the seminar, a printed volume will be published collecting the material produced during the seminar and all the contributions selected for the final round table.

Approximately 7-10 resident academic researchers will participate for the duration of the seminar, from EPFL Lausanne (Nicola Braghieri and Filippo Fanciotti), the Polytechnic of Milan (Elisa Boeri), the Bergische Universität Wuppertal (Filippo Cattapan), the University of Genoa (Valter Scelsi), the Universität Innsbruck (Giacomo Pala), and the University of Roma Tre (Francesca Mattei). Anna Positano has been asked to develop a photographic project on the research theme.



Baldassarre Peruzzi, *Scena prospettica con edifici romani* o *Scena romana*, 1675 circa, Reale Galleria degli Uffizi, Firenze