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Roma Interrotta **The Urbs that is not a Capital**

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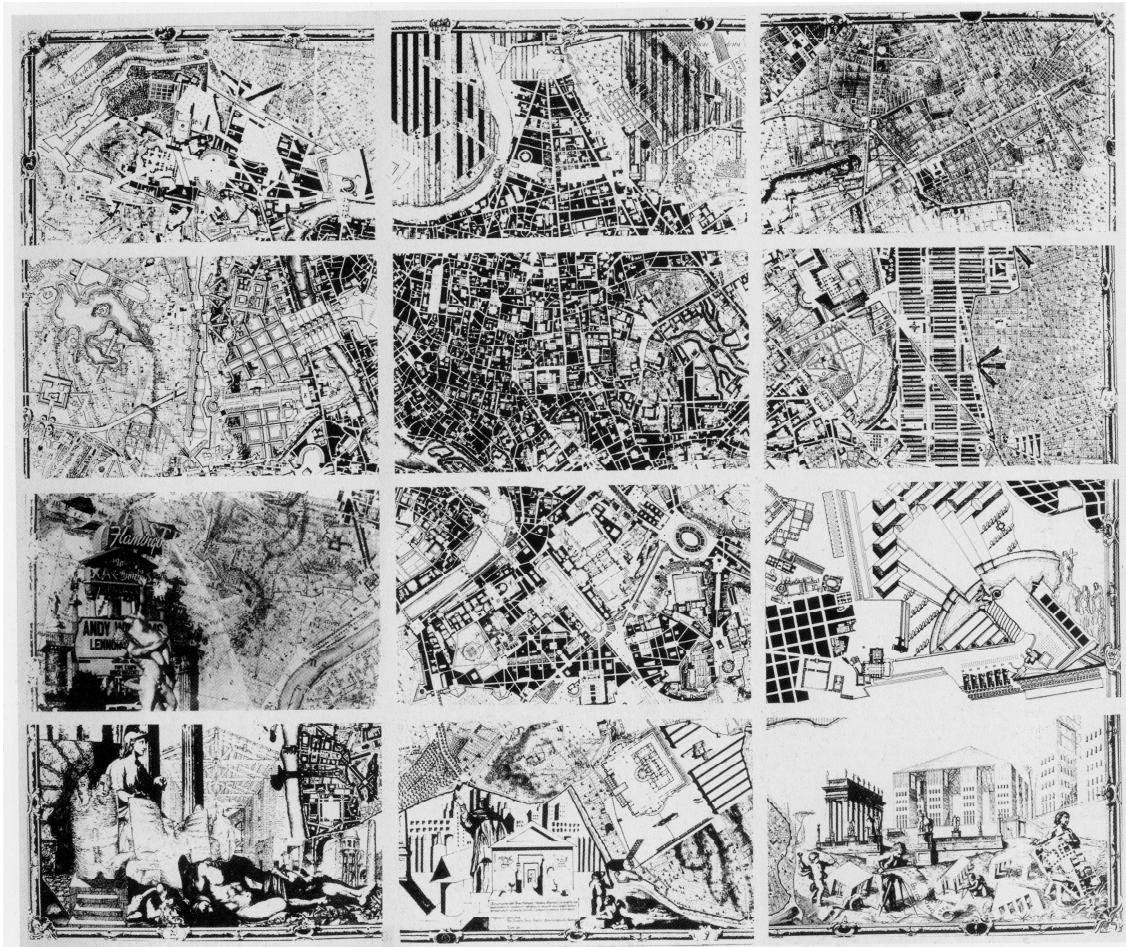
In 1978 the Italian architect Piero Sartogo, invited to make an exhibition by the association Incontri Internazionali d'Arte, joined eleven other leading architects on the international scene to design a 'New Rome' based on the city's historical nucleus.¹ The project was titled *Roma Interrotta* ('Rome Interrupted'). Its point of departure were the twelve sheets, defined by the size of the printing plates that constitute Giambattista Nolli's famous *Nuova pianta di Roma* of 1748. Each architect was assigned a sheet or 'sector' on which to develop a fictional design. The projects were exhibited in the Mercati di Traiano in May-June 1978 and the show subsequently traveled to various prestigious venues around the world. The exhibition was published in an Italian catalogue and in a thematic issue of the British journal *Architectural Design*, an important platform for postmodernist architecture.² *Roma Interrotta* has continued to fascinate architects and architectural historians ever since, especially now the oeuvre of contributors such as Robert Venturi, Colin Rowe and James Stirling again attracts much attention. The original projects were exhibited at the 2008 Venice Architecture Biennale, accompanied by a new set of proposals from twelve offices for the urban development of Rome, now titled *Uneternal City. Urbanism beyond Rome*.³

In *Uneternal City*, Nolli's map was replaced by datascares, graphics of mobile phone use and satellite images representing the transient and partly virtual nature of the contemporary city. The scope of the interventions was widened to the entire area of metropolitan Rome, the largest municipality in Europe. The critical distance with regard to the existing situation that *Roma Interrotta* established by taking a 240 year-old map as its starting point now emerged by shifting the attention from the

¹ Besides Sartogo, the following architects and their teams participated: Costantino Dardi, Antoine Grumbach, James Stirling, Paolo Portoghesi, Romaldo Giurgola, Robert Venturi and John Rauch, Colin Rowe, Michael Graves, Rob Krier, Aldo Rossi and Leo Krier.

² *Roma interrotta*, Roma, Incontri Internazionali d'Arte, Officina Edizioni, 1978; M. Graves (ed.), *AD Profile*, 20: *Roma Interrotta*, in: *Architectural Design*, vol. 49, 3-4, 1979. All references are taken from the English publication, and will be given as *Roma Interrotta*.

³ A. Betsky (ed.), *Uneternal City. Urbanism beyond Rome*, Venezia, Marsilio, 2008.



1. *Roma Interrotta*. Overview of the twelve projects (taken from Nolli, Vasi, Piranesi. *Immagine di Roma Antica e Moderna*, a cura di M. Bevilacqua, Roma, Artemide, 2004)

center to the rapidly expanding periphery of the city, addressing hitherto neglected needs by seeking new life for Rome in the untapped resources of the vast area outside of the city walls.

Uneternal City adopted the most benign and least ambiguous reading of *Roma Interrotta*: an imaginative project generating proposals about the future urban development of Rome. Indeed, the whole enterprise of *Roma Interrotta* could be construed as an academic exercise in urban planning, with the architects working as if they had gone back to Nolli's Rome; the project of participant Romaldo Giurgola, for instance, did just that.⁴

But such reading probably misses the original point. The choice of Nolli's *Nuova pianta* in conjunction with the title of the project was motivated not only by the desire to provide the participating architects with an attractive graphic representation that approximated contemporary Rome. *Roma Interrotta* was also a criticism of Roman developments in the nineteenth and twentieth century, the period between the production of Nolli's map and the exhibition project. Working from the *Nuova pianta* implied picking up the thread of history before the urban

⁴ See 'Nolli: Sector VI. Romaldo Giurgola', in: *Roma Interrotta*, pp. 60-61. This is also the point of view adopted in Alan Chimacoff, 'Roma Interrotta Reviewed', in: *Roma Interrotta*, 7. AD 49, 60-62.

development of Rome had gone astray, and the map was cast as a clear and final registration of the legitimate urban development that had started in Antiquity and ran its course until the pontificate of Benedict XIV (r. 1740-58). The twelve projects, then, attempted to reconnect present-day Rome with its historical origins. The participating architect and critic Colin Rowe, writing two decades later, put it like this:

The program for the exhibition was based [...] upon the argument that, after Nolli, the urban tissue of Rome had been 'interrupted', that is, that something assumed implicit in the urban tissue of Rome had become lost. In other words, since nothing very important in Rome had happened between 1748 and 1870 - except for Valadier's intervention in the Piazza del Popolo - the exhibition was an ostensible critique of urbanistic goings-on since the overthrow of the temporal power of the Papacy. [...] many of [the participants], I think, failed to understand the message.⁵

In this essay, I want to delve further into the conundrum of *Roma Interrotta*. After all, as Rowe suggests, the brief of the project declared contemporary Rome an obvious problem. But it also effaced the same problem by asking architects to work from the situation before the nefarious developments occurred. Or, as the participating architect and architectural historian Paolo Portoghesi put it succinctly, in Nolli's Rome 'there is no lack of equilibrium to compensate, no error to correct'.⁶ As a result, the problem itself remained undefined. At the same time every proposal invites comparison with a real counterpart in contemporary Rome, not only in terms of practical solutions for particular issues of urban development but also with regard to the role that architecture and urbanism could play in the city. Such comparison would be motivated by the notion that Rome as well as Roman architecture and urbanism turned into something fundamentally different when the city became the capital of Italy. *Roma Interrotta* then fostered the expectation that this comparison would clarify both what has changed in Rome after 1870 and how this change affected architecture and urbanism.

In order to define the issues that the architects designing *Roma Interrotta* were addressing, it is necessary to have a closer look at what the problem of Rome actually consisted of. To do so, I will not reconsider in detail the urban development of Rome after 1870, an endeavor beyond the scope of this essay, but ask what could have constituted the difference between pre- and post-1870 Rome to the mind of those involved in the project. This will clarify why the architects chose to work from Nolli's map and elucidate which issues the architects chose or chose not to deal with in their projects. It will be argued that the self-evident yet momentous fact that Rome became a capital of an altogether different kind than classical or papal Rome in the period between 1748 and 1978 is almost entirely neglected. This elision

⁵ C. Rowe, 'Roma Interrotta', in: A. Caragone (ed.), *As I Was Saying. Recollections and Miscellaneous Essays. Volume 3: Urbanistics*, Cambridge (Mass.), MIT Press, 1996, pp. 127-129.

⁶ 'Nolli: Sector V. Paolo Portoghesi', in: *Roma Interrotta*, p. 57. The same point was made in a review of the show by F. Dal Co, 'Roma Interrotta', *Oppositions*, 12, 1978, pp. 108-118, here p. 110: 'Their projects [of the participants] rise above any operative implication: putting their faith in the plan of Nolli, they do away with the embarrassing presence of modern Rome'.

reveals the views held amongst architects and architectural historians of *Roma capitale*, but also the limits of *Roma Interrotta* and the kind of architectural practice it sought to promote.

The problem with *Terza Roma*

When Rome became the capital of Italy in 1870 the population stood at around 230.000 and only a portion of the area within the Aurelian walls was built on. Adapting this city to its new status meant constructing the infrastructure of a modern state, including housing and facilities for its public servants, as well as the apparatus of representation that a young and still fragile nation required. In order to guide these developments in 1873 the city council approved a masterplan or *piano regolatore*. The earliest *piani* (the second plan would be approved in 1883, the third in 1909) described in rather extensive detail the urban development of the city, especially in Prati, the zone north of the Vatican, and the area of the Quirinal, Viminal and Esquiline.⁷ Still, their implementation hinged on the cooperation between the governments of the city, the state and the province, as well as on the cooperation of a wide range of actors such as real estate developers. The city depended on these developers for the swift construction of housing schemes. At the same time wild speculation ruled supreme, facilitated by the enormous concentration of property holdings within just a few families and financial companies. In 1896 Emile Zola wrote that ‘un vol de spéculateurs, venu de l’haut de l’Italie s’était abattu sur Rome, la plus noble et la plus facile des proies’.⁸ A famous example was the development of the Ludovisi-quarter by the Società Generale Immobiliare when the eponymous noble family sold off the lands of its villa, one of the marvels of early modern Rome.

The building of new city quarters went hand in hand with the so-called *sventramento* of the *centro storico*, the clearing of sites and buildings to allow for the development of new streets and squares such as the Corso Vittorio Emanuele and its connection to the Via Nazionale, the Via Cavour and piazza Venezia. This piazza, of course, became the site of the Vittoriano, first envisioned there in the second architectural competition for the monument in 1882.⁹ The strategy of *sventramento* was exacerbated under the Fascist regime, which aimed at isolating the monuments of classical Rome as part of an imperial scenography of the city, so that in Benito Mussolini’s words they could ‘loom gigantic in their required solitude’.¹⁰

⁷ S. Kostof, ‘The drafting of Roma capitale. An exordium’, in: *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 35, 1976, pp. 5-20, here p. 7.

⁸ The quote is taken from R. Catini, ‘Roma dopo la crisi edilizia con gli occhi di Émile Zola’, in: *La costruzione della capitale: architettura e città dalla crisi edilizia al fascismo nelle fonti storiche della Banca d’Italia*, a cura di A. Marino, G. Doti & M. L. Neri. Thematical issue of: *Roma moderna e contemporanea*, vol. 10, 3, 2002, pp. 543-558, here p. 543.

⁹ See, for instance, A. Muntoni, ‘Da Piazza Venezia ai Fori Imperiali nei piani per Roma (1873-1919)’, in: *Storia dell’urbanistica/Lazio III. Progetti per Roma dal Seicento al Novecento*, Roma, Kappa, 1988, pp. 53-74.

¹⁰ Quoted from S. Kostof, ‘The third Rome. Polemics of Architectural History’, in: *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, vol. 32, 1973, p. 241.

If the building frenzy after 1870 rivaled that of any period in Rome's history, architectural historians paid it scarce attention until the 1960s. In a landmark survey of recent studies of post 1870-Rome published five years before *Roma Interrotta*, the architectural historian Spiro Kostof attributed this lacuna to the roundly negative assessment of both the transformation of the city and building activity since 1870, compounded with the idea that since Giambattista Piranesi nothing had really been accomplished in terms of architecture, with Valadier's work as perhaps the sole exception.¹¹ This assessment resulted from the modernist slant of much architectural historiography, which disavowed the nineteenth century, found few if any modernist masterworks in the Urbs, and was uneasy about the politics of the era. Moreover, the historiography reviewed by Kostof had serious qualms about the development of post-1870 Rome: monuments had been destroyed or mutilated and papal lethargy had been substituted by speculation, obliterating the principles of urban planning carefully honed over centuries to generate a broken and unlivable city. Kostof singled out Leonardo Benevolo's *Roma, da ieri a domani* of 1971 as the most vocal condemnation of 'the Rome of Victor Emanuel II, Humbert I, the Fascists', in Benevolo's view a development that 'should be eliminated' entirely.¹² Which is exactly what *Roma Interrotta* went on to do, to the extent that in his review of *Roma Interrotta* the architectural historian Francesco Dal Co wondered why Benevolo had not been invited to participate, as his book had voiced so clearly the dim view of 'the embarrassing presence of modern Rome' that the project seemed to have adopted.¹³

Nolli's Rome as *exemplum*

Against this view, Kostof and some of the authors he reviewed stressed the continuity of the development of Rome from the eighteenth century up to the twentieth, a point strengthened by later discussions of for instance the Via della Conciliazione, whose planning history stretches back to the seventeenth century.¹⁴ Conversely, the notion of renaissance and baroque Rome as the berth of urban planning according to rational and aesthetic principles has been challenged by studies laying bare the sheer

¹¹ Kostof, 'The third Rome', *cit.*, pp. 239-250.

¹² *Ibidem.*, p. 248.

¹³ Dal Co, 'Roma Interrotta', p. 110. See M. Graves, 'Roman Interventions', in: *Roma Interrotta*, *cit.*, p. 4: 'If one were to compare modern Rome with Nolli's plan of 1748, the development which has occurred since the 18th century is, one might think, crude and without the substance of the urban structure as recorded by Nolli'; G. C. Argan, 'Roma Interrotta', in: *Roma Interrotta*, *cit.*, p. 37: '[Rome] is no longer a city, but a desert stuffed with people, broken up by the same speculation which made it grow without bounds. Until the beginning of the 18th century, that is, until Nolli's plan, it had been, time and again, a splendidly religious and decorously secular city. It has become an atheistic and bigotted city. And these are the reasons for this exhibition on interrupted Rome.'; 'Nolli: Sector V. Paolo Portoghesi', *cit.*, p. 56: 'Rome can be considered an 'interrupted' city by virtue of the fact the it has undergone a lengthy process of organic expansion and contraction, all the while maintaining a profound coherence, only to have been finally enveloped within an alien body which surrounded and suffocated it'.

¹⁴ T. Kirk, 'Framing St Peter's. Urban Planning in Fascist Rome', in: *Art Bulletin*, vol. 88 (2006), pp. 756-776.

economical and socio-political interests at work in the early modern city.¹⁵ However, the subtler image of post-Nolli Rome emerging in the 1970s was not taken into account by the participants of *Roma Interrotta*. That architectural historiography often exerts an only marginal influence on architectural culture in general only partly explains this disjunction, especially since some of the participants were themselves active as architectural historians. As Kostof remarks, the dismissal of post-eighteenth-century Rome was rooted in the paradigmatic role that the baroque city played in twentieth-century architectural thought.¹⁶ The authoritative history of architecture in the service of modernism, Siegfried Giedion's *Time, Space and Architecture* (first published in 1941), had assigned baroque Rome a foundational role in the emergence of urban planning as a design discipline. Giedion wrote:

Within the Roman phenomenon [i.e. baroque Rome] there lies a hope for a still intangible future, for a time when it may become indispensable for the existence of the western world to create a new form of central administration inspired by spiritual principles. Baroque Rome shows that this not necessarily result in a deadening of all achievement to a colorless monotone, a drab international gray. On the contrary it demonstrates that the interaction of a diversity of forces can produce a new vitality.¹⁷

According to Giedion, papal Rome is nothing less than the model of the modern capital, ruled at once by rational principles and spiritual values.¹⁸ It delicately balances planning and its disruption by the multitude of actors laying claim on the territory, a process enabled by the temporal weakness but spiritual authority of the papacy. As a result, the complexity of papal Rome embodies modernist internationalism. If Giedion does not spell them out, the implications for post-baroque Rome are clear: it is a failed modern capital, where an artificial and by no means spiritual authority attempted to implement an overall plan on the city. Indeed, Giedion's schematic map illustrating baroque Rome shows the Termini station (inaugurated in 1863 by Pius IX) as a 'nineteenth-century destruction' of the connection between San Lorenzo and Santa Maria Maggiore.

Papal Rome appears again as the example of a desirable urban development also in *Collage city*, written in the early 1970s by the *Roma Interrotta*-participant Colin Rowe and Fred Koettler and published in 1978. When the authors develop the concept of *bricolage* as a productive counter-part to the planning methods of the engineer-scientist, they are led, 'like Pavlov's dogs',

to the condition of seventeenth century Rome, to that collision of palaces, *piazze* and villas, to the inextricable fusion of imposition and accommodation, that highly successful and

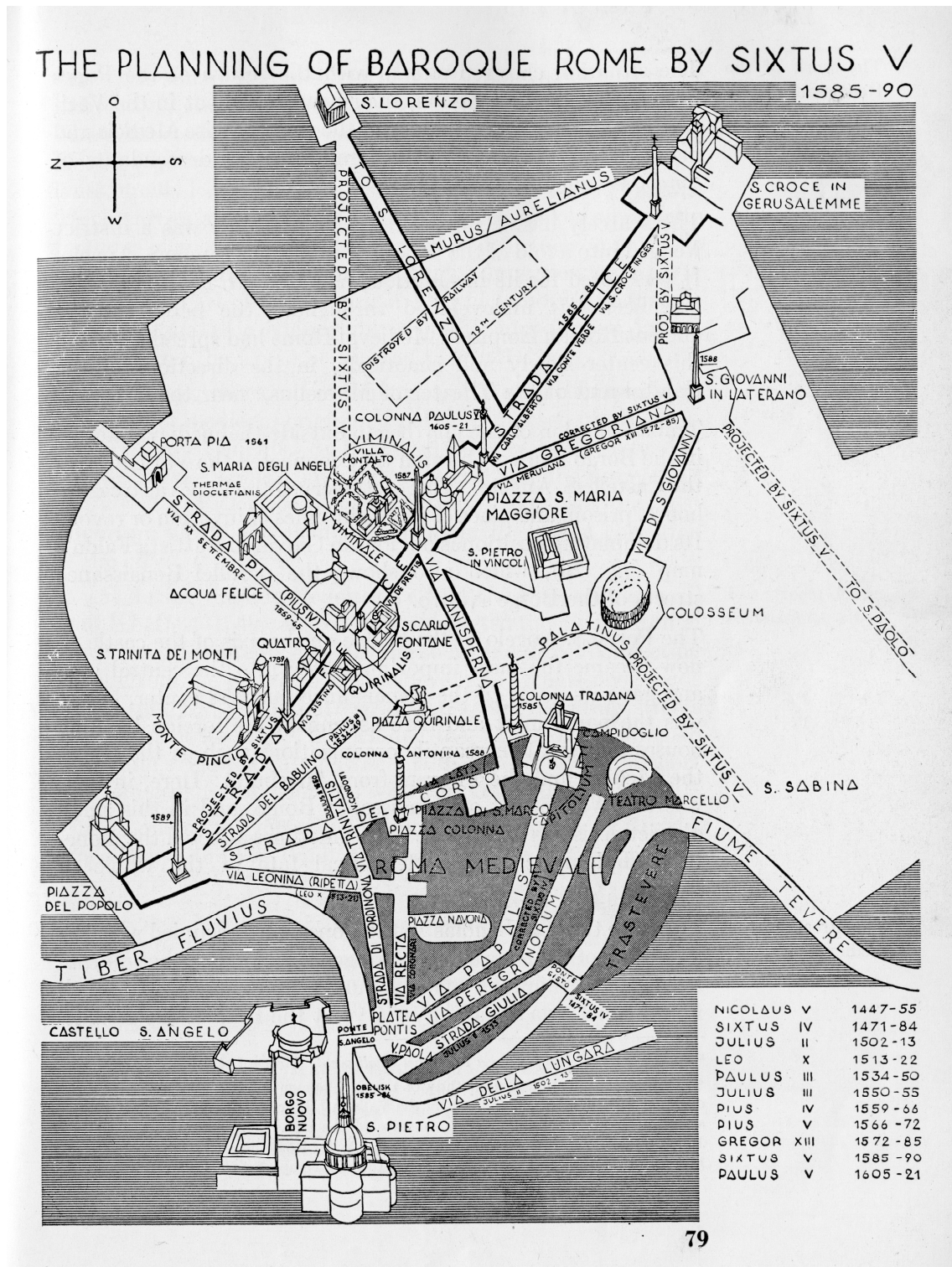
¹⁵ See, for instance, J. Connors, 'Alliance and emnity in Roman baroque urbanism, *Römisches Jahrbuch der Bibliotheca Hertziana*, 25, 1989, pp. 205-294. D. Metzger Habel, *The Urban Development of Rome in the Age of Alexander VII*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002.

¹⁶ Kostof, 'The third Rome', *cit.*, p. 240.

¹⁷ S. Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture. The Growth of a New Tradition*, fifth edition, revised and enlarged, Cambridge (Mass.) - Oxford, Harvard University Press - Oxford University Press, 1967, p. 77.

¹⁸ In this sense, baroque Rome is cast, quite surprisingly, as a possible model for the monumental representation of social democracy, an issue that Giedion would address in the *Nine points on monumentality* of 1942-43, written with J.-L. Sert and F. Léger.

resilient traffic jam of intentions, an anthology of closed compositions and *ad hoc* stuff in between, which is simultaneously a dialectic of ideal types plus a dialectic of ideal types with an empirical context.¹⁹



2. The Rome of Sixtus V, from S. Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture* (cf. note 17)

¹⁹ C. Rowe & F. Koetter, *Collage City*, Cambridge (Mass.), MIT Press, 1978, p. 106. On the relation of *Collage City* to *Roma Interrotta*, see G. Châtel, 'Facts and Figures', *Oase*, 79 (2009), pp. 52-62.

As in Giedion, the urban fabric of baroque Rome exemplifies the collision of only partially fulfilled intentions. This situation is exacerbated in Imperial Rome, 'with its more abrupt collisions, more acute disjunctions, its more expansive set pieces'.²⁰ However, if Rowe and Koetter argue that *bricolage* will produce the formal characteristics of a city that reflect the complex processes of democratic politics, they are not interested in the program that Giedion discerned specifically in papal Rome, that of a supra-national capital.²¹ Moreover, more so than *Space, Time and Architecture, Collage City* focuses on the formal characteristics of the city. One of its most potent points is that these characteristics depend upon the mutual relation between the built object and the space between those objects.²² Space has a shape and a presence, as much as the buildings. Ideally, the city would consist of 'a solid-void dialectic which might allow for the joint existence of the overtly planned and the genuinely unplanned, of the set-piece and the accident, of the public and the private, of the state and the individual'.²³ This relation between object and space is expressed in so-called figure-ground plans, where built mass is treated either as *poché*, that is, blacked in so as to get a better idea of the form of the physical space, or outlined 'at a level of detail that encourages the understanding of the city as a spatial sequence of rooms', to quote from Michael Graves' introduction to *Roma Interrotta*.²⁴

The fact that Graves discusses the *poché*, a notion central to Rowe's exposition on urban space,²⁵ marks an important nodal point between *Roma Interrotta* and contemporary ideas on urban design. Graves writes that Nolli's map was chosen as the starting point of *Roma Interrotta* because it exemplifies the *poché* and its aptness at registering urban space. This view of Nolli was quite widespread and Nolli's map figured prominently in the debate on urbanism in the first half of the 1970s.²⁶ In fact, the proposal by Venturi and Rauch for *Roma Interrotta* is a barely altered passage from Venturi, Scott Braun and Izenour's landmark *Learning from Las Vegas* (1972), a detailed analysis of the Las Vegas-strip that included a Nolli-map of the area.²⁷ Here, as in the writings of Rowe, the question was how to describe the formal qualities of urban space. Nolli's representation of Rome exemplified these qualities by representing it as a complex composite of open spaces (both interior and exterior, private and public) and built mass (either as compact *insulae* or articulated buildings).

By emphasizing this aspect of Nolli's map, Graves' introduction casts *Roma Interrotta* much less as a reckoning with *Roma capitale* and its insidious urban planning than as an engagement with contemporary questions of urban design.

²⁰ Rowe & Koetter, *Collage City, cit.*, ibidem.

²¹ Rowe & Koetter, *Collage City, cit.*, p. 105.

²² It should be noted that Giedion discusses Michelangelo's design for the Capitol in similar terms.

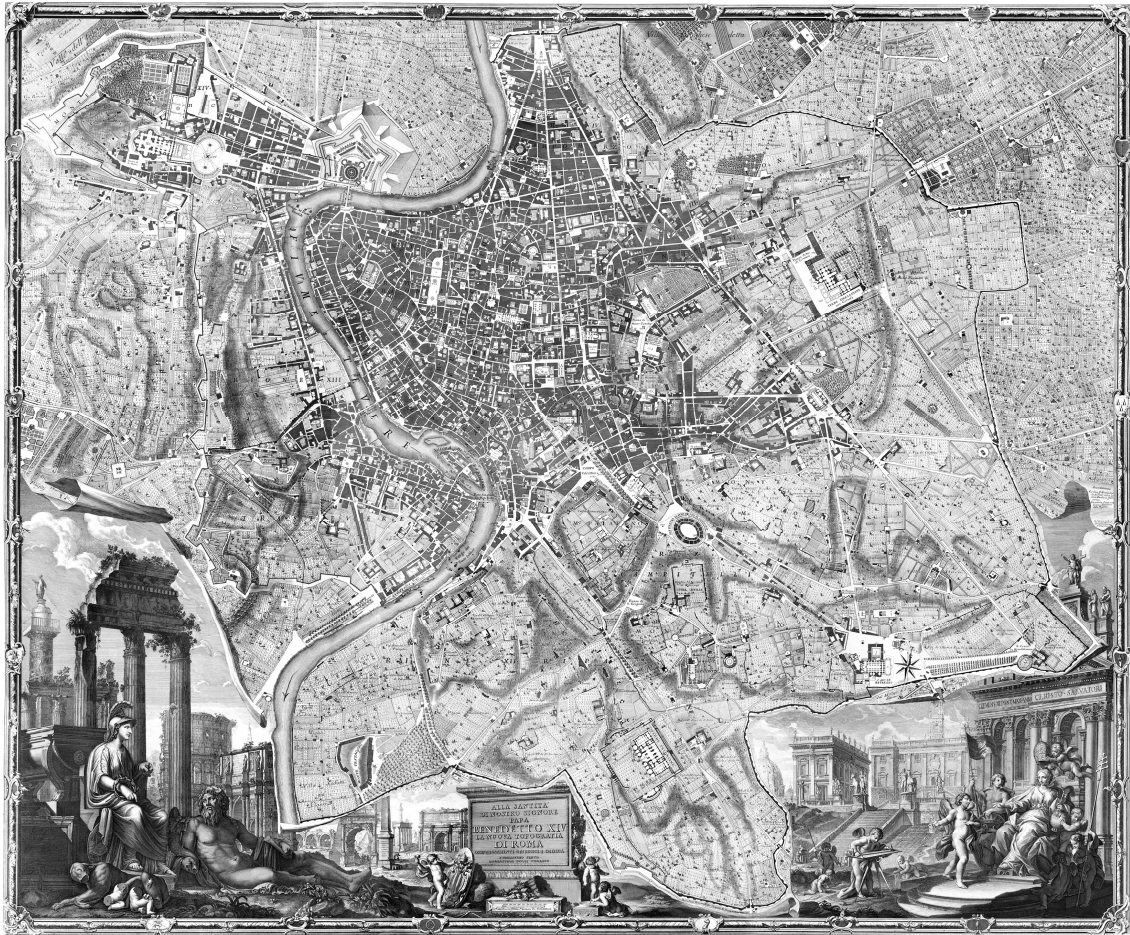
²³ Rowe & Koetter, *Collage City, cit.*, p. 83.

²⁴ Graves, 'Roman Interventions', *cit.*, p. 4.

²⁵ Rowe & Koetter, *Collage City, cit.*, pp. 78-79

²⁶ A. P. Latini, 'Nollimap', in: *Nolli, Vasi, Piranesi. Immagine di Roma Antica e Moderna*, a cura di M. Bevilacqua, Roma, Artemide, 2004, pp. 67-71.

²⁷ ibidem, pp. 67-68; M. Delbeke, 'Mannerism and Meaning in *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*', *The Journal of Architecture*, vol. 15, 3 (2010), pp. 267-282, here p. 277.



3. Giambattista Nolli, *Nuova pianta di Roma*, 1748

In Graves' view, Nolli's map was an at once accurate and evocative registration of a delicate urban fabric teeming with vitality, an open invitation to architects to design.²⁸ As such, again very much in line with the argument of *Collage City*, Graves compares Nolli's Rome with the reconstruction of Imperial Rome proposed by Giambattista Piranesi in his *Campo Marzio*-engraving, where the city is represented as a chaotic aggregation of gigantic buildings. To Graves, the two plans embody two opposite principles of urban design, not two representations of the city in a particular stage of its historical development.²⁹

Such reading of Nolli's *Nuova Pianta* pushes the program supporting Nolli's endeavor itself very much into the background. The culmination of the ambition first voiced in Raphael's letter to Pope Leo X to seize the city in a series of accurate plans that would be integrated with up-to-date archeological knowledge, the *Nuova pianta* was also a conscious attempt to project the image of a capital seeking its place in a

²⁸ Graves, 'Roman Interventions', *cit.*, p. 4.

²⁹ *Ibidem*. A similar point is made in 'Nolli: Sector II. Costantino Dardi', in: *Roma Interrotta*, p. 34; and 'Nolli: Sector VI. James Stirling', in: *Roma Interrotta*, p. 42. In this sense, Graves, like many contributors, adhere to the a-historical notion of classicism espoused for instance in A. Papadakis & H. Watson (eds.), *New Classicism. Omnibus Volume*, London, Academy editions, 1990, a digest of texts first published in *Architectural Design* featuring many participants to *Roma Interrotta*, including a reproduction of Aldo Rossi's proposal, *ibidem*., p. 171.

changing world where religion had to find a new balance with science and politics.³⁰ The most obvious testimony of this ambition was the adoption of modern cartographic techniques that represented Rome in the same way as other European capitals.³¹ In other words, from an historical point of view the Rome of Nolli's map is less the outcome of a long and continuous process of urban development (characterized by many but ultimately productive conflicts) than a deliberate attempt to negotiate the multiple and not necessarily compatible superimposed Romes, *Roma antica, sacra* and *moderna*, and reposition the result in the present.³² If the morphology or form of Nolli's Rome was perhaps quite different from the city that emerged after 1870, the program was not: the aim was to create a modern capital.

A Rome that is not a capital

It seems that only two projects take the historicity of Nolli's map as its starting point. Incidentally, these projects do not confine themselves to the sector they had been assigned but address the city as a whole. In the case of Leo Krier, this option was more or less forced upon him because he drew the lower right corner of the map which contains the allegory of the papacy seated in front of the emblematic buildings of *Roma moderna*, the basilicas of St Peter's and St John, and the Capitol. This forceful image of 'central power' stimulated Krier to reflect upon the ancient administrative structure of Rome, the division in 14 *rioni*, and to propose new monumental buildings for each *rione* that could facilitate 'the spontaneous formation of anti-institutional social centers' acting as a counter-structure within the city.³³ Other contributions also sought to insert alternative communities into papal Rome,³⁴ but Krier's project deliberately examined the possible role of monumental architecture within a modern metropolis radically different from the monocentric capital but still rooted in its own history. As such, it addressed the dynamic between state and individual that is so central to Rowe and Koetter's *Collage City*. Colin Rowe himself literally went back in time and tried to imagine a different future for Nolli's Rome. An elaborate historical fiction, complete with invented sources and scholarly literature, described how Rome became the capital of Napoleon Bonaparte's empire, which spurred the development of the Palatine, Celio and Aventine, Rowe's sector and largely *disabitato* in Nolli's times.³⁵ In so doing, Rowe at once managed to exemplify his own principles of urban design and his awareness of the historical specificity of Rome, encompassing its appeal as the archetype of the European city but also the 'original' capital in the Western imagination.

³⁰ See M. Bevilacqua, *Roma nel secolle dei lumi. Architettura, erudizione, scienza nella Pianta di G.B. Nolli 'celebre geometra'*, Napoli, Electa, 1998, pp. 97-107.

³¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 65-82.

³² On the emergence of these notions, see M. Delbeke, 'Roma antica, sacra, moderna: de zeventiende-eeuwse herconfiguratie van de stad in reis- en pilgrimgidsen', *Spiegel der Letteren*, vol. 48, 2 (2006), pp. 149-161.

³³ 'Nolli: Sector X. Leo Krier', in: *Roma Interrotta*, cit., p. 98.

³⁴ 'Nolli: Sector I. Piero Sartogo', in: *Roma Interrotta*, cit., pp. 30-33.

³⁵ 'Nolli: Sector VIII. Colin Rowe', in: *Roma Interrotta*, cit., pp. 68-81.

The other participants considered Nolli's map as the embodiment of two interconnected ideas: that of an exemplary city and the exemplary representation of urban space. Which of these ideas a participant chose to emphasize seems to have depended as much on their familiarity with Rome and its urban development after Nolli as their particular views on urban design. The project by the Italian architect Costantino Dardi, who taught at the Roman university of La Sapienza at the time of the project, deliberately proposed alternatives for the nineteenth-century developments at Prati and the Villa Ludovisi.³⁶ Paolo Portoghesi, who had contributed to several of the publications that Kostof reviewed in 1973, addressed the assumptions underlying to the whole enterprise as well as the conundrum they generated.³⁷ Projects by non-Italian architects, on the other hand, tended to read Nolli's map as a statement on architecture and urban design. This is the case for instance in Michael Graves' project, which mines Nolli's map for four archetypical architectural forms that combine into complex an urban fabric expressive of man's aspirations 'to give order and meaning to his environment'.³⁸ Similarly, Rob Krier, proposed a series of drawings of archetypal elements of architecture and the city, emphasizing (even despite his irony) the role of Rome as a mythical origin in any discourse on architecture or urbanism.³⁹ Other architects, such as James Stirling and Aldo Rossi, repaired to their own oeuvre. Their self-aware irony about the brief and their own contributions provided them with an opportunity to reflect upon some of the principles of their architectural practice.⁴⁰

Even this briefest of surveys suggests a perhaps unsettling reluctance to engage with the program underlying both *Roma Interrotta* and Nolli's *Pianta Nuova*, that of Rome as a capital city. In fact, to rephrase a point made by the critic Alan Chimacoff, there is significant irony in the fact that many of the participants are 'avowed contextualists' yet failed to address this theme.⁴¹ This reluctance is enabled by a threefold elision. Contemporary Rome was substituted by Nolli's map, as a result *Terza Roma* disappeared from view as well, and Nolli's map itself was treated as what could be termed a figure of 'the city' rather than a project for Rome. This raises the question of whether the brief of *Roma Interrotta* was indeed apposite to face 'the embarrassing presence of modern Rome'. But even if this were the case, this threefold elision is very much embedded within the discourse on architecture entertained by the participants. *Roma Interrotta* sits uncomfortably close to some key notions of that discourse, such as the relation between strategies of representation of urban space and views on the development of the city. This fuels

³⁶ 'Nolli: Sector II. Costantino Dardi', *cit.*, p. 36.

³⁷ See notes 6 and 13. Also 'Nolli: Sector V. Paolo Portoghesi', *cit.*, p. 56: 'A city planning intervention whose point of departure in (sic) a two-century-old document [...] implies a drastically negative evaluation of everything built in Rome from then, 1748, on. Even if we do not wholly share this indiscriminate opinion, especially with regard to 19th-century expansion, we must admit that an imaginary deletion of the third and fourth stages of Rome would facilitate [...] a critical relationship of continuity between the historical city and its present counterpart.'

³⁸ 'Nolli: Sector IX. Michael Graves', in: *Roma Interrotta*, *cit.*, p. 82.

³⁹ 'Nolli: Sector X. Rob Krier', in: *Roma Interrotta*, *cit.*, pp. 96-97.

⁴⁰ 'Nolli: Sector VI. James Stirling', *cit.*; 'Nolli: Sector XI. Aldo Rossi', in *Roma Interrotta*, *cit.*, pp. 88-90.

⁴¹ Chimacoff, 'Roma Interrotta Reviewed', *cit.*, p. 7.

the suspicion that many of the participants adopted themes such as origins, creativity, oeuvre, architectural history that could both incorporate the myth of Rome and act as substitute programs that would shield them from unwelcome realities, in the first place architecture's irrelevance in the face of modern urban development, a problem very well illustrated by the very *history* of Rome. Not incidentally, this impotence and the dividends it yields is the theme of Rem Koolhaas' contemporary *Delirious New York* (1978), a revisionist history of another mythical city.⁴²

⁴² R. Koolhaas, *Delirious New York. A retroactive manifesto for Manhattan*, London, Thames and Hudson, 1978.

Key words

Urbanism, Rome, Giambattista Nolli, Roma capitale, *Roma Interrotta*

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RIASSUNTO

Roma Interrotta. L'Urbe non è una capitale

Nel 1978 fu presentato a Roma il progetto *Roma Interrotta*, comprendente progettazioni urbane elaborate da dodici architetti di fama internazionale ispiratisi alla *Nuova Pianta di Roma* di Giambattista Nolli (1748). Il titolo e la struttura del progetto ne sottolineano il carattere critico: lo sviluppo di Roma sarebbe stato interrotto verso la metà del XVIII secolo e in particolare dopo il 1870 la città avrebbe subito una drammatica trasformazione, per cui le tracce della sua evoluzione storica non sarebbero quasi più visibili. I progetti avanzati vogliono essere un tentativo di riallacciarsi nuovamente a tale evoluzione.

In questo contributo si esplorano le idee su *Roma capitale* avanzate da architetti e storici dell'architettura negli anni Settanta del secolo scorso, al fine di comprendere le ragioni del loro radicale rifiuto della *Terza Roma* e perché tale presa di posizione fosse proprio in quel momento attuale e importante. La Roma barocca immaginata da Nolli funge nell'ambito dell'architettura come un'immagine ideale della città, tuttavia anche essa è completamente spogliata da qualunque significato culturale e politico. Le proposte di *Roma Interrotta* dunque non sono soltanto esemplari del dibattito sviluppatosi nel mondo dell'architettura nel periodo considerato, ma ne rivelano anche i limiti intrinseci e le lacune.