

Visionary Power



NAi Publishers

Producing the Contemporary City

Roman Holiday

Roman Holiday
Exploiting the Power of Tourism

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1. In 2005, more than eight million tourists visited Rome. Tourism means consumption of the major monuments, congestion in the centre, and the transformation of the baroque city into a monofunctional shopping district. Roman citizens tolerate the evils of tourism because of the economic benefits it brings. Yet tourism can be more than a nuisance: it presents an opportunity to reorganize the city in a way that will benefit both visitors and residents.

2. Pope Sixtus V (1585-1590) and Domenico Fontana were able to imagine a project for Rome stemming from the needs of contemporary religious tourism. They used a very basic concept: establishing connections among the seven major churches. These links would clarify the structure of the city and reactivate the richness of the Roman ruins inside of a new ideological frame. The success of the extremely empiric, thrifty and fast enterprise of Sixtus and Domenico is the practical demonstration that tourism does not necessarily destroy the city; on the contrary, tourism can produce the city.

3. There are three main attractions in Rome: the Vatican, the shopping district distributed throughout the baroque city, and the Roman ruins. The Vatican was reorganized for Jubilee 2000; the baroque city evolves through the actions of its many inhabitants; the Roman ruins remain more or less unchanged since the fascist interventions. The realization of the new C metro line, passing below the Fori, offers a concrete opportunity to rethink the entire area.

4. The area from Piazza Venezia to the Coliseum is slowly developing into an informal, self-organized theme park. Provisional solutions spontaneously grow in response to the touristic demand: kiosks market drinks and souvenirs, gladiators enliven family photos, multimedia productions show *Brutus Plotting to Kill Caesar* – in your language.

5. Compared to Disney's *Magic Kingdom*, Rome's central archaeological area – from the Fori to Caracalla baths – is five times larger, four times less attractive in terms of visitors, and 20 times less profitable.

Yet Rome is not a theme park, and profit is not the only reason to keep the Rome business going. Ruins are more complicated to keep than cardboard castles; property is split among multiple owners, both private and public. Management is correspondingly intricate: various administrations are involved in heritage protection, events promotion, gardening and safety. Customers are different as well.

6. Contrary to a theme park or a museum, Rome has no clear border: as one moves outward from the centre, the tourist attractions gradually diminish; they do not disappear abruptly. In the *campagna* there are plenty of minor buildings, amazing landscapes, lovely coasts.

Rome is not Venice; it is not delimited by an 8-km² island. Rome is not the *Magic Kingdom*. To think of Rome as such is both cynical and unrealistic. In Rome, the business of tourism can grow to involve a broader territory. The reorganization of the touristic city enacts the reorganization

of the entire post-bureaucratic city.

7. In a global market of cities competing as providers of space, facilities, environment, it is not difficult to recognize Rome's qualities. As the only global city already complete in its collection of spaces, Rome only needs to rediscover its metropolitan assets.

Rome needs no major changes to its public spaces or its architecture collection; it can avoid the blind search for masterpieces that occupies the painful last chapter in the history of post-industrial cities. Rome as a *spectacle city* is nothing new; its identity as a *spectacle city* was already re-established after the return of the Popes from Avignon.

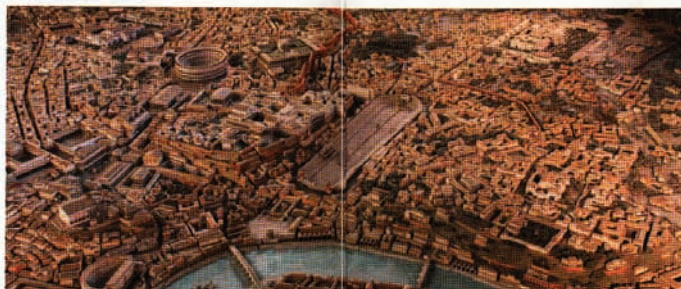
Spaces in Rome are ready for contemporary uses. What still needs work in Rome is infrastructure, not only as sheer network – roads, tunnels, cables – but as a grammar of the urban experience, as a code that enables one to understand the city in all of its richness.

8. Rome is made of projects. Rome has been a project and a re-foundation from the beginning. Romulus had a project for Rome: it was an urban and an international one; and it was a re-foundation. He chose to build the city on the Palatine hill, transforming the very heart of the previous settlement. Remus, on the contrary, proposed to start a new city on the deserted site of the Aventinus hill, and his project failed because it was not metropolitan.

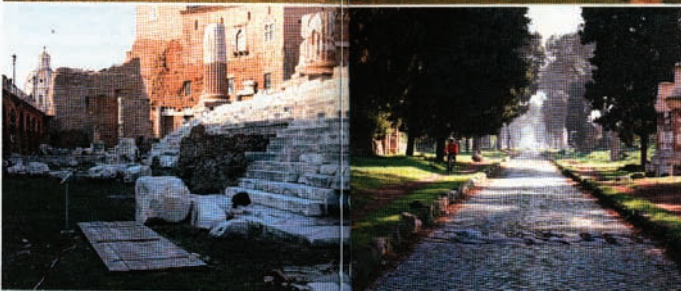
All of the projects that followed were, again, re-foundations; it was repeatedly the sheer amazement with the city of the past that inspired visions of the new city. The main business of Alberti and Bramante was to show to their clients the impressive beauty of the ancient city.

Rome is made of universal projects, one on top of the other. And being, from the beginning, a universal project translated into urban space (Rome is a civilization project that is mainly encoded into laws and urban artefacts, a civilization project whose main tool is the city), it is a universal project in the form of a stage.

Model of Imperial Rome
Circus Maximus – Trajan's Forum



View of the Via Sacra, from the Arch of Titus to Campidoglio hill



Acquedotti park
Forum of Augustus

Caffarella park
Via Appia Antica

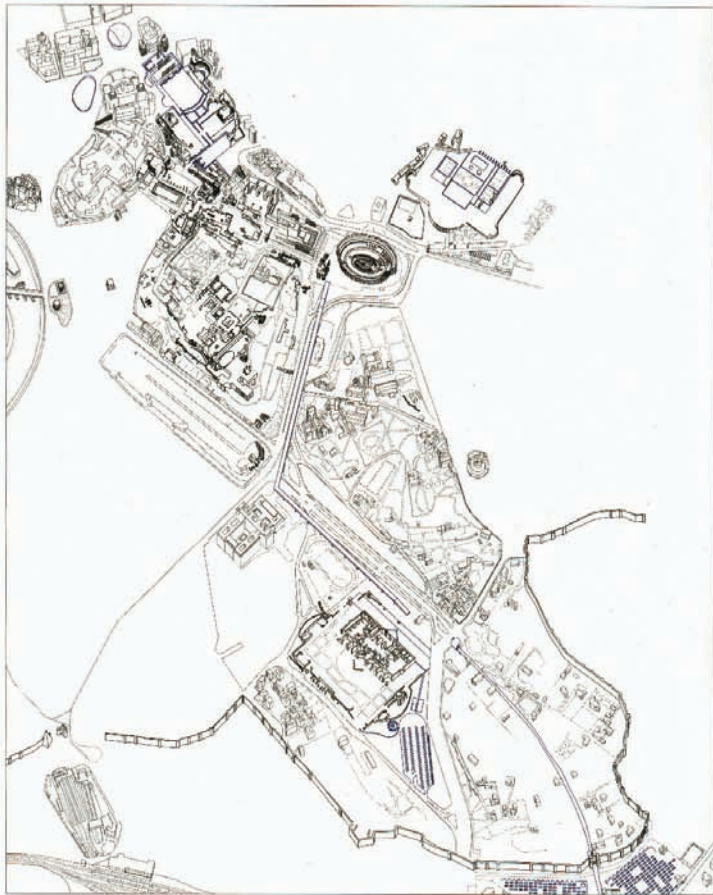
The stage is there. The problem is: a stage for what? A stage to rent for signing treaties, just as a Palladian villa is rented for a wedding party?

9. Rome, as a ready-made global platform for metropolitan events, only needs to discover which event to locate in its various spots in order to reactivate them. The ancient city has demonstrated its suitability for contemporary events. The Jubilee 2000, the strikes and manifestations against the Iraqi war, the celebrations for the World Cup 2006, have all inhabited the ancient city, revealing territories that are surprisingly aligned with contemporary rituals. The contemporary multitude used the immense, indeterminate, yet precise and contained space of the Circus Maximus to identify itself as a political body. As pure space, by now completely deprived of any meaning, the Circus allows its occupants absolute freedom. As a room with precise dimensions and with no intentions, the Circus embraces events without suggesting any stable definition for the mutating contemporary multitude, simply allowing half a million people to recognize each other inside of a large hole in the ground with a glorious, somehow exotic, Roman name.

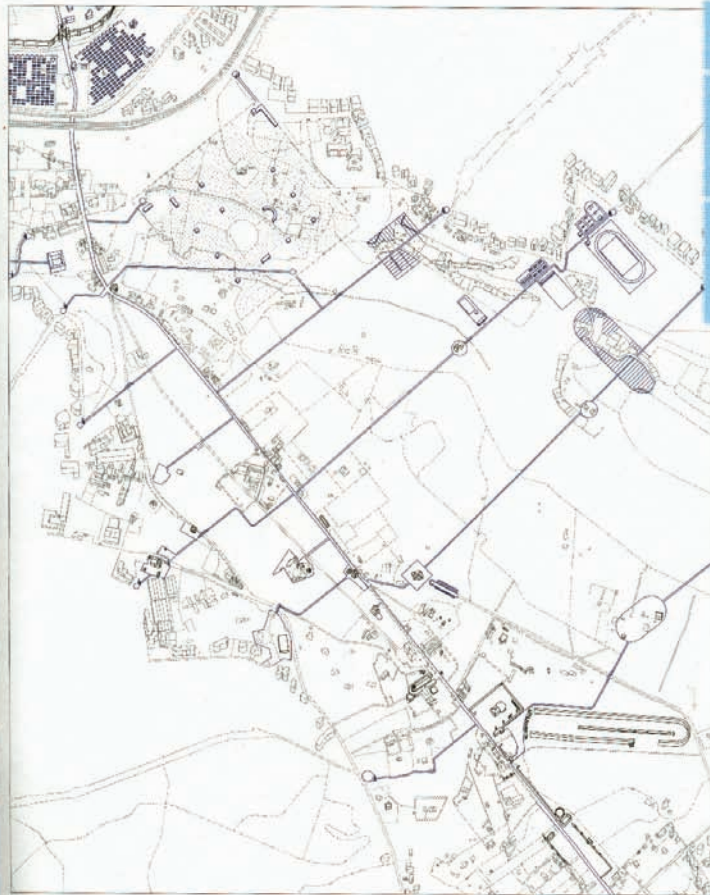
The events that invade the contemporary city in increasing numbers require spaces to be enacted: *public* spaces, but different from the nineteenth-century and modernist ones. Rome provides them: spaces for individuals and for the multitude, colossal and indeterminate, abstract and popular. Imperial Roman spaces provide the most suitable environments for contemporary metropolitan events. A network connecting the central zones with infrastructure, and with larger areas at a strategic distance from the centre, defines Rome as a landscape ready for happenings, ranging from everyday meetings to impressive mass manifestations. Rome becomes a global supplier of space; tourism is absorbed into new nomadic metropolitan patterns.

Rome is the contemporary public space; Shanghai is lacking.

Appia Antica archaeological park, from km 0 to km 3.5
(black and grey: existing situation / blue: project)



Appia Antica archaeological park, from km 3 to km 6
(black and grey: existing situation / blue: project)



10. There is nothing to build in Rome. Architects must be humble. The city only needs a framework by which to understand what is already there (and this may accidentally require a bit of architecture). It is only necessary to build the infrastructure that enables the existing spaces to perform within their global context. After all, Rome's most influential architects during the last couple of centuries were painters and writers – Piranesi, Goethe, Stendhal – who produced the software through which to understand the ancient city. Now the infrastructure with which to decode the ancient city must be built for the contemporary multitude.

The museum/transfer at the Coliseum



The 'passeggiare romane' inside of the museum/transfer. Like in a time machine the ancient city reappears, providing visitors with the basic knowledge necessary to decode the contemporary ruins.



11. Roman relics must find their place within a culture that is becoming increasingly visual. Ruins should be exposed; spaces should be evident. If ruins do not produce spatial experiences, they are lost for an increasing majority of (not necessarily uneducated) visitors. And without an initial spatial experience of the ruins, no further intellectual experience is possible. There can be no understanding of what goes unnoticed.

The archaeological park has to be spectacular enough to attract the masses; it has to be straightforward without compromising its richness; it has to allow the coexistence of organized, fast, plebeian visits and refined, slow, random promenades. It has to communicate with both Goethe and Goethe's maid, and to accommodate visits of two years or two days.



12. To restore clarity to the Roman spaces, the most important step is to reintroduce the crowds for which they were conceived. Mass tourism, in this respect, could be a tool with which to re-establish the urban organization of the ancient city. The opening of the Via Sacra in the Roman Forum gave back clarity to the organization of the Forum by reactivating an easy and logical path and establishing the proper hierarchy between a main road and the related spaces. Tourism can be the unexpected promoter of urbanity, colonizing the ruins and thereby expanding the collection of spaces at the citizens' disposal.



The Trajan Forum after the demolition of Via dei Fori Imperiali



The new metro station at piazza Venezia allows a general reorganization of the traffic fluxes. By transforming the uncertain setting of the square, the new metro station rediscovers the alien beauty of the Vittorio Emanuele monument.

New nomadic citizens are accommodated next to the Aurelian walls during their busy roman holidays.

The museum/transfer at the Caracalla baths

13. The reactivation of the ruins is a rediscovery of the urban potential of the ancient plan. In order to perform, the city needs a pavement on which to move without excessive preoccupations (according to Raymond Hood's formula: *the plan is of primary importance, because on the floor are performed all the activities of the human occupants.*)

Ruins can be part of the contemporary city only if the pavement of the contemporary city is at the level of the Roman city. Gestures have to happen in the Roman scene. The present (fascist) organization of the Fora only allows one to pass by the buildings and look without entering. Ancient buildings are pure background. Everything is distant, flat, impossible to touch. The city is empty; citizens do not deserve the city.

14. In a 1994 advertisement of the Barilla company, some of the main Italian public spaces appear to have been invaded by large corn fields. The Barilla commercial describes a *lite* city, one that is able to couple history and quality of life, moderate urbanity and pastoral isolation, nature and spectacle.

It is easy to dismiss Barilla urbanism as cheap, populist and philistine, yet the Barilla campaign not only recognizes desires that are part of the contemporary city, but also discovers tools for its transformation. Surrendering to nature seems to be the last resource of urbanity; green matter, the ultimate tool with which to build the city.

Green matter can make ruins understandable and usable. Green matter is tolerant and precise, robust and comfortable. It can evolve, allowing spaces to be experienced and allowing archaeological areas to mutate according to changing interpretation paradigms. Green matter defines a group of recognizable activities for the places where it appears and immediately provides a name – *park* – for whatever it touches. Green matter protects architecture with its intimate moral legitimization. It gives the system a touch of realistic unrealism: the ancient city is gone, and the first reason not to rebuild

Francesco Jodice, "Roma A.D. 2007"



it, is not to erase the fact that Rome was really there.

15. Be more confident. The contemporary city must be nothing less than the best possible city. Reject the obsession with layering both as desire for protagonism (the stupid idea: we have to invent something just because we are here) and as complete lack of responsibility (the cowardly idea: nothing in the history of the city is worth a decision). Think of the city in terms of spaces and rediscover their differences. Remove the nineteenth-century cellars in the middle of Trajan's Forum because they compromise the space of the Forum; remove them because Imperial spaces are better, not because Imperial times were better. Architecture is a judgement of urban resources, a commitment not to waste. A project is just something for the city to gain or to lose in terms of space. Excavations in the Imperial Fora will be sheer gain, yet excavations in the Circus Maximus will be pure loss for the city. To excavate in the Fora will add an extraordinary system of spaces to the city. To excavate in the Circus Maximus will eliminate from the city a performing urban tool, leaving an entire category of events without a place in which to happen. Solve problems the Roman way: be confident. Use the tremendous openness of architecture to find a possibility for the coexistence of tourism, heritage and the contemporary city. Rely on a given, shared architectural knowledge. Beauty can be easy. Erase traces. When asked to restore Diocletian baths and to transform the building into a church, Michelangelo decided not to do anything. He simply determined where to put the door, and thus how to move within the Roman spaces. Then he suggested painting the vaults white. Erase traces. The city does not need authors.