Roma Interrotta and the Monte Celio: A New Proposal Based on Past Lessons

KEVIN HINDERS

University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign

This paper traces the relationship between the *Collage City* text and the Roma Interrotta exhibition while positing a new design for the Monte Celio and extending the design method used in the original Roma Interrotta. The new proposal is first done as a response to the 1748 map of Rome by Giovanni Battista Nolli. The product is then placed into the existing context to explore opportunities for current urban design proposal. The new proposal also investigates potential design opportunities using computer morphing to explore unforseen opportunities.

It is easier to design the cities of the future than cities of the past. Rome is an interrupted city because it has stopped being imagined and begun to be (poorly) planned.
— Giulio Carlo Argan, Mayor of Rome, 1978

INTRODUCTION

The Roma Interrotta project submitted by Colin Rowe with Peter Carl, Judith DiMaio, and Steven Peterson was an important event following the publication of "Collage City"[1] written with Fred Koetter. The exhibition gave Rowe the opportunity to follow up the "Collage City" text with a didactic example. However Rowe's Interrotta project can be read as a total design. It was executed with authoritarian, though benevolent, control similar to perhaps Hadrian's Villa within a shortened time frame. As a follow up to the Interotta project, I have created a new design proposal for the Monte Celio, illustrated here with similar premises to those Rowe's submission uses. The project is based upon ideas formulated in Collage City and illustrated in Roma Interrotta. (The project is in the quadrant executed in 1978 by Michael Graves[2] and includes sites adjacent to those of the Sector IX executed by Graves. Just as Rowe's submission includes both a design submittal and a section written by Peterson called "Urban Design Tactics", so too does this submittal.[3]) The key difference between the original Interrotta project and the new Monte Celio proposal is the Monte Celio also includes a transformation series that inserts the proposal into the existing city. The stages of transformation begin to indicate potential modifications to the existing conditions…a methodology of imagination for future consideration. Through this examination the idealized and the real come into a dialogue which allows for both the planned and the unplanned to be seen.

ROMA INTERROTTA

It has been 20 years since the publication of Roma Interrotta by Architectural Design. Roma Interrotta was a design exhibition and text involving twelve invited proposals based upon interpretation of the 1748 Nolli map of Rome. In describing Roma Interrota, Michael Graves wrote:

> …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. In speculating about the nature of urban experience, it seemed appropriate to identify the thematic assumptions of the proposed exhibition around the expansion of Nolli's Rome to accommodate the city's growth.

> Since Nolli's plan was divided into 12 sections, presumably because of the technical limitations of printing, it was felt that the distribution of these sections to individual participation might yield a comparison of urban intentions, especially at their junctures or seams.[4]

The twelve primary investigators in the exhibition included: Piero Sartogo, Constantino Dardi, Antoine Grumbach, James Stirling, Paolo Portoghesi, Romaldo Giurgola, Venturi and Rauch, Colin Rowe, Michael Graves, Aldo Rossi, Rob Krier, Leon Krier.[5]

ROWE- WORD AND FLESH

Rowe is fond of the use of complex oppositions in his writings.[6] In his introduction to *Five Architects*, Rowe states:

> We are here, once more, in the area where the physique and the morale of modern architecture, its flesh and its word, are again, not coincident; and it is when we recognize that neither morale nor physique, neither word nor flesh, was ever consistent with each other, that we might reasonably approach the architects whose work is here presented.[7]

Rowe's statement refers, in 1972, to a body of work that is simultaneously within and at odds with the manifestos of modern architecture. Several years later, in 1975 with Fred Koetter, Rowe wrote Collage City,[8] most certainly an urban design manifesto. This article was later elaborated upon and published in book form in 1979. The exhibition of Rowe's Section VIII could thus be seen as "the word made flesh."

Rowe's exhibition project and texts of Roma Interrotta illustrate the statement from Collage City:

> It is … suggested that neither object nor space fixation are, in themselves, any longer representative of valuable attitudes. … the situation to be hoped for should be recognized as one in which both buildings and spaces exist in an equality of sustained debate. A debate in which victory consists in each component emerging undefeated, the imagined condition is a

type of 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.[9]

Rowe and Koetter state what could just as well be a description of their Section VIII submittal to Roma Interrotta:

It is a condition of alerted equilibrium which is envisaged; and it is in order to illuminate the potential of such a contest that we have introduced a rudimentary variety of possible strategies. Cross-breeding, assimilation, distortion, challenge, response, imposition, superimposition, conciliation: these might be given any number of names and, surely, neither can nor should be too closely specified; but if the burden of the present discussion has rested upon the city's morphology, upon the physical and inanimate, neither "people" nor "politics" are assumed to have been excluded.[10]

In Rowe's text for Roma Interrotta the physical design proposal is linked with a plausible genesis for the design's reality. Through the creation of the mythical Father Vincent Mulcahey, S.J., Rowe is able to create a fantasy history for the project. A fantasy that weaves events, real and proposed, into a narrative that imagines how politics and people create settings for realized urban inventions and interventions. But the truth is, as much as it may aspire to "the joint existence of the overtly planned and the genuinely unplanned," the project could never realize such a condition. The project, because of the design method, was never open to the genuinely unplanned, just as it was never completely produced by this fantasy of history. Instead it was a dialogue between the formal tendencies of the designers and the imagination of what could have happened.

In the *Collage City*, a methodology is proposed to replace the antiquated and often brutal utopian models of the platonic and Marxian utopias. This method is an attempt to allow a range of "vest pocket utopias for the here and now, while allowing for the reality of change, motion, action and history." The major accomplishment of Rowe and Koetter is to replace the paradigm of modern urban design with a more adaptable, less authoritarian vision. A paradigm which can allow for variety and je ne se quois. Just as importantly this paradigm re-establishes the possibility of values, giving the designer "a reference according to which they can evaluate facts." This paradigm empowers the designer by re-establishing a link with the past that the modern urban design paradigm (the composite Hegelian, Marxist, Darwinian) had removed. The paradigm further empowers the designer to create idealizations within the larger context. These idealizations have value within the time frame of the designer.

Proposed here is a method, an experiment, that allows the design gap between the overtly planned and the unplanned to be narrowed. I have created the Monte Celio project as a series of these vest pocket utopias, based upon the 1748 Nolli map of Rome, using Rowe's Roma Interrotta example. Upon reinsertion of these idealized pocket utopias back into the existing condition of Rome, a variety of possibilities arise. Through a series of transformation exercises new situations can be imagined. The text below includes description of the tactics and strategies for the design of this area. The existing condition of Rome is not largely considered during the Interrotta part of the investigation, except for the phenomenological understandings gained through visitation to existing sites.

A NEW ROMA INTERROTTA ON THE CELIO

Upon my investigation of the current Celio Hill in Rome, I discovered an amazing state of disarray and a general lack of quality urban design. Although the list of individual buildings is quite substantial (Bascillica di San Giovanni in Laterno, San Stefano Rotundo, the Casino Massimo, the Curria, the Scala Santa, and so on) the urban infrastructure rarely supports these edifices. To facilitate further investigation of this area, I chose to isolate a portion of
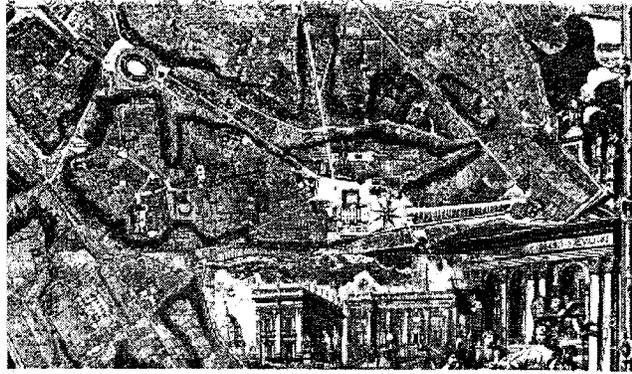

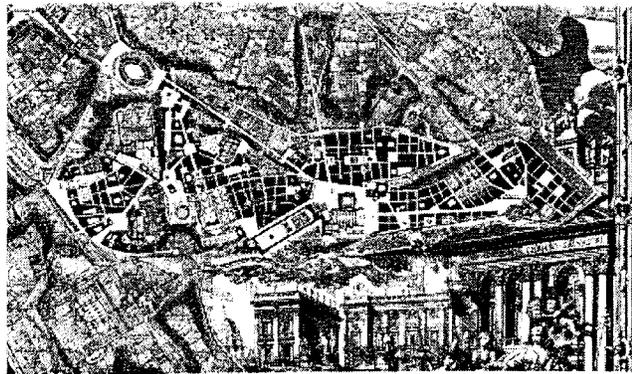Fig.1 Portion of the 1748 Nolli map.

Fig. 2. Proposed design for the Monte Celio - Rome, Italy.

Giovanni Battista Nolli's 1748 Map of Rome. A new Celio Hill and accompanying valley has been designed. The area is not limited to the engraving divisions as created by Nolli and used in the 1978 Roma Interrotta. Instead the new design seeks to find more natural or at least relevant boundaries to the area. This new design investigates the nature of the field and texture of the city, while introducing a balance between street / square (figural void) and building /object (figural solid) as described by Rowe and Koetter.

This new hill town sits on top of the Celian Hill with the south and east bounded by the existing Aurelian Wall. The major focal point of this area, as recognized by the plan of Pope Sixtus V, is the Bascilica of Saint John's in the Lateran. Using Saint John's (one of the four major pilgrimage churches in Rome) as a nucleus, the project is made up of a number of "rione," or districts, each one separable yet interconnected. Included in these districts is an existing investigation made by Steven Peterson and Colin Rowe for the 1978 Roma Interrota.

URBAN DESIGN STRATEGIES

The "Monte Celio" Project is used to illustrate a number of urban design principles and strategies. The following text describes a variety of useful design tactics to be used when creating urban interventions.

Nolli's 1748 map used a loose crosshatch to indicate the major topographic changes of Rome indicating where the hills and valleys were located. In this design the spaces and the buildings correspond to the contour changes in the site and the protected valley inside the Aurelian Wall. The design for the area creates a hill town with a protected valley extension.

Primary connections between the major monuments and figural spaces exist in the proposed plan. Many of these connections derive from studying, reinterpreting and reinforcing the existing site con-

ditions. Secondary connections are created internal to larger fields that begin to organize these internal areas and tertiary figures make up the texture and the fabric of the individual neighbor hoods. This texture is reflected in the aerial perspective. The design's distinct fields create five separate, yet interdependent districts.

The Region of the Villa Massimo is an example of a district shown separated from the surrounding context. This region focuses on the Casino Massimo, the church of SS. Pietro e Marcellino and the Scala Santa. The Aqua Claudia bounds the region to the south and east while a view to the Coliseum extends to the northwest.

In figure 5 the illustration indicates the integral relationship of buildings and spaces with the topography as spaces are interconnected with the building fabric. Above is a rendering of the spaces as physical solids with respect to topography, while below shows the buildings that give form to the spaces. By separating this region from
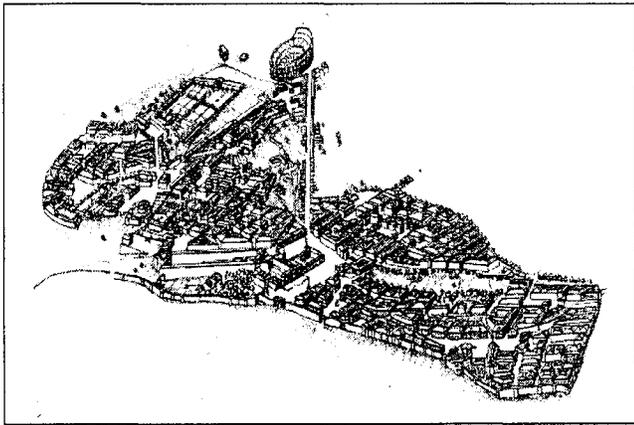

Fig. 3. Perspective view.

the overall design I am able to see how the fabric and space-to-solid relationship weave at both the local level and large scale.

The district of SS. Quattro Coronati illustrates the manner in which a series of objects may be used to organize the countryside in an "Acropolian like" manner, each set piece in a prescribed location based upon perspective and over lap. Sequential views enfold as one rounds a sweeping curve at the lower area of the Celian Hill and begins to see the Belvadere in the distance, then an initial terrace to a proposed villa. Next one sees the villa with the Belvadere in the distance as well as the steeples of San Giovani in Laterno. Finally, up the hill are the buttressing and the church of San Stefano Rotundo. Thus these objects, although seen in plan in a loosely organized fashion may be used to actually create a very organized scene for the viewer.

The overall design has two major set pieces, San Giovanni in Laterno and the Aqua Claudia. These two elements tie the hill town together and organize the entire composition. The first set piece, San Giovanni in Laterano, is used to form a part of all the surrounding regions. The second set piece is the Aqua Claudia, which threads through the entire town on its way to the Palatine Hill. I use the Aqua Claudia as both an edge to, and link through, the various districts. In the design, San Giovanni is placed in a proper space so as to allow the facade to have a surrounding backdrop. This new space uses the Scala Santa as a secondary focal point for the overall piazza. The design creates a clear connection between San Giovani and Santa Croce in Gerusalemme and the adjacent amphitheater/garden. The view back from Santa Croce indicates how the buildings to the north pull back and the street widens to create a figural space that leads to the major figural piece of the composition. San Giovanni acts as a knot, holding all the surrounding regions together.

Bricollage is a strategy proposed by Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter in *Collage City*. To use this tactic I took known pieces, pieces at hand or in the mind, and found new uses or manners in which these known entities can be applied. It is a "handyman's" way of resolving
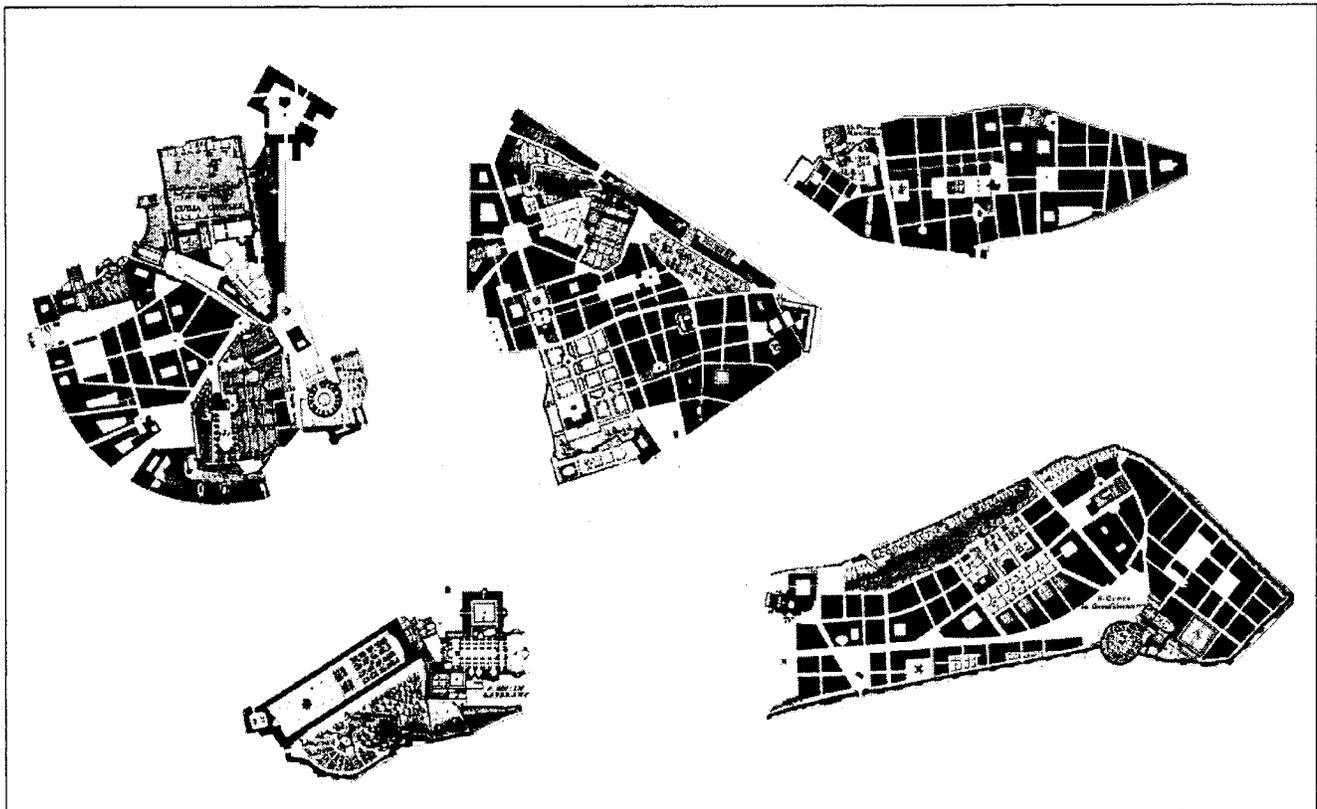

Fig. 4. Plan of districts separated.

a problem rather than an "engineering" mentality. The same method can be used with spaces and buildings. Bricollage is a tool that enables the designer to utilize potential memory invoking to assist in the creation of new places in the city. There are numerous examples of bricollage throughout the design.

There are two distinct texture patterns in Rome. The first texture is in the Campus Martius, the historic city center. Intimate relation ships between the major buildings and the spaces they sponsor can be observed there as well as the connections between those spaces and buildings. This same strategy of texture is used in the western portion of the design for the Celio. Space is the mediator of the field. The area to the south and east of the Piazza del Popolo introduced by Sixtus the V in the 1600s illustrates the second distinct pattern. This area being more recent, it shows a textured grid in which the street is the primary space and connector. The grid begins to conform to the trident. In the area near Santa Croce in Gerusalemme the same strategy is used. The street as space begins to be extended. The area between Santa Croce in Gerusalemme and the surrounding fabric separate to form a space between the buildings and the figural monument.

A NEW PLAN FOR THE MONTE CELIO

The insertion of the idealized hill town back into the existing urban fabric is initially a compositional strategy. Recognizing appropriate locations for cutting away the existing or altering the idealization facilitates the creation of the composite. In the next step I have created a series of transformations that gradually allow the idealized Monte Celio to become existing Rome, a transformation which can be read in both directions.[11] Computer technology is used to create a morphological transformationof one plan into the other.

Exploration of the internal sequence allows a glimpse into potential solutions and situations not previously envisaged. The in- between transformations create interesting possibilities. In this proposal alternatives are explored to invoke the imagination. Since no single condition along the way is seen as idealized the potential for allowing both "the joint existence of the overtly planned and the genuinely unplanned" becomes enhanced. The method treats the area as a composition while each piece can then be seen as a point of reference for a real urban proposal. Finally, the city becomes once again a part of the imagination.

Shown here is one solution that utilizes the current and idealized plans and then proposes a new possibility. The major districts of the idealized plan are created though the field patterns are different in several districts. The new plan utilizes existing buildings to create urban design opportunities first imagined by the idealized plan. For example the idealized plan proposed a "reverse Belvedere Court-yard" behind the Lateran. By exploring the transformations of open space and solid a new piazza along the Lateran and San Stefano becomes envisaged. Most of the new plan requires little alteration to the existing condition. The enhancement of the area is created with strategic reinforcement and adjustment to the existing condition.

In closing it is fitting to return to the former Mayor of Rome taken from the original Roma Interrotta:

> Before Rome became as flat and shapeless as an unmoulded polenta, the Romans lived, moving in the layers of the stratified centuries, like fish in water, in the depths and at the surface... In contrast to space which is opaque, time is transparent. Swimming under the surface of the water, the monuments are seen as reefs, the ruins as coral. This is the city Bernini and Borrimini had imagined...[12]
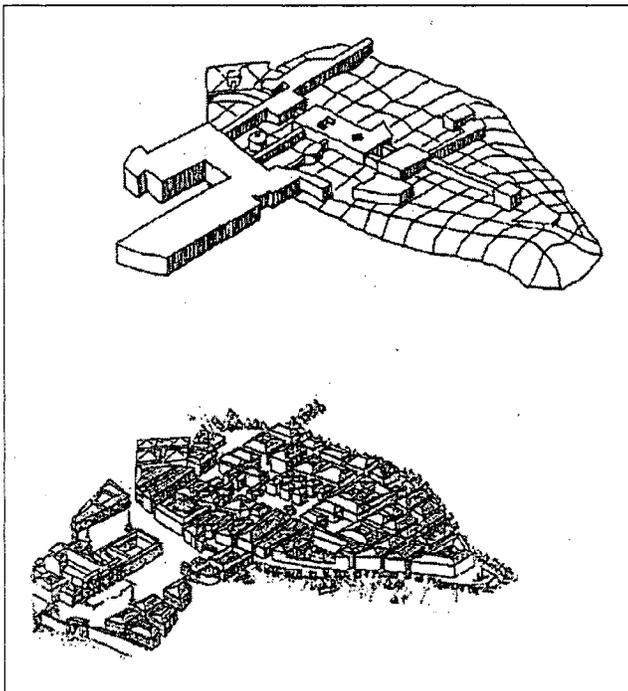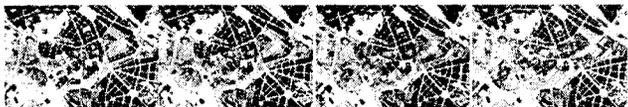

Fig. 5. Solid /Void comparison.

Fig. 6. Still frame progression of existing condition to idealized Nolli Map.

Fig. 7. Existing plan of the Monte Celio.

Fig. 8. Proposed plan for the Monte Celio.

NOTES

[1] Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter, *Collage City* (Cambridge and London, 1979).

[2] Michael Graves, guest editor, *Roma Interotta A.D. Profile 20* Architectural Design, Haig Beck ed., vol. 49 no. 3-4, (1979).

[3] The original Rowe submittal included a "historical narrative" which sought to reinforce the role of politics and people in the creation of urban design. For the sake of brevity (and the author's limited desire to indulge in as much, given the focus here is on methodology) the narrative shall be all but eliminated in this draft.

[4] Graves, op. cit., p 4.

[5] For a review of the importance and worth of these investigations see Alan Chimacoff's, *Roma Interrotta Reviewed*, Ibid, p. 7-8.

[6] George Baird, "Oppositions in the Thought of Colin Rowe," *Assemblage*, no. 33 (August, 1997), p. 22-35.

[7] Colin Rowe, introduction to *Five Architects: Eisenman, Graves, Gwathmey, Hedjuk, Meier* (New York: Wittenborn, 1972), p. 3.

[8] Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter, "Collage City," *Architectural Review*, v. 158 (August, 1975), p. 66-91.

[9] Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter, *Collage City* (Cambridge and London, 1979), p. 83.

[10] Ibid., p. 83.

[11] This strategy has long been used to teach transformation to beginning architecture students at Cornell and other Universities in the U. S.

[12] Graves, op. cit., p. 37.