

**The *Archescape* :
Seeking the Way Out from Within**

by

Etienne Issa

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Architecture

at

Dalhousie University
Halifax, Nova Scotia
March 2016

© Copyright by Etienne Issa, 2016

CONTENTS

Abstract	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Chapter 2: Original Motives of Escape	4
The Formation of Cities	4
The Introverted Escape	5
Chapter 3: A Glimpse of Rome	7
Monuments	7
Ruins and Formal Rome	8
From Ruins to Basilicas	9
The Enlightenment	11
Activated Rome	15
Chapter 4: Three Scales: From Field to Event	18
The Flight Line and the Dérive	18
The Room and the Element	32
Chapter 5: A History of Walls and Gates	34
The Ghetto and its Origins	34
One Block, One Gate	37
Discovering the Block	38
Chapter 6: Three Interventions: Between Old and New	42
Transition	52
Immersion	56
Resonance	62
Chapter 7: Conclusion	70
References	72

ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the *archescape* (Wallis de Vries, 2014) within the historical center of Rome. The term refers to the point of intersection where architecture meets escape. The primal need for escape from the city's pressures traditionally suggests fleeing outward to its greater landscape indulging in the qualities of natural elements. Instead, by providing an opportunity to engage with natural features inside the city we then escape through the same structure we flee from.

Within the city's structure are to be found inhabitable fields of the medieval type and transit lines of its modern one. These lines fragment the spontaneous character of the medieval city imposing a structure of vision and transparency, ironically leading to an unsustainable urban growth. Within the medieval type, *flight lines* (Wallis de Vries, 2014) can be explored to reach moments of evasion that are connected to the public urban sphere. The lines of flight introduce the archetype of the portico, serving as liaison from urban field to architectural room, the holder of elusive natural elements in the city.

The project explores the possibilities of reclaiming the historical medians of public space by presenting a sequence of three rooms within the courtyards of one block. A bathing room, a chanting room, and an in-between room will provide an urban escape for the individual's experience; a coalescence of architectural space and natural element.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would firstly like to thank my parents for their unconditional support throughout my studies. It will always be greatly appreciated.

I feel a need to thank my friends and colleagues for the discussions held about this project, which have consciously or unconsciously affected the outcome of my work. I would also like to thank those who have helped me pull through in the days prior to thesis presentations.

Finally, this thesis would not have been possible if it wasn't for the devotion of Cristina Verissimo and Catherine Ann Somerville Venart. I will be forever grateful for your attention, intensity, and investment. Thank you Catherine. Thank you Cristina. You have made this a memorable experience for me.

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The *archescape* (2014) is coined by Gijs Wallis de Vries alluding to the escape within the city. The term is based on Piranesi's Campo Marzio and his vision of a reconstructed ancient Rome. The act of fleeing outward "consumes what it desires and abolishes the 'outsideness' and 'otherness' that it longs for" (Wallis de Vries' 2011, 29); the fatal escape. The destructive nature of the conventional escape is partly due to the physical gap between city and country. We might think of the greater landscape as the place where one can be intimate with nature, or at least natural elements. However, by bringing these natural elements to the city, cutting the physical gap between city and suburbs, we allow for individuals to spontaneously discover these elements and provide an opportunity for the urban escape. "The invasion of nature in the city allows evasion" (Wallis de Vries 2011, 78).

While Rome has retained most of its medieval structure, it is interrupted by a clear modern one emphasized by major streets. These streets operate as physical boundaries, fragmenting its predecessor, marking the different phases of urban planning linked to the political agenda of the city over time. The successive efforts of Roman Popes, such as Sixtus V, established a network of urban routes connecting significant landmarks and monuments of Christianity. These paths speak to the modern city's structure of transparency and visibility

whereas the medieval arrangement represents a structure of intimacy and invisibility . The arteries created by papal politics constrain the medieval spatial type, one that is for the individual to discover. The sensuous and tactile environment of discovered space is therefore interrupted by the rational and transitory structure of governed space. As stated by Aureli, "if traditionally a city is made of walls and streets, then the modern city is increasingly shaped by circulation, a tendency that has diminished the rich experience of moving through urban space" (Aureli 2011, 32). My intervention serves as counterpoint to the modern city's homogenizing social and political pressures celebrating the individual character of its multi-sensory medieval typology.

We can get a better understanding of the *archescape* through the lens of Guy Debord's (1994) *psychogeographer*, the individual attentive to the signs of their urban environment. This figure embodies the characteristics of the medieval city moving through urban space in reaction to its intrinsic features, rejecting predefined routes. If the medieval city turns it back on its contemporary boundaries, the *psychogeographer* is the one celebrating its internalized condition. This condition will be studied at three scales. Through the *dérive* (Debord, 1994) in the medieval terrain we will explore how the *flight lines* constitute the urban field for the escape. The in-between space defined by the portico is the archetype that acts as gateway between field and escape, sequence and moment, connecting the two spatially. Finally, the room is the place to which we

escape, where the individual regains intimacy with the discovered natural elements framed through the architectural intervention.

The project is located in the heart of the area of Sant' Angelo, directly north of the former Jewish ghetto's walls. The project reclaims three formerly public courtyard spaces within one city block mapped by Giambattista Nolli in his map of Rome in 1748. The three courtyards, like many others in the city are missed opportunities as merely breathing space between private buildings. They inherently carry internal qualities lending themselves to be relevant apparatus for the urban escape. While re-connecting the courtyards to the public sphere, they also link the individual to the natural element.

Finally, through the medieval city's multi-sensory trail and introverted courtyards we make our way to the isolated rooms; a bathing room, a chanting room and an in-between room. Each room occupies one courtyard space. As the immersive quality of water is framed in the bathing room, the resonant span of the voice is expressed in the chanting room and the in-between room connects the two together. The rooms frame the individual's authentic experience providing an intimate moment with natural elements to evade the geopolitical pressures of the governed city.

CHAPTER 2: ORIGINAL MOTIVES OF ESCAPE

The Formation of Cities

One fascinating aspect of city origins is linked to the forming of an assembly point but more importantly a place of security. Although cities form a place where one can worship religious beliefs, exchange goods at the market, and attend political meetings with the rest of its society, military measures have to be taken to ensure its protection. Henri Pirenne states that “the first buildings erected by man seem, indeed, to have been protecting walls” (Pirenne 1956, 57). This introduced the notion of the fortress a popular building type at the start of the ninth century. The German-Latin term *burgus* designates the fortress, a term we more commonly refer to as burg. Pirenne also brings up an interesting fact that *town* (in modern English) and *gorod* (in modern Russian) which referred to the city meant enclosure. To think that cities have been created with such introverted intent is simultaneously logical and striking.

In ordinary times, these enclosures remained empty. The people resorted to them only on the occasion of religious or civic ceremonies, or when war constrained them to seek refuge there with their herds. But, little by little with the march of civilization, their intermittent animation became continuous animation. (Pirenne 1956, 58)

What was once a sporadic meeting center then became a city merging administrative, religious, political and economic spheres within that confined territory. Cities internally developed from commerce

and trade where inhabitants ensured its survival and development. As this happens the inhabitants did not receive any particular privileges and were eventually were faced with the pressures of these various city-spheres. A common reactionary response to these pressures is to flea back out to where it all started, escaping outward beyond the city's walls.

The Introverted Escape

Uncommon to traditional thinking where one leaves the city's pressures to find the other landscape further past the confines of the city, I wish to pursue the idea` of escaping within the contemporary city centre. Moreover, the density , noise and flow of the city can only make the escape more delightful, creating notable sequences and variations between the bustling city activity and the evasive points where one forgets that he or she is in the city. Not to mention that this conventional escape is destructive to the development of cities.

The Arcadian desire that motivates the massive escape from the city has a fatal impact, for it destroys paradise as soon as it is regained. It consumes what it desires and abolishes the 'outsideness' and 'otherness' that it longs for . Since antiquity citizens have found ways to escape from the urban tumult by creating flight lines to a world other than outside the city . Initially, the escapes occurred at its borders, suburbia being only one of its avatars. They also took place right in its middle, indeed, in central and prominent places. Cities have always boasted gardens, arcades, academies, museums, theatres, and other 'amenities' (...) as places for relaxation, contemplation, concentration, study, sport, play, art, - in one word: leisure. (Wallis de Vries 2014, 29)

While these places listed above do represent a type of space where one can escape to, this project puts an emphasis on the anonymous spaces of the city. Perhaps, spaces that are not institutionalized or clearly defined as theatres, museums, or academies. This study investigates possibilities of escape within the public terrain of the city, concealed from main pedestrian flow. Moreover, it seeks to establish an inextricable relationship with the city's depth contributing to its authenticity. The escape can be read as the individual's finding of an event through the labyrinthine qualities of the urban terrain.

Not to find one's way in a city may well be uninteresting and banal. It requires ignorance – nothing more. But to lose oneself in a city – as one loses oneself in a forest – that calls for quite a different schooling (...) I penetrated to its innermost place, the Minotaur's chamber. (Benjamin, Jennings, Eiland and Smith 1999, 598)

The individual, while openly malleable to the urban tissue navigates in direct sensorial response to the city's corpus and porosity. Instead of being a passive figure, the subject participates in the 'found' event and takes part in the experience that contributes to the authentic city. The importance of the 'findings' of the event to be within the city are of fundamental to the understanding of the *archescape*. The individual seeks not to flee outward to the vast natural landscape, but rather inward through the dense fabric where natural elements can be discovered.

CHAPTER 3: A GLIMPSE OF ROME

Monuments

Permanences present two aspects: on the one hand, they can be considered as propelling elements; on the other, as pathological elements. Artifacts either enable us to understand the city in its totality, or they appear as a series of isolated elements that we can link tenuously to an urban system. (Rossi 1982, 59)

The monuments of Rome create an isolated and elevated layer from the rest of the city, allowing for the more anonymous elements to sink in the city. Most attempts at planning Rome have started with the placement of monuments establishing a *tabula rasa*, abstracting the remaining elements of the city. In the image below, the ruins represent the start point for envisioning the city to come.



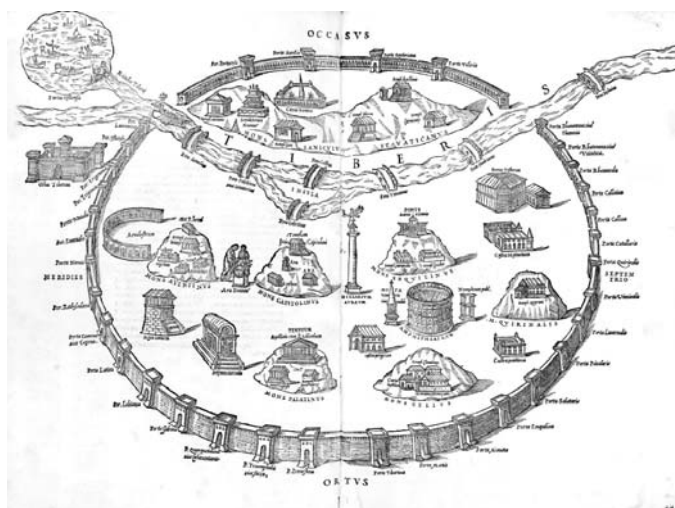
Giovanni Battista Piranesi, *Scenographia Campi Martii*, 1762 (detail)

Ancient monuments, particularly those in Rome, were interpreted as evocative clues for analogical reconstructions and recompositions of the ancient world. This power of evocation and the analogy of *instauratio urbis* had been used politically to support ideological and political visions. Ancient

ruins were not simply evidence of a past to be preserved, but were also formal examples to be recomposed according to the narratives of power (Aureli 2011, 104)

Ruins and Formal Rome

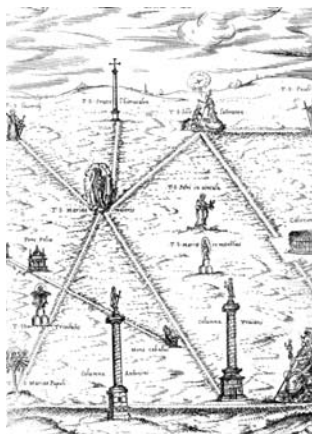
Ancient Rome consisted of the mere cumulus of individual forms without a general plan tying them together. This lack of cohesion explains the attempt at *instauratio urbis* carefully locating the placement of ancient ruins as a point of departure. The architects of the time had to compose with singular architectural elements and their place on the geographical terrain. Fabio Calvo's map of ancient Rome diagrammatically depicts the monuments in space framed by the two key topographical features; the Tiber river and the city's walls, both pervading through modern Rome. The void space between the monuments represents the space for the potential re-envisioning of Rome.



Fabio Calvo, *Antiquae urbis Romae cum regionibus simulachrum*, 1527

From Ruins to Basilicas

With the influence of papal power in sixteenth-century Rome, the relevance of Antiquity's revival was questioned. As Aureli states, under Sixtus V (1585-1590) the focus of monuments shifted from the ancient ruins to the early basilicas of Christianity. This was also marked by the implantation of obelisks along the processional routes he created with his architect Domenico Fontana. The planned streets and monuments presented a condition far removed from domestic life, alternatively fabricating an emblematic and ritual city-domain. Antonio Bordino's map below leaves out the city fabric illustrating the pilgrim's guide to the city.

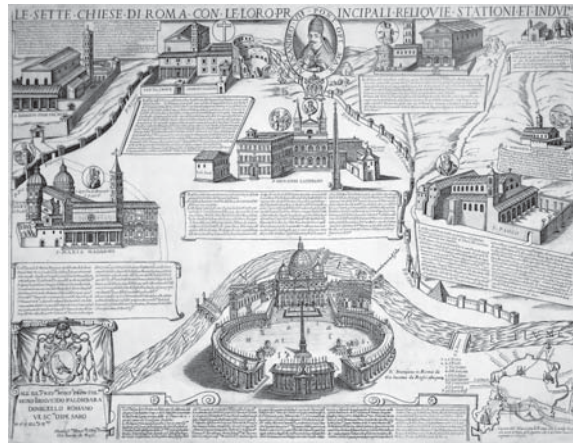


Antonio Bordino, Map of Rome under Pope Sixtus V, 1588

Though Sixtus V rejected the erudite and antiquarian apparatus of *instauratio urbis*, he nevertheless assumed the principle of reinventing the new city by strategically highlighting some of its existing but latent monuments (...). The city is portrayed as a *tabula rasa* in which the only elements are the restored ancient columns and the basilicas, the “as found” objects now highlighted as the poles of the new city. (Aureli 2011, 101)

While Bordino's map symbolically represented the city's new poles, Giacomo Lauro's map valued the icons of Christianity with his map of the seven churches of Rome.

Here the basilicas become the authentic places of the city; together they constitute a structure that derives its complexity from their value in primary artifacts, from the streets that join them, and from the residential spaces that are present within the system. Domenico Fontana begins his description of the principal characteristics of the plan in this way: 'Our Lord now wishing to ease the way for those prompted by devotion or by vows who are accustomed to visit frequently the most holy places in the City of Rome, & in particular the seven Churches so celebrated for their great indulgences and relics, has opened a number of very spacious and straight streets in many places. Thus by foot, by horse, or in a carriage, one can start from any place in Rome one likes and continue virtually in a straight line to the most famous devotions. (Rossi 1982, 125)



Giacomo Lauro, The Seven Churches of Rome, 1599

The streets, reduced to corridors for public procession, became in a very real sense outdoor passages where the buildings that enclosed them were simply facades for an international city of pilgrimage. The tragic street was thus the instrument of urban control and regulation, inserted at the will of the planner into a hitherto private realm. (Vidler 2011, 19)

With the succession of each pope came singular interests manifested through respective projects. This in no way helped to provide an integrative plan for the growth of Rome. Moreover ,

Aureli mentions that only five orthogonal plan maps were created during the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries denoting the tumultuous political standing of the city. Purposefully elected at a mature stage in their lives to limit their reign, each Pope could only do so much but leave traces on the city neglecting urban policies that could provide coherent guidelines for the city's long-term planning. Rome resulted in the incoherent arrangement of building fabric compressed between its rising monuments, along with its arteries tying them together.

The Enlightenment

The relevance of Christian monuments as markers for the development of Rome was being questioned in the mid-eighteenth century while the movement of the Enlightenment emerged, where reason became the source for authority and legitimacy.

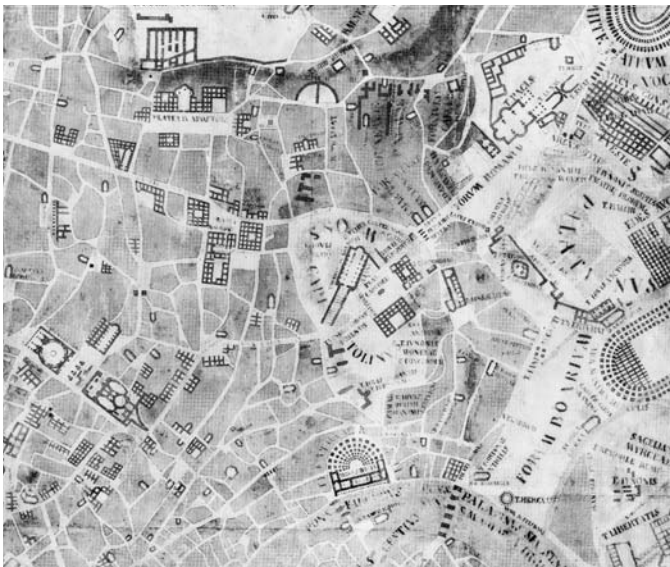
In this influential effort to organize knowledge according to the principles of reason, the capital of Christianity was portrayed as a corrupt city, a symbol of irrational culture, and a slave to its past. This accusation signalled a growing suspicion of the cultural legacy of Rome. Under attack was the very validity of antiquarian knowledge through which the history of the ancient world had been reconstructed according to the myth of Rome. (Aureli 2011, 103)

Giambattista Nolli's map was in the works at this particular time with papal endeavours shifting away from judiciously situated monuments, encouraging pressing reforms in dealing with Rome's administration and infrastructural systems (Aureli). Where most previous maps tried to

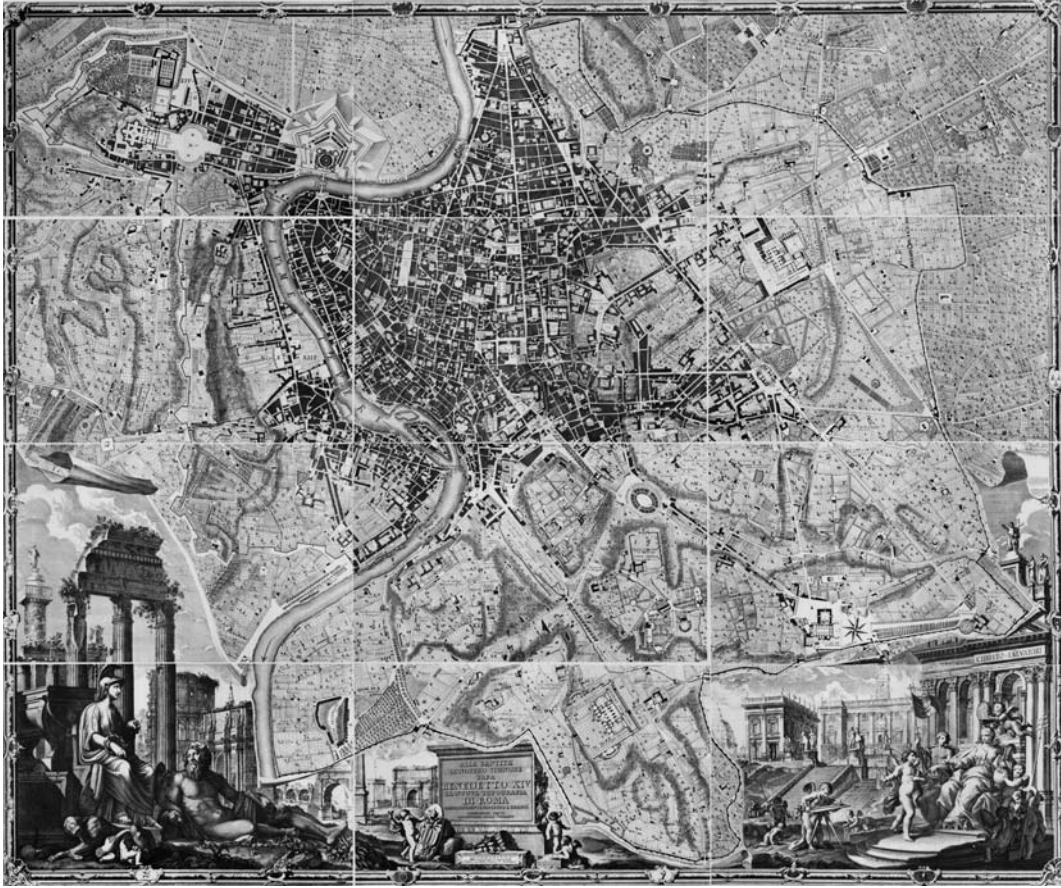
capture archaeological placement of buildings and landmarks, the Nolli map, developed after Leonardo Bufalini's map was a careful survey of the whole city with great accuracy. In this way, archaeology was celebrated through the Enlightenment as the way forward to scientifically reconstructing the city based on firsthand knowledge.

The progressive culture of the eighteenth century thus mobilized archaeology to replace the myth of antiquarian knowledge and its humanistic underpinnings with another myth grounding contemporary knowledge on science: the idea of producing knowledge via rigorous empirical method liberated from ideological preconceptions. (Aureli 2011, 104)

One could argue that the discipline of cartography arose with the scientific rigour of the Enlightenment culture. The creation of more recent maps such as Nolli's became texts where one could read the relationship between city-territory indicating undertones of the city's political configuration.



Leonardo Bufalini, *Pianta di Roma*, 1551 (detail)



Giovanni Battista Nolli, *Nuova Pianta di Roma*, 1748



Frederico Fellini, *Satyricon*, 1969 (images from Gary Devore's wordpress)

Activated Rome

Having looked at scientific representation modes of Rome, we might also find value in exploring interpretive forms of representation; mainly through the cinematic lens. As we now understand the city-territory mapping and its political layer, we may find an insightful, although subjective portrait of Rome through Federico Fellini's films.

The flesh of Rome can be sampled through the events depicted by the director informing us of the city's character. Fellini's interest lies not in representing the attractive or historical features of a touristic Rome. Rather he constructs the medium for the transmission of his vision of the city's backdrop.

Walking around Rome, in Fellini's films, is a disconcerting and fragmented experience. In rejecting conventional narrative structure Fellini also rejects conventional 'routes' (...) allowing us no sense of linearity as we move through time and space. We have, as spectators in these films, absolutely no control over the city. (Larmour and Spencer 2007, 361-363)

Fellini allows the viewer to get deeper and deeper, almost giving one a privileged view of a domestic 'hidden' Rome. In a scene from Fellini's *Satyricon*, we follow two individuals moving through a labyrinthine trail. We walk through doors that take us from street to agora, from agora to bathing room, from bathing room to a corridor that spills out onto many more intimate rooms, etc. We move through a space similar to a broken enfilade where each room evokes a let-go, the elusive quality of the city's internal organs.

With such a scene, Fellini sets up a site/sight to frame urban experience revealing the events of the city. The scene comes to an end when the two characters come out of the corridor into a courtyard space linked to many more corridors and rooms enabling us to envision the experience as only part of a greater whole. This scene single-handedly expresses the numerous possibilities of escape within the introverted layer of the city.

Now that we have envisioned an iterative take on the escape, we can have a look at how one navigates through the city in order to track it down.



Frederico Fellini, *Satyricon*, 1969 (image taken from Gary Devore's wordpress)



Model based on Nolli's map of 1748.

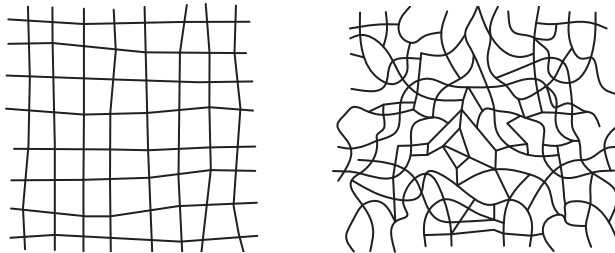
The interpretive model above is based on the Nolli map, framing part of the historic center of Rome. Its peripheral streets are cut-off at the start of main arteries, abstracting the transparent layer of the city, the one that is highlighted in historical maps. It allows us to focus on the medieval field. This field is then differentiated by two layers: the higher level represents the actual field (the coming together of streets) that allows one to enter the public spaces of the city, the lower level.

CHAPTER 4: THREE SCALES: FROM FIELD TO EVENT

The Flight Line and the Dérive

The *Ligne de fuite* or *Line of flight* (transl. by Brian Massumi), is a term coined by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1987) in *A Thousand Plateaus*, referring to the limited possibilities of escape. It is defined as the elusive moment when change occurs through the crossing of a threshold between two models. In the *ligne de fuite*, *fuite* designates the act of fleeing or eluding but equally of flowing or leaking.

These lines can be expressed as parcours/ sight lines that exist in two urban conditions; the modern city and the medieval city . While they are linear and unbroken in the first, the second's are constantly interrupted.



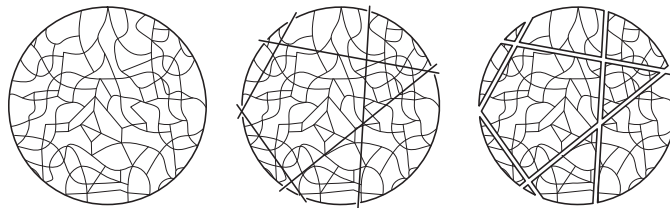
The modern grid structure (left) and the medieval arrangement (right) .

This interruption presents the opportunity for invisibility to put the imagination at work introducing the notion of discovery through progressive reveals. The urban qualities of the medieval city interact with the subject on emotional and tactile levels. We are framed with wall surfaces; their openings, their textures, etc. The successive surfaces in space

shape the flight line and define the movement of the body along its trail. The surfaces form the veil for the backdrop of the city's events concealed through cracks, doors and gates; the porous elements of the city. Essentially, these lines are connected and altogether form the terrain that precedes the event/escape, such as the one depicted in Fellini's film.

These lines invite us to roam and linger in labyrinthine complexes, in eccentric gardens, in the never-ending arcades, or in wild and rough terrain. The joys of recluse are mixed with the pleasures of the obscure, the enigmatic and the elusive (...) For that is what flight lines are about: to draw us into escapes. (Wallis de Vries 2014, 51-56)

The flight lines in Rome constitute a body . We may think of it as an inhabitable field. However, this field is not continuous, rather it is broken of f by its politically-defined arteries.



The fragmentation of the field.

If traditionally a city is made of walls and streets, then the modern city is increasingly shaped by circulation, a tendency that has diminished the rich experience of moving through urban space. Circulation does not simply move bodies, but subtly forces them to follow predefined trajectories. We no longer move from place to place, but from A to B: everything that exceeds these points of departure and destination is nullified by the compulsion to flow within given channels (Aureli, Mastrogli and Steele 2013, 32)

This understanding of the city's field versus its lines will serve us to frame the *dérive*. Debord's (1955) *dérive* is the passage through varied ambiances, performed by an individual aware of their surroundings and their psychogeographical effects. The *dérive* relies on the individual's emotional responses to their urban geographical context. The individual character of the medieval city is animated through the personality of the *dériveur*. Sadler quotes Marx on the topic claiming that "men can see nothing around them that is not their own image; everything speaks to them of themselves. Their very landscape is alive" (Sadler 1998, 77).

This exploration happens away from the modern city's monuments and arteries that portray its transparency, alternatively it occurs in the urban field of invisibility. The channels encourage superfluous movement along uncontested routes. Contrarily to the idea of following predefined paths, the subject invests in the anti-defined path seeking for the depth of the city leading to an authentic relationship with it. Merlin Coverley elaborates on the theme of *psychogeography* resonating with Fellini's experience "of the city as a site of mystery (where one) seeks to reveal the true nature that lies beneath the flux of the everyday" (Coverley 2010,13).

The flight line and the *dérive* both deal with time and sequence, aside from the formal, textural and tactile qualities of the urban terrain. If the flight lines speak to the urban conditions of the field, the *dérive* speaks to the navigation within it.

Rome's (...) narrow, uneven, and less than straight streets suggest that visibility along them was often restricted to short sections, with aural, olfactory and haptic cues more relevant to inhabiting and navigating them. (Betts 2011, 130)



The modern street leading up to a basilica with a control point ahead (left) and a sample of the medieval field (right).



Exploring the field of Rome



Exploring the field of Rome



Exploring the field of Rome



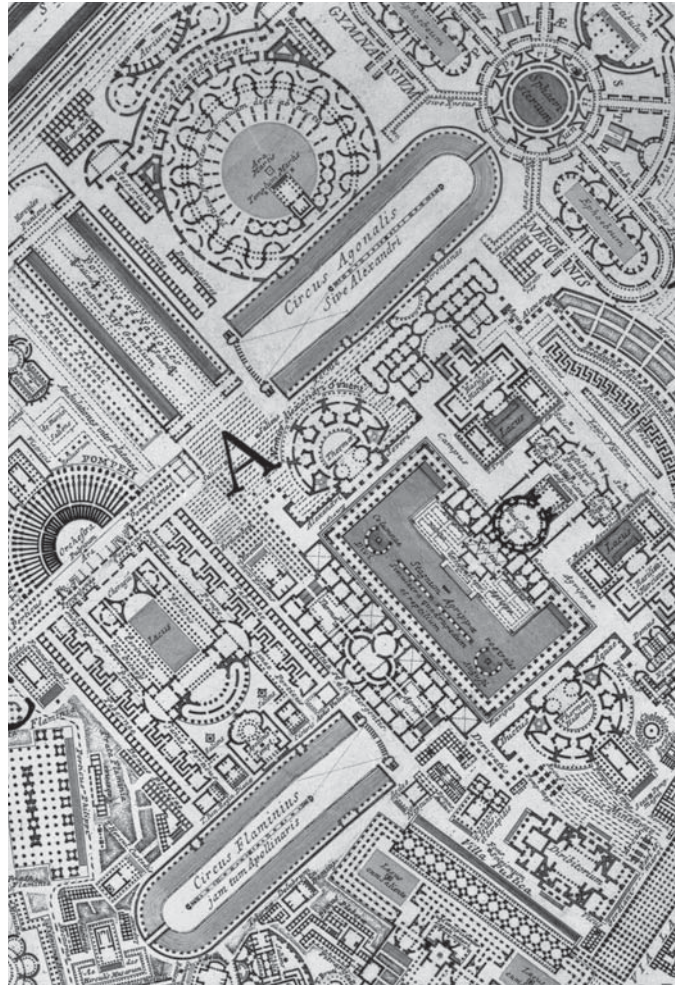
Exploring the field of Rome



Exploring the field of Rome



Exploring the field of Rome



Giovanni Battista Piranesi, *Ichnographia Campi Martii antiquae urbis*, 1762 (detail)

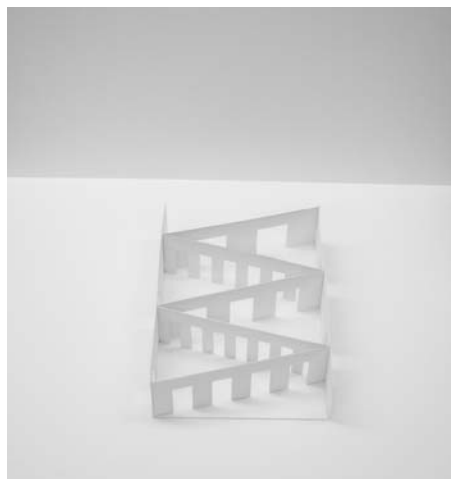
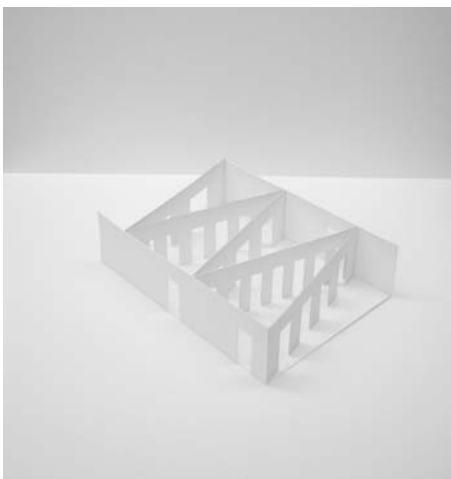
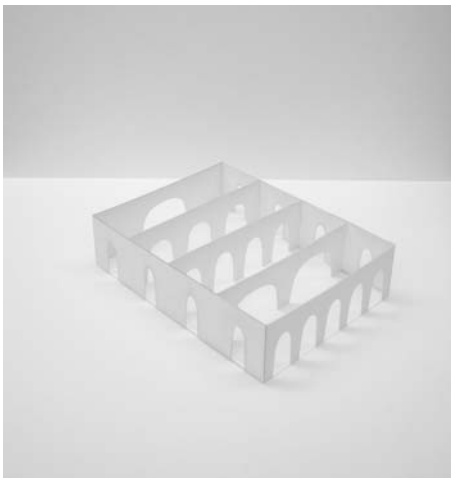
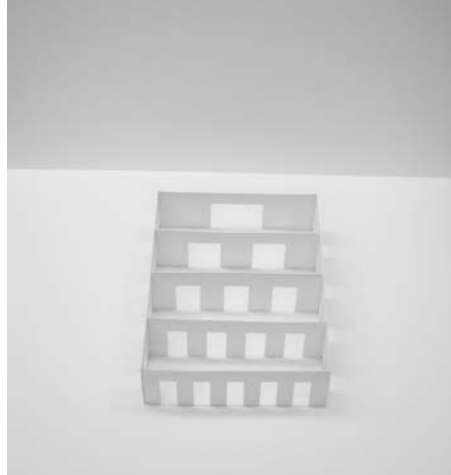
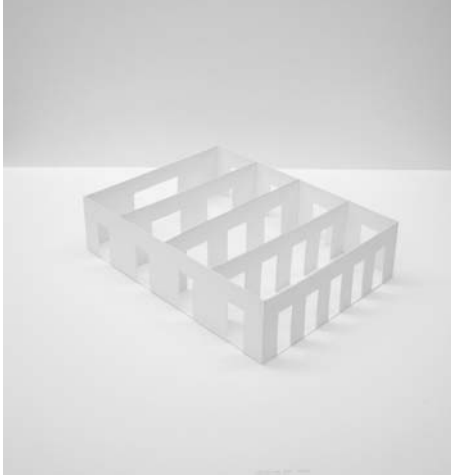
The In-Between and the Porticus

The *porticus*, commonly referred to as arcade, colonnade or gallery is a prevailing architectural device in Rome and perhaps the most prominent building typology expressed in Piranesi's *Ichnographia*. This device will allow for a better understanding of the individual's engagement with city-depth in the public realm.

The portico is a public space of excellence that serves as shelter from wet or hot conditions but it also serves as a connector or gateway from one space to another. Moreover, it represents the most basic and primitive way of framing in art history. Through its commonly expressed arches, it presents the subject with a selective scene, defining an interior and exterior. The frame conceals what is behind it, introducing a limitation in vision allowing for the mind to take over.

Vision is that which becomes visible of the invisible. (Wallis de Vries 2014, 38)

The multiplication of this linear device creates a matrix of frames, introducing the notion of depth. This engages the viewer in a three-dimensional space instead of a two-dimensional plane. For this reason the *porticus* is both inviting and intriguing; stimulating the mind to envision and the body to react. The static individual is solicited to become a participant in the discovery of the spatial sphere that lies at the limitation of vision. Moreover, the in-between space symbolizes the intersection of visibility and invisibility, the tangible and the elusive.



These earlier models explore the relationship between portico and spatial sequence.

For many arts the frame is a crucial instrument to separate the real from the imaginary . Its function is to select a view, its event to kindle the imagination (...) The effect of framing is visual, but as my eye is led to move into space, my body starts wandering with all my senses awake. (Wallis de Vries 2014, 35-174)

Friedrich Nietzsche in *Die Fröhlichen Wissenschaft* states that the arcade allows one to 'walk in one's own thought'. (Wallis de Vries 2014, 79)

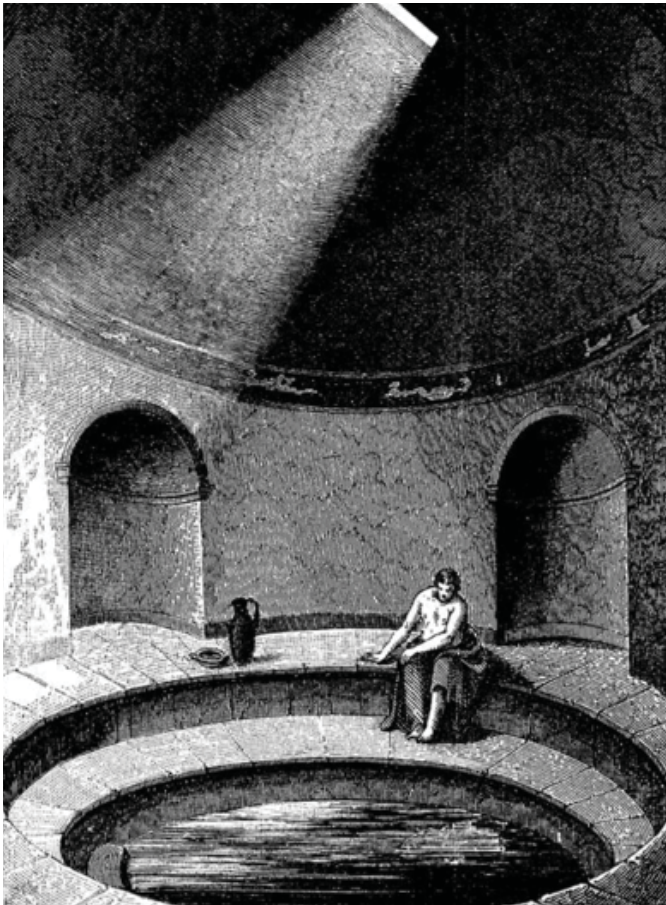


The collages express the manipulation of the arch into the portico, generating different spatial configurations.

The Room and the Element

The room is understood as the totality of rooms that make for the interior . It represents the confines that frame experience and immersion. Its walls protect the heart of the event and frame the individual's escape.

The purpose of 'the interior ' could be said to be two fold: the making of environmentally controlled spaces for human inhabitation; and the definition of an outside from an inside, whether physical, legal, or political. The interior in both senses is the making of a world that is distinct yet related to an exterior. The interior, then, is its own little reality, with its own rules, limits, and truths. (Brennan 2015)



Overbeck, Frigidarium of the Old Baths at Pompeii, 1898

In the same way that the in-between aspires to rêverie through the invisibility of its structure, the room does so with its evocative elements. It does so through the spatial confines that frame the purity of elements such as water, light or sound. One can argue that a correlation exists between element and imagination, imagination and escape; therefore between element and escape. Bachelard claims, “Si les choses mettent en ordre nos idées, les matières élémentaires mettent en ordre nos rêves. Les matières élémentaires reçoivent et conservent et exaltent nos rêves (Bachelard 1956, 182).” Interestingly enough, “escapism has a somewhat negative meaning because of the common notion that what one escapes from is reality and what one escapes to is fantasy” (Tuan 1998, 22). However, fantasy is rooted in reality manifested through one’s imagination, and imagination is the vehicle for escape. Yi-Fu Tuan goes as far to say that “imagination is our unique way of escaping” (113).

The image of the courtyard in Fellini’s *Satyricon* comes to mind as it represents the possibility of escape while addressing the issues of city density and intensity.

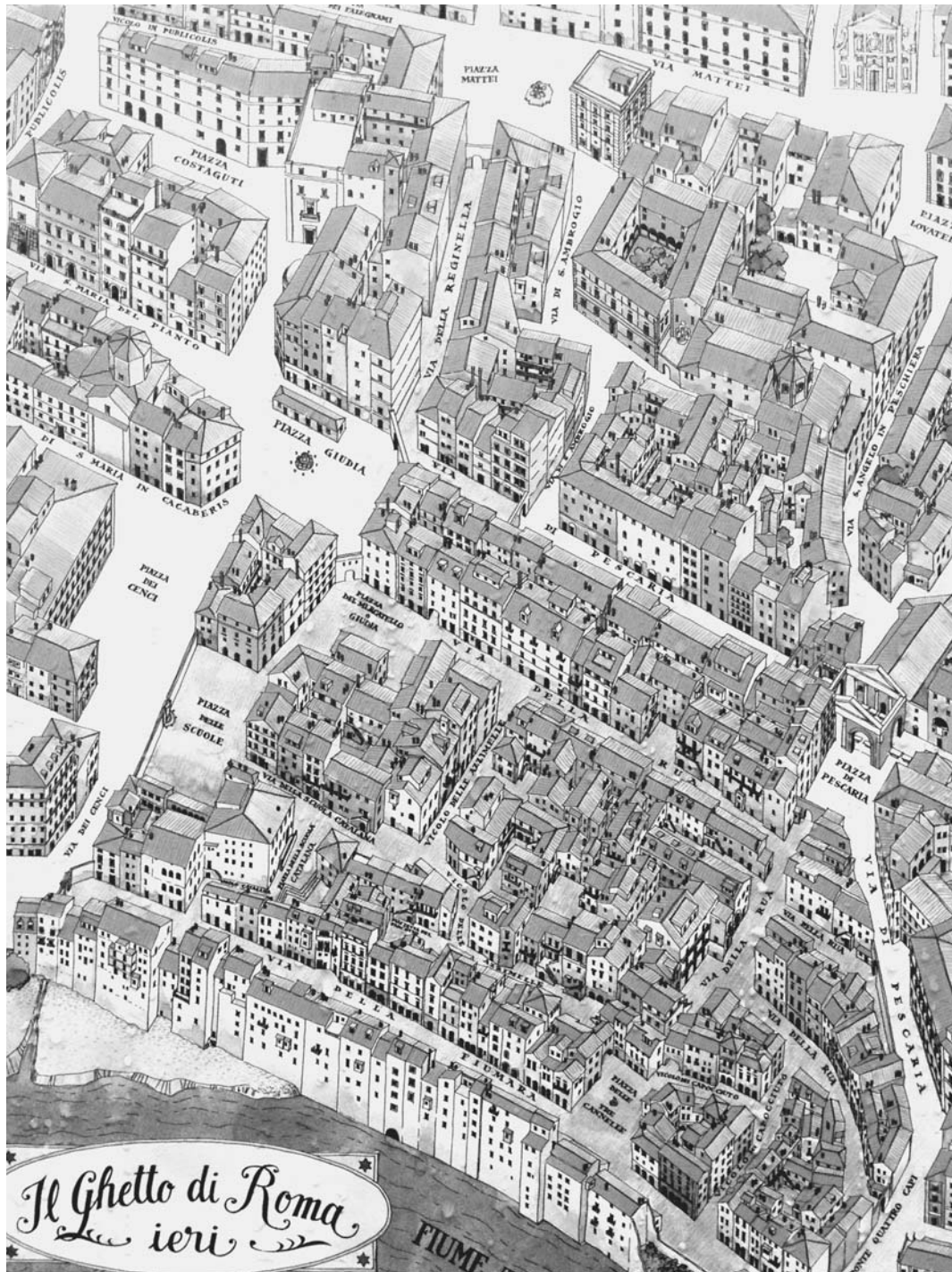
Density and intensity require architecture. And that is where the concept of archescape comes in – a vision of an architectural landscape that frames urban escape. (Wallis de Vries 2014, 163)

The following chapter introduces the historical and geographical context of the project along with the dense configuration of the block where the intervention occurs.

CHAPTER 5: A HISTORY OF WALLS AND GATES

The Ghetto and its Origins

The ghetto of Rome was built during the mid-sixteenth century by the Pope's architect of that time, Sallustio Peruzzi. The ghetto was essentially an enclosed neighborhood made up of walls and gates. At the end of the century the ghetto developed along *Via Fiumara*, framed by the Tiber river and *Via Rua*, cornered by the *Portico d'Ottavia*. According to the museum exhibition at the *Tempio Maggiore di Roma* it was only in 1848 that Pius IX took down the walls and by 1870 the ghetto was dismantled as Rome joined the Kingdom of Italy. The Synagogue was constructed shortly after and the Jews were granted citizenship.



Illustrative map of the former ghetto purchased in a local souvenir shop.

One Block, One Gate

Immediately to the north of the former ghetto sits the site of the intervention. It is one large city block in the quarter of Sant' Angelo. To its north-west is the *Fontana delle Tartarughe* located in the *Piazza Mattei*. At its opposite face, to north-east is the inhospitable *Piazza Lovatelli* leading to the entrance of a state building. The lower east part of the block is connected to the *Portico d'Ottavia*. The block is surrounded by *Via dei Funari* to its north, *Via Sant'Angelo in Pescheria* to the east, *Via del Portico d'Ottavia* just south, and finally *Via di Sant'Ambrogio* to the west. Located right in the middle of the block is the *Chiesa di Sant'Ambrogio della Massima*. This church is swallowed by the block with no visible entrance from *Via Sant'Angelo in Pescheria* and barely any from *Via di Sant'Ambrogio*. The only access point is through a gate that encloses the block.

Discovering the Block

Walking through the streets of Rome I came to a stop at the *Piazza Mattei* and took a moment to admire the fountain of the tortoises. I then walked along the *Via di Sant' Ambrogio* where my path was re-directed a couple times due to the nature of the windy street. I was later facing a closed gate in front of a small courtyard with signs indicating that trespassing this property line was forbidden. I took a few steps over to the drinking fountain nearby to soothe my dehydrated throat from all the walking I had done to that point. As I stood straight again I heard barely perceptible chanting coming from a distance. It did not sound like religious chanting, in fact it seemed closer to folkloric chants. I walked back to the gate and stood there trying to locate the source point. It could of came from anywhere. However, I returned on my steps where I had noticed but ignored the open door of a building.

Moving through the doorway I quickly realized that I was standing in an abandoned building, observing a barricaded door with heavy chains and locks inside the main entrance hall. I was faced with a staircase which I borrowed to get up to the first floor, only to find another chained door. On my way from the first to second floor, I could slowly start to hear the chanting coming back. The second floor was also locked off. Finally, I made my way to the third and top floor of the building, flooded by light coming from a central courtyard surrounded by an L-shaped corridor. I was genuinely happy to be



Images supporting the discovery.



Images supporting the narrative.

tracking down the voices I had heard. The corridor brought me closer to the vocal source but once again I came to a halt due to a smaller steel-caged door.

I waited in the corridor for a few minutes, listening to the chanting and observing the courtyard from above. It felt like a privileged moment in this city in which I wished I had the keys to all doors. Momentarily, the singing came to an end and people walked out from where they were signing. I then saw the last two individuals lock the fence and I walked up to them asking them about their activity. They explained that they were a small choir using one of the rooms as rehearsal space. I then asked about any other occupants in the building and they answered that the only other people inhabiting it were a group of activists fighting against the privatization of water in Rome. The elements of escape for my intervention were then confirmed; water and sound.

CHAPTER 6: THREE INTERVENTIONS: BETWEEN OLD AND NEW



Site model



Satellite image of site, base image from Bing maps



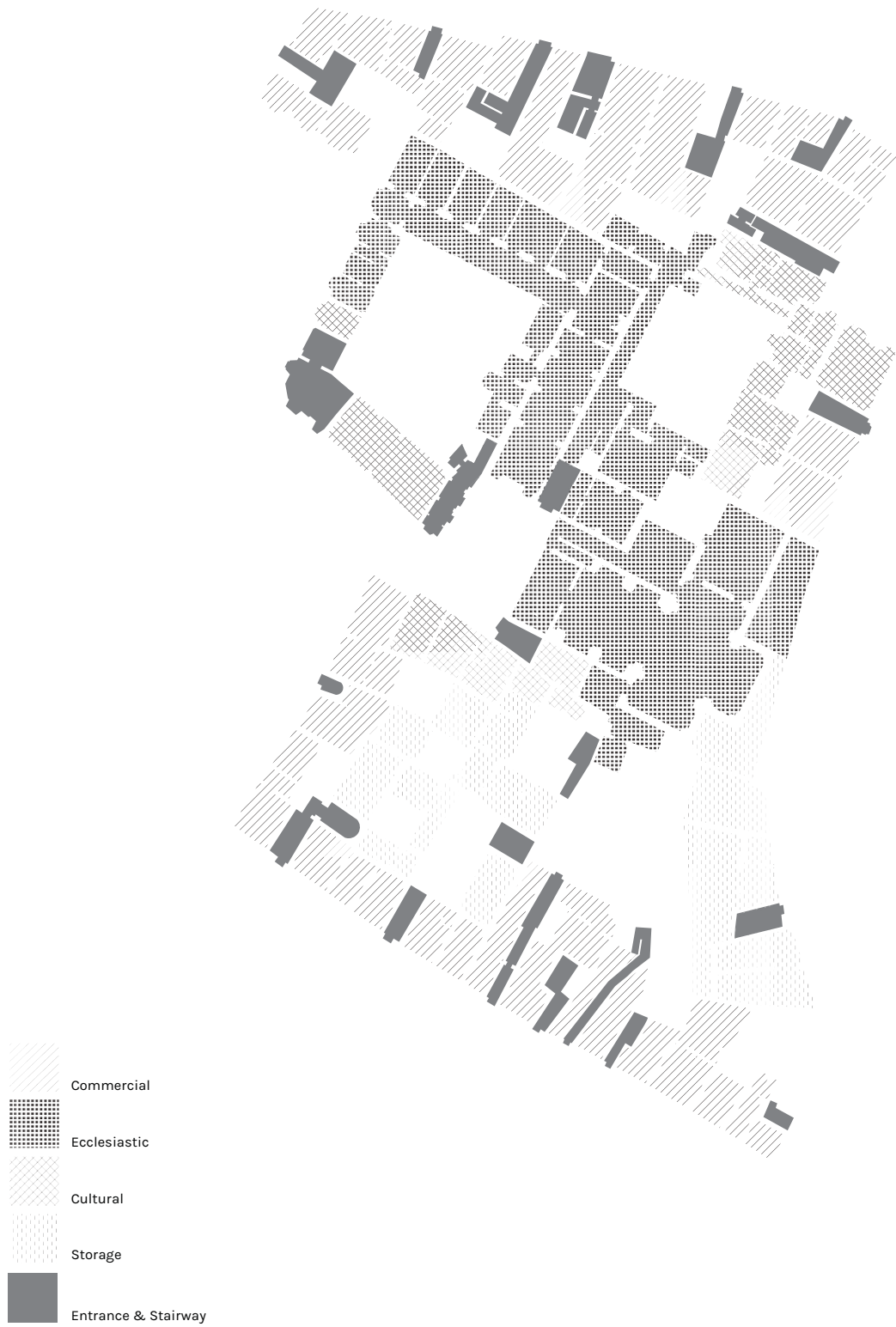
Site plan



Existing plan of the block



Block analysis of building origins



Block analysis of building occupation

Before elaborating on any of the three interventions, an initial design move was made through the city block creating a narrow street connecting *Via di Sant' Ambrogio* and *Via Sant'Angelo in Pescheria*. In its current urban state, the block swallows the church making it unnoticeable from the street. This allows inhabitants to walk by the church's walls, where one can also gain access to it. The church is currently a hollow space devoid of any furniture. Perhaps, one of the reasons why it is hardly used could be linked to its scandalous past in mid-nineteenth century. It once served as annexe to the convent of the Nuns of *Sant' Ambrogio della Massima* which is currently occupied by a group of Benedictine monks. In his publication, Hubert Wolf elaborates on the activities led by the Nuns involving sexual abuse and serial poisoning within the convent, perhaps shining light on the anonymous character of the church. Consequently, the idea behind conserving the blank state of the Church is to raise curiosity about its lack of activity, ultimately revealing its past. (It would be possible to envision occasional cultural events taking place in this space.)

More importantly, I would argue that this initial intervention gives another possible route for inhabitants who wish to crossover between *Via di Sant' Ambrogio* and *Via Sant'Angelo in Pescheria* without having to pass through the bustling *Via del Portico d'Ottavia*.



Intervention plan of the block



View of narrow street created through the first gate, along the second.



Existing condition



Proposed condition

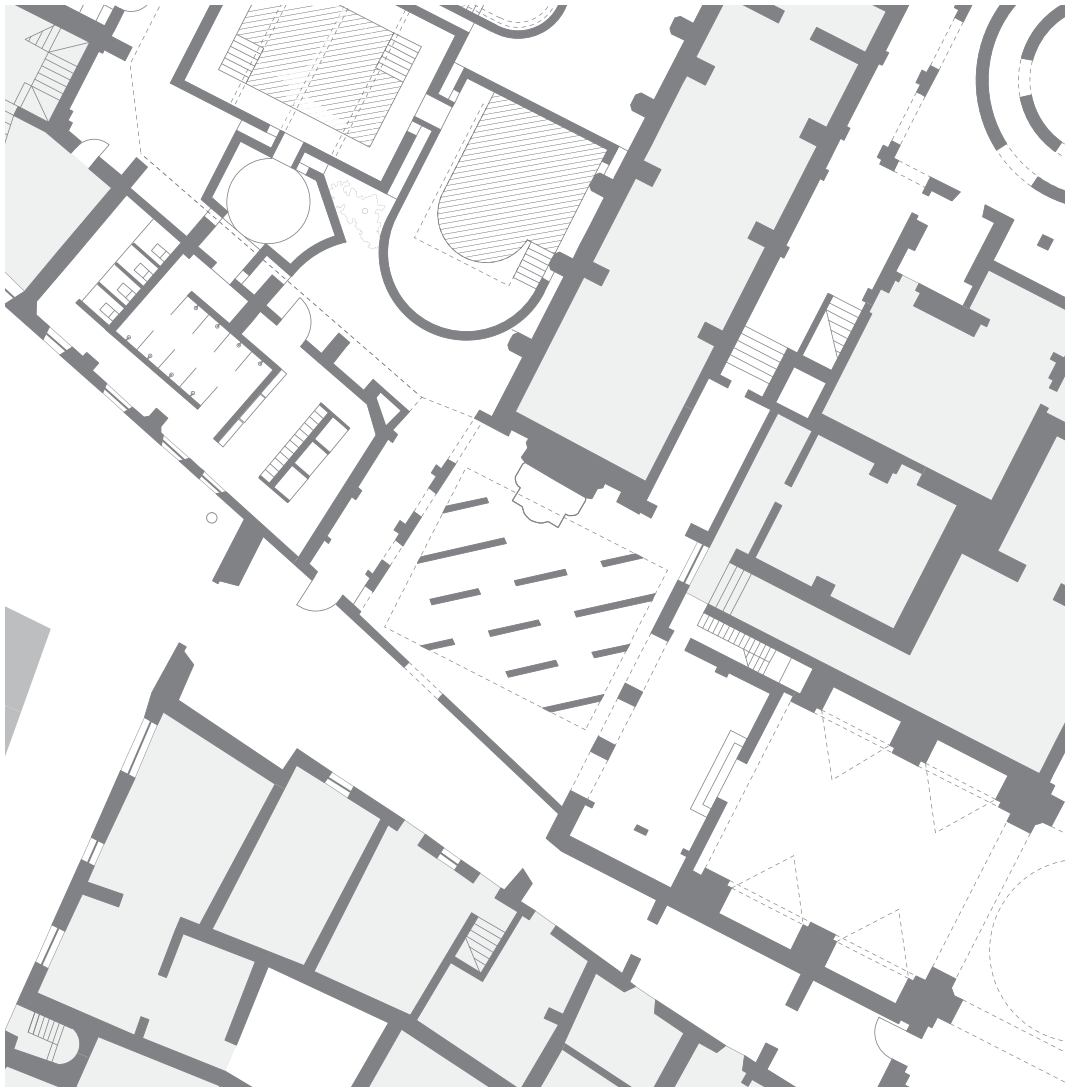
Transition

The In-Between Room - Framing Vision

As mentioned in the earlier chapter 'The In-Between and the Porticus' this first room serves a gateway between the medieval field and the rooms we escape to. It is a space made up of a series of walls. It is "a space of transition where the individual could regain his social being and the crowd gradually break(s) down into its individual parts" (Vidler 2011, 43).

This room is based on a grid that responds to structural elements and openings of the façades that enclose the courtyard. The proportions of the room respond to the arches of the church entrance, the height of the fountain, and the spacing of the colonnade to its left.

The diagonal walls set up only one direct visual link to the existing fountain from the gate. The walls of the plan are used to fragment the courtyard space, progressively revealing moments within it. This encourages one to move through the room in order to discover what is beyond the concealed moments in space, a similar experience to navigating the medieval field. As one gets closer to the fountain, there is a point where the individual is faced with two possible trails. One is framed by the entrance to the bathing room and the other by an opening that leads to the chanting room. The possibilities of exploration give the individual freedom to react based on their own emotional responses to the condition.



Plan for the in-between room



View from the second gate framing the fountain.



View from the corridor leading to the chanting room.

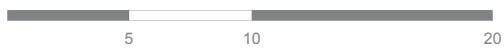
Immersion

The Bathing Room

This sequence presumes that one was slightly more compelled by the threshold leading to the bathing room; a room made up of a series of rooms. These rooms are placed within the courtyard that opens up from the last. The experience of the in-between room is still in effect until one reaches the door leading to the bathing rooms.

Bounded by the monastery and the vacant building, a former college, the compositional arrangement of the rooms generates three other open-air rooms within the courtyard. The first being the entrance to the bathing room (A), whereas the second and third are respectively for the monks (B) and for the occupants of the contiguous building (C). The trees of the courtyard are replanted to complement the open-air rooms.

The two spaces adjacent to the main hall and staircase on the ground floor of the corner building are integrative parts of the bathing rooms. The individual walks into the first room enclosed by the existing walls of the building for changing and showering purposes. This space transitions to the vestibule with seating area on both sides leading up to the first room to reveal water; a warm water basin.



Plan for the bathing room



The warm bath

The centralized room receives harsh morning light infiltrating through the vaulted roof structure while the afternoon light softly glows into the space. This bathing room is detached from any existing structure, connected to two other rooms. The one at its right is the cold bathing room. The walls of this room collide with the columns rhythmically-spaced on the façade of the adjacent monastery. A reveal between new and old structures allows light to reach the water. The lifted interior partition wall interacts with the opening of its exterior wall to allow for light to glow into the room.



The cold bath

Moving from cold to hot bath, one needs to pass through the central warm bath, left with the choice of plunging back in or walking around the water mass. The hot bathing room is a darker environment where light simultaneously penetrates an oculus and softly washes down through its lateral walls. Under the oculus is a dry platform with a drinking fountain.

Finally, one's bathing experience comes to an end with the steam room. The latter is split in two intimate rooms by a short corridor that aligns with another fountain. This fountain connects to a small basin that extends to the other side of the existing façade-wall. The basin is expressed as a small cavity cut-out from the pavement of the street. Directly above the fountain is a slit that uses a former opening of the façade reflecting diffuse light into the steam room.



The vestibule, the warm bath and the hot bath (from right to left)

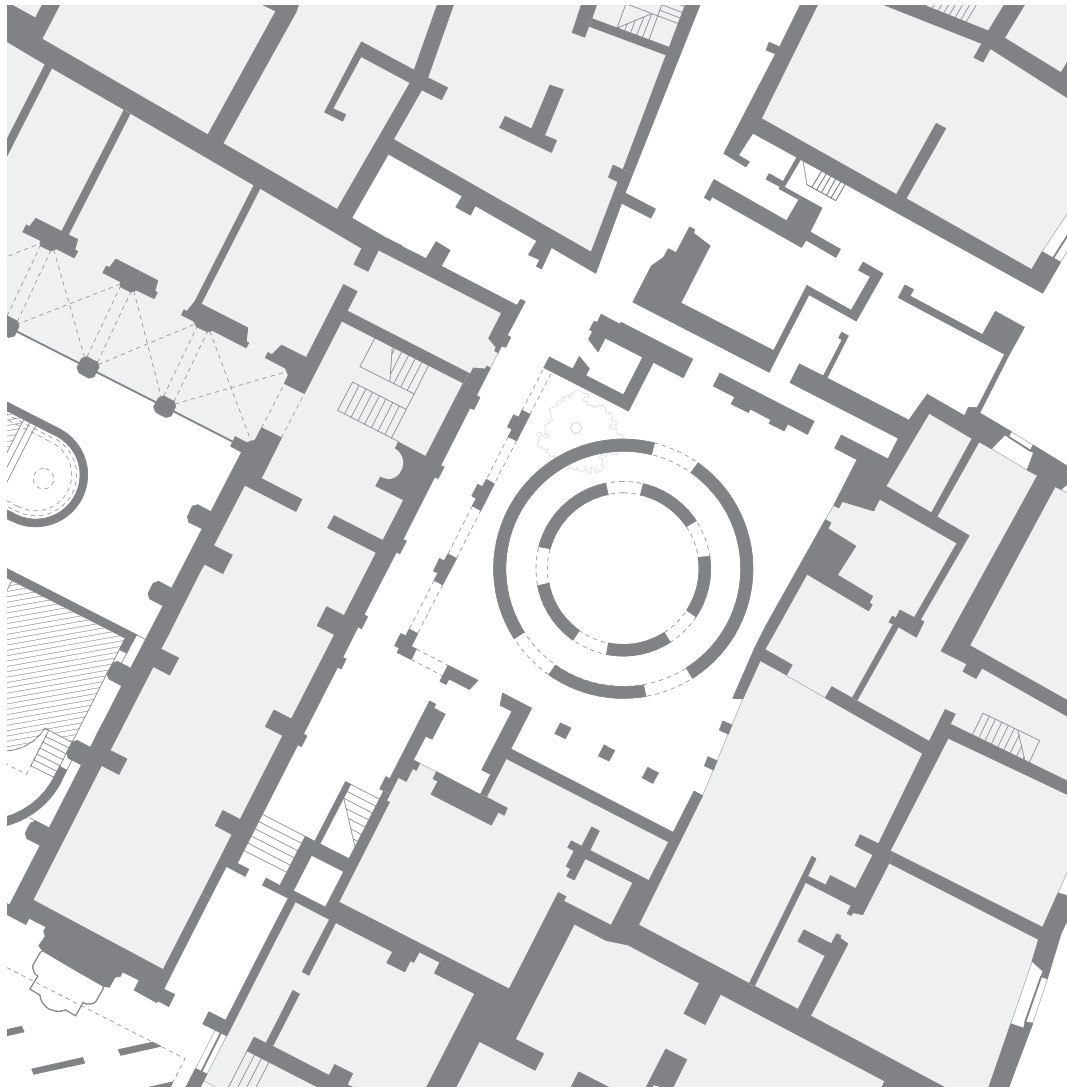
Resonance

The Chanting Room

In this sequence, the last experiential room is most likely the first that we perceive as we circumambulate the block, through sound. The chanting room is detached from the courtyard's walls; an object in space. Its openings, however, are framed to create a link between the existing access points of the surrounding buildings. The wall to the left of the room was at a certain point in time an arcade, but is currently a solid wall. The intervention also includes the carving out of the wall to reveal only the columns that re-introduces its original state, an arcade.



The arcade along the chanting room

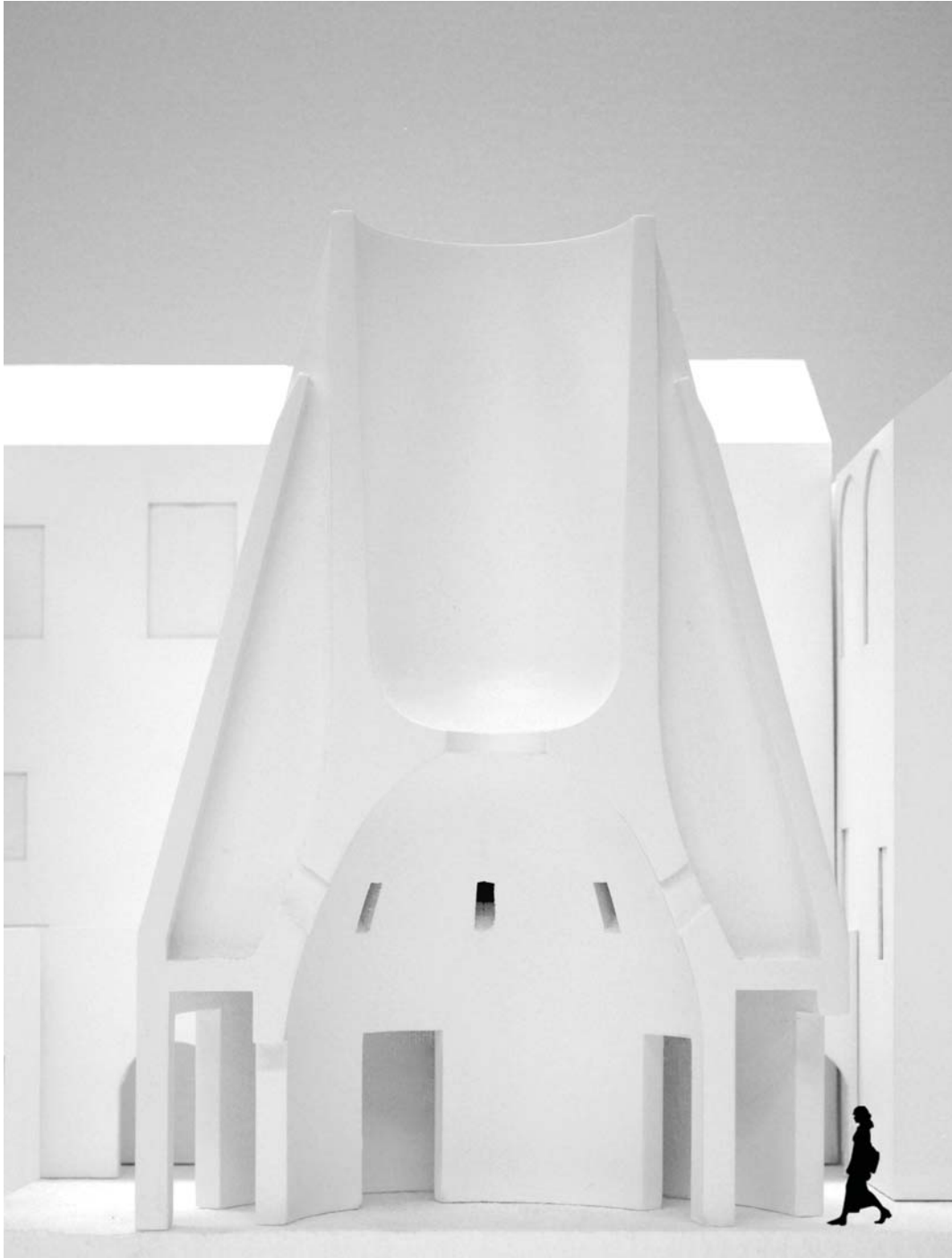


Plan for the chanting room

One dominant trait manifested in Rome is the sound of the bells of Christianity making it impossible to forget about the geopolitical significance of the church. While papal power is responsible for the city's arteries and reforms, as discussed in earlier chapters, marking its presence on the ground level; its presence is also enforced above-ground with the resonating bells.

With an understanding of this oppressive urban force, the chanting room is simultaneously a sincere, symbolic and political intervention. Although, we can perceive many alternate sounds in Rome, they mostly come from the ground level. This room breaks the resonant monopoly of Christianity on a higher level and introduces the voice of the people.

At this point it becomes important to define the choir's type of chanting. The group of singers are part of a greater choir led by an Italian singer-songwriter and researcher of *ethnomusicology*. This discipline can be summarized as the study of music in its cultural and social context. The choir's leader has taken an active role in this discipline and has personally recorded the chanting of many citizens in various Italian towns asking them to sing about their daily lives, hardships, etc. The choir rehearses these recordings (lacking conventional music structure), preserving a sense of cultural identity and its transmission for generations to come. It is in this spirit that the chanting room was envisioned; a space with the ability to project and transmit the words reflecting the reality of its own culture.

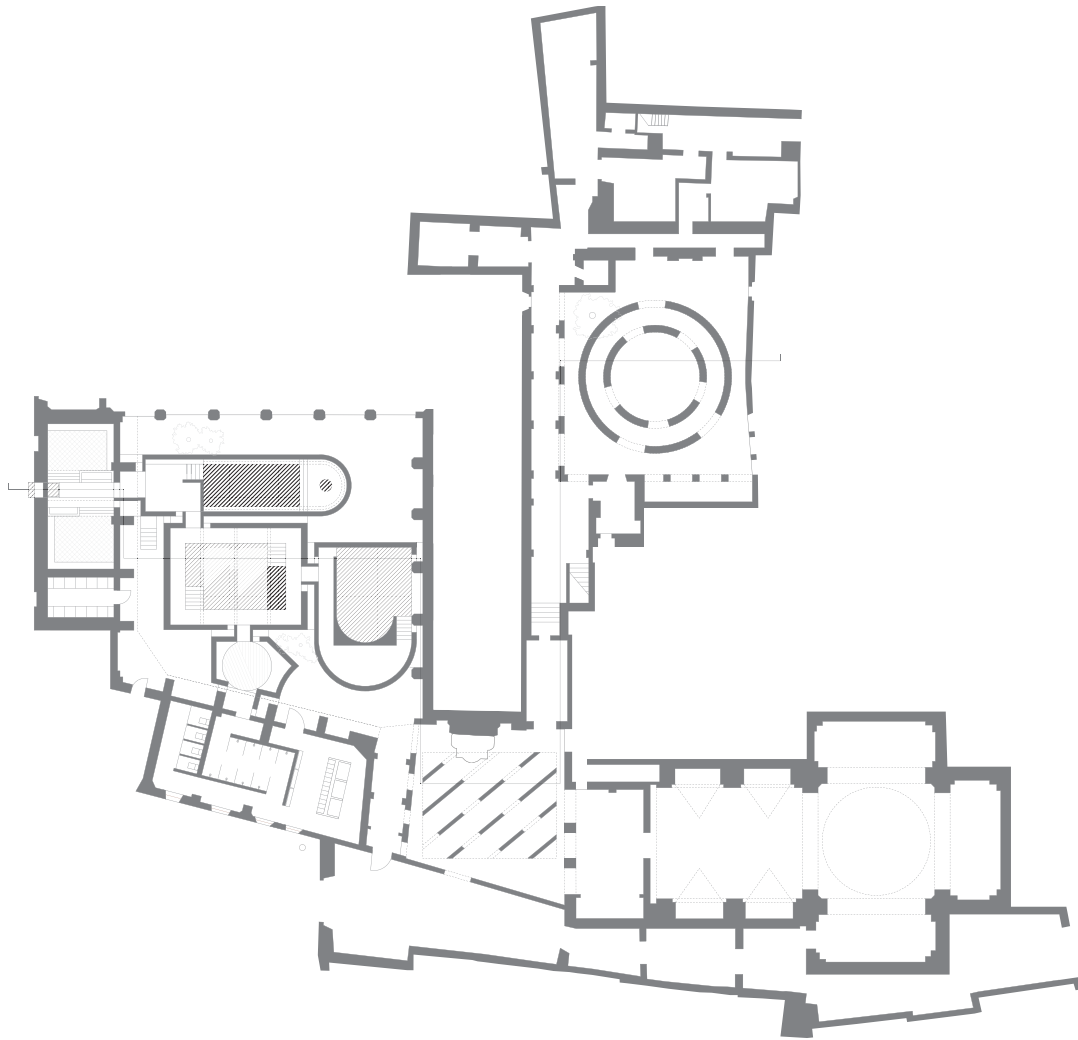


The chanting room



Section cutting through the three courtyards





Plan isolating the public space of the upper block



Collage framing the outer landscape within the block (view from the first gate)

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

This thesis reflects on the modern city that expands outward and the medieval city recomposes itself inward. Referring back to Pirrenes' claim where the first buildings made by man were essentially fortresses to secure the city the project uses the pre-existing walls of the building façades to protect the escape. The event is isolated from the socio-political order of the uncontested city and encourages its inhabitants to share authentic experience in the withdrawn layer of the courtyards. Moreover, the project engages in the depth of the inhabitable city blurring the boundaries that distinguish public from private milieux. In this context, one can discover rooms sunken within the complexity of the city fabric; engaging with the natural elements that enable us to take flight.

While the transit lines of the modern city emphasize circulation, the medieval city celebrates navigation and exploration. Interestingly enough, Piranesi's *Ichnographia* for the Campo Marzio treats the city as a field barely representing circulation while thoroughly exploring variations on the archetype of the wall. This project contributes to the textural terrain made of surfaces and boundaries, where the individual is gradually invested in the flesh of the city.

Finally, this thesis raises critical questions about the way we inhabit cities where the individual "remains alert to the increasing 'banalisation' of our urban environment that preoccupied the situationists

and (it) continues to provide a political response to the perceived failures of urban governance” (Coverley 2006, 111). In a way , this reinforces the contrast between the political territory and the domestic field; the city read from above and the one lived from the ground. Furthermore, “the small streets, and hidden routes over rooftops and through basements and back alleys used by the resistance activists in *Citta Aperta*, are directly opposed to the big boulevards and piazzas which serve as the city’ s arteries for the marching Nazi troops with their tanks” (Larmour and Spencer 2007, 366). However, “only by resisting the overview can the individual re-establish the emotional engagement with his surroundings (...) For ‘their story begins on the ground level, with footsteps,’ writes de Certeau, and it is here, not up above, that the history of the city is written” (Coverley 2006, 106)

REFERENCES

- Aureli, Pier Vittorio and Martino Tattara. 2013. *Dogma: 11 Projects*. London: AA Publications.
- Aureli, Pier Vittorio. 2011. *The Possibility of an Absolute Architecture*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Aureli, Pier Vittorio. 2008. *The Project of Autonomy: Politics and Architecture within and Against Capitalism*, edited by Temple Hoyne Buell Center for the Study of American Architecture. New York: Princeton Architectural Press.
- Bachelard, Gaston. 1956. *L'Eau et les Rêves. Essai sur l'Imagination de la Matière* Paris: Le Livre de Poche.
- Benevolo, Leonardo. 1993. *The European City*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Benjamin, Walter, and Rolf Tiedemann. 1999. *The Arcades Project*. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press.
- Benjamin, Walter, Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith. 1999. *Selected Writings. Vol. 2: 1927-1934*. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Bing Maps. Aerial image of Rome. Accessed February 14, 2016. <http://www.bing.com/maps/>.
- Brennan, Nicholas Lobo. 2015. "Studio for Immediate Spaces Sandberg Instituut, Amsterdam" Accessed on April 15. <http://www.immediatespaces.nl/2014-15/Studio3.html>
- Cassarà, Silvio, and Peter Eisenman. 2006. *Peter Eisenman : Feints*. 1st ed. Milan: Skira.
- Coverley, Merlin. 2010. *Psychogeography*. Harpenden: Pocket Essentials.
- Debord, Guy. 1994. *The Society of the Spectacle*. New York: Zone Books.
- Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. 1983. *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Krautheimer, Richard. 1983. *Three Christian Capitals: Topography and Politics*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Larmour, David H. J. and Diana Spencer, ed. 2007. *The Sites of Rome: Time, Space, Memory*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Betts, Eleanor. 2011. "Towards a Multisensory Experience of Movement in the City of Rome." In *Rome, Ostia, and Pompeii: Movement and Space*, edited by Ray Laurence and David Newsome, 120-130. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Lobell, John. 2008. *Between Silence and Light : Spirit in the Architecture of Louis I. Kahn*, ed. Louis I. Kahn. 2008 ed. Boston: Distributed in the U.S. by Random House.
- Pallasmaa, Juhani. 2011. *The Embodied Image: Imagination and Imagery in Architecture*. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons Inc.
- Pinto, John A. 2012. *Speaking Ruins: Piranesi, Architects and Antiquity in Eighteenth-Century Rome*. Michigan: Michigan University Press.
- Pirenne, Henri. 1956. *Medieval Cities: Their Origins and the Revival of Trade*. Translated by Frank D. Halsey. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Rinne, Katherine Wentworth. 2010. *The Waters of Rome: Aqueducts, Fountains, and the Birth of the Baroque City*. 1st ed.. ed. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Rossi, Aldo, and Peter Eisenman. 1982. *The Architecture of the City*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.
- Rykwert, Joseph. 1988. *The Idea of a Town: the Anthropology of Urban Form in Rome, Italy and the Ancient World*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Sadler, Simon. 1998. *The Situationist City*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- San Juan, Rose Marie. 2001. *Rome: a City out of Print* . Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Sennett, Richard. 1994. *Flesh and Stone: The Body and the City in Western Civilization*. 1st ed. New York: W.W. Norton.
- Strauss, Erwin. 2000. *Du Sens des Sens: Contribution à l'Étude des Fondements de la Psychologie*. Grenoble: Ed. Million.
- Tuan, Yi-Fu. 1998. *Escapism*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Vidler, Anthony. 2011. *The Scenes of the Street and Other Essays*. 1st ed.. ed. New York: Monacelli Press.
- Wallis de Vries, Gijs. 2014. *Archescape: On the Tracks of Piranesi*. Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Duizend & Een.
- Wordpress. "Gary Devore's - archaeologist and author." Accessed April 19, 2016. <https://garydevore.wordpress.com/2012/08/18/satyricon-7-scene-iii-the-subura/>.