OPPOSITIONS BOOKS

Introduction by Peter Eisenman
Translation by Diane Ghirardo and
Joan Ockman

Revised for the American Edition
by Aldo Rossi and Peter Eisenman

Aldo Rossi

The Architecture of the City

Once again, it is the sum of these values, including memory itself, which constitutes the structure of urban artifacts. These values have nothing to do with either organization or function taken by itself. I am inclined to believe that the way a particular function operates does not change, or changes only by necessity, and that the mediation between functional and organizational demands can occur only through form. Each time we find ourselves in the presence of real urban artifacts we realize their complexity, and this structural complexity overcomes any narrow interpretation based on function. Zoning and general organizational schemes can only be references, however useful, for an analysis of the city as a man-made object.

I now wish to return to the relationship between architecture and *locus*, first to propose some other aspects of this problem and then to consider the value of the monument in the city. We will take the Roman Forum as an example because it is a monument of fundamental importance for a comprehensive understanding of urban artifacts.[22]

The Roman Forum

The Roman Forum, center of the Roman Empire, reference point for the construction and transformation of so many cities of the classical world, and foundation of classical architecture and the science of the city practiced by the Romans, is actually anomalous with respect to the origins of Rome itself. The city's origins were at once geographical and historical. The site consisted of a low and marshy zone between steep hills. In its center, among willows and cane fields that were entirely flooded during the rains, was stagnant water; on the hills were woods and pastures. Aeneas described the sight in this way: ". . . and they saw herds of cattle lowing here and there in the Roman forum and in the elegant Carinae quarter."[23]

The Latins and Sabines settled on the Esquiline, the Viminale, and the Quirinale. These places were favorable for meetings of the peoples of Campania and Etruria as well as for settlement. Archaeologists have established that as early as the ninth century the Latins descended from the hills to dispose of their dead in the valley of the Forum, just one of the valleys of the Roman countryside, and thus the place entered into history. The necropolis discovered by Giacomo Boni in 1902–1905 at the foot of the Temple of Antoninus and Faustina constitutes the most ancient testament man has left there. First a necropolis, then the place of battles or more probably religious rites, the Forum increasingly came to be the site of a new form of life, the principle of a city being formed by tribes scattered throughout the hills who converged there and founded it.

Geographical formations indicated the way for paths, then for the roads that climbed up the valleys along the lines that were least steep (Via Sacra, Via Argiletus, Vicus Patricius), thereby charting the course of the extra-urban map. It was based not on a clear idea of urban design but instead on a structure indebted to the terrain. This link between the terrain and the conditions of the city's development subsequently persists throughout the whole history of the Forum; it is present in its very form, rendering it different from that of a city that is established by plan. The Forum's irregularity was criticized by Livy—"this is the reason that the ancient sewers, which formerly led through the public areas, now run here and there under private buildings, and the form of the city more resembles an occupied zone than one properly divided"[24]—who blamed it on the speed of reconstruction after the sack of the city by the Gauls and the impossibil-

ity of applying the *limitatio*; but in fact this kind of irregularity is characteristic of the type of growth Rome underwent and is quite similar to that of modern cities.

Around the fifth century the Forum ceased its activities as a marketplace (losing a function that had been fundamental to it) and became a true square, almost according to the dictum of Aristotle, who was writing at about this time, "The public square . . . will never be sullied by merchandise and artisans will be forbidden entrance . . . Far away and well separated from it will be the place destined as the market . . ."[25] Precisely during this period the Forum was being covered with statues, temples, monuments. Thus the valley that once had been full of local springs, sacred places, markets, and taverns now became rich with basilicas, temples, and arches, and furrowed by two great streets, the Via Sacra and the Via Nova, which were accessible from small alleys.

Even after Augustus's systematization and the enlargement of the central zone of Rome by the Forum of Augustus and the marketplace of Trajan, after Hadrian's works and until the fall of the Empire, the Forum did not lose its essential character as a meeting place, as the center of Rome; *Forum Romanum* or *Forum Magnum*, it became a specific artifact within the very heart of the city, a part that epitomized the whole. Thus Pietro Romanelli wrote, "On Via Sacra and the adjacent streets crowded with luxury stores, the people passed curiously without wanting anything in particular, without doing anything, only awaiting the arrival of the hour of the spectacles and the opening of the baths; we recall the episode of the "bore" who was so brilliantly described by Horace in his satire, '*ibam forte via Sacra . . .*' The episode was repeated thousands of times a day, every day of the year, except when some dramatic event up in the Imperial palaces on the Palatine or among the Praetorian Guards succeeded in stirring up the torpid soul of the Romans again. The Forum during the Empire was still on occasion the theater of bloody events, but they were events that almost always finished and exhausted themselves in the place where they unfolded, and one could say the same for the city itself: their consequences were stronger elsewhere than here."[26]

People passed by without having any specific purpose, without doing anything: it was like the modern city, where the man in the crowd, the idler, participates in the mechanism of the city without knowing it, sharing only in its image. The Roman Forum thus was an urban artifact of extraordinary modernity; in it was everything that is inexpressible in the modern city. It recalls a remark of Poète's about Paris, derived from his unique knowledge of the ancient and modern history of that French city: "A breath of modernity seems to waft to us from this distant world: we have the impression that we are not much out of our own environment in cities like Alexandria or Antioch, as in certain moments we feel closer to Imperial Rome than to some medieval city."[27]

What tied the idler to the Forum, why did he intimately participate in this world, why did he become identified in the city through the city itself? This is the mystery that urban artifacts arouse in us. The Roman Forum constitutes one of the most illustrative urban artifacts that we can know: bound up as it is with the origins of the city; extremely, almost unbelievably, transformed over time but always growing upon itself; parallel to the history of Rome as it is documented in every historical stone and legend, from the Lapis Niger to the Dioscuri; ultimately reaching us today through its strikingly clear and splendid signs.
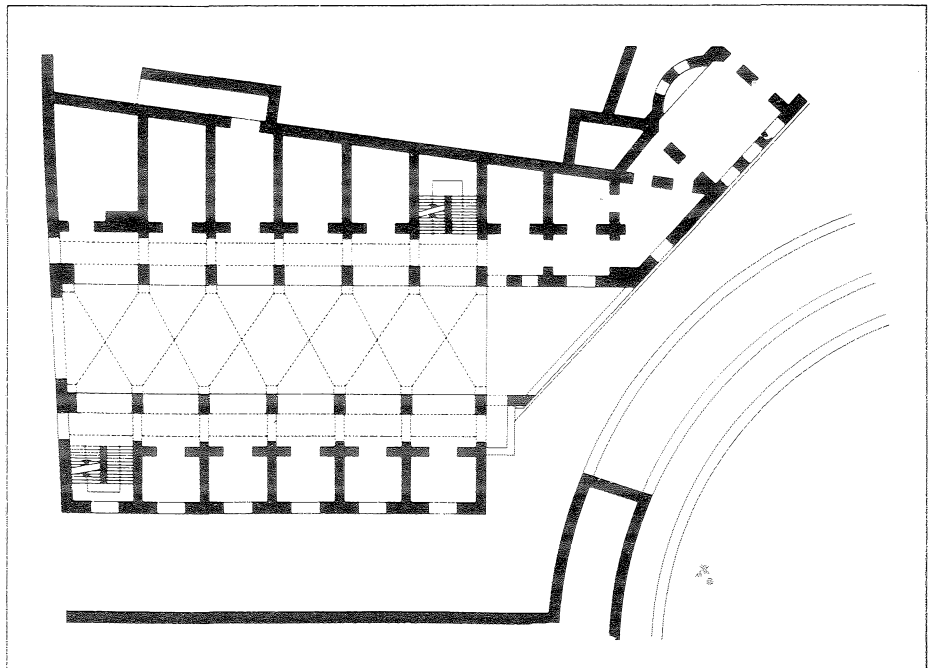
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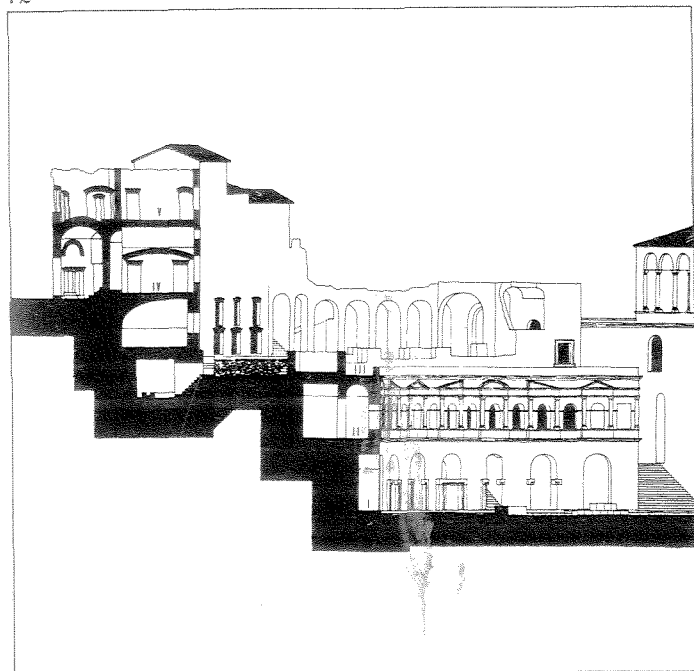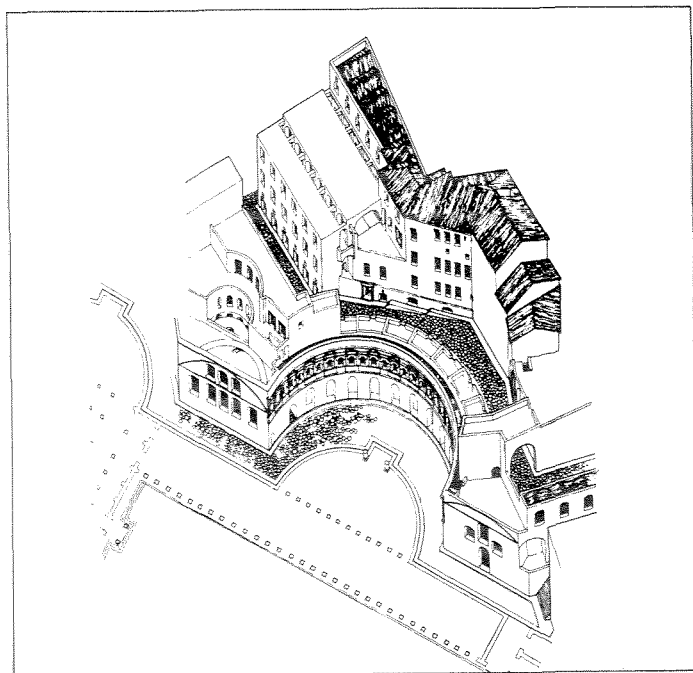
75 *The Market of Trajan.*
76 *The Market of Trajan, plan of the covered street with shops on both sides.*
77 *A part of third-century Rome, including the Stadium of Domitian, Theater of Domitian, Baths of Agrippa, and Flaminian Circus.*

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The Forum epitomizes Rome and is part of Rome and is the sum of its monuments; at the same time its uniqueness is stronger than its single monuments. It is the expression of a specific design or at least of a specific vision of the world of forms, the classical one; yet its design is also more ancient, as persistent and preexistent as the valley where the shepherds of the primitive hills gathered. I would not know how better than this to define an urban artifact. It is history and it is invention. It is also, then—and in this sense it particularly approaches the theory presented here—one of the foremost lessons of *architecture* that exists.

At this point it is appropriate to distinguish between *locus* and *context* as the latter is commonly understood in architectural and urban design discourse. The present analysis approaches the problem of the *locus* by attempting to set out an extremely rational definition of an artifact, approaching it as something which is by nature complex but which it is nonetheless necessary to attempt to clarify as the scientist does when he develops hypotheses in order to elucidate the imprecise world of matter and its laws. *Locus* in this sense is not unrelated to context; but context seems strangely bound up with illusion, with illusionism. As such it has nothing to do with the architecture of the city, but rather with the making of a scene, and as a scene it demands to be sustained directly in relation to its functions. That is, it depends on the necessary permanence of functions whose very presence serves to preserve forms as they are and to immobilize life, saddening us like would-be tourists of a vanished world.

It is hardly surprising that this concept of context is espoused and applied by those who pretend to preserve the historical cities by retaining their ancient facades or reconstructing them in such a way as to maintain their silhouettes and colors and other such things; but what do we find after these operations when they are actually realized? An empty, often repugnant stage. One of the ugliest things I have seen is the reconstruction of a small part of Frankfurt on the principle of maintaining Gothic volumes alongside pseudo-modern or pseudo-antique architecture. What became of the suggestiveness and illusion that seemed so much to inform the initial proposal I do not know.

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Of course, when we speak of "monuments" we might equally well mean a street, a zone, even a country; but if one of these is to be preserved everything must be preserved, as the Germans did in Quedlinburg. If life in Quedlinburg has taken on a kind of obsessive quality, it is justifiable because this little city is a valuable museum of Gothic history (and an extraordinary museum of much German history); otherwise there is no justification. A typical case which relates to this subject is that of Venice, but this city merits a special treatment, and I do not wish to linger now on it. It has been much debated elsewhere and requires the support of very specific examples. I will therefore return to the Roman Forum once more as a point of departure.

In July of 1811, Count De Tournon, prefect of Rome during Napoleon I's occupation of Italy, expounded his program for the Roman Forum to Count De Montalivet, Minister of the Interior:

"*Restoration work on the ancient monuments.* As soon as one addresses this issue, the first thing that comes to mind is the *Forum*, the celebrated place in which such monuments have been amassed and associated with the greatest memories. The restoration of these monuments consists above all in freeing them from the earth that covers their lower parts, connecting them to one

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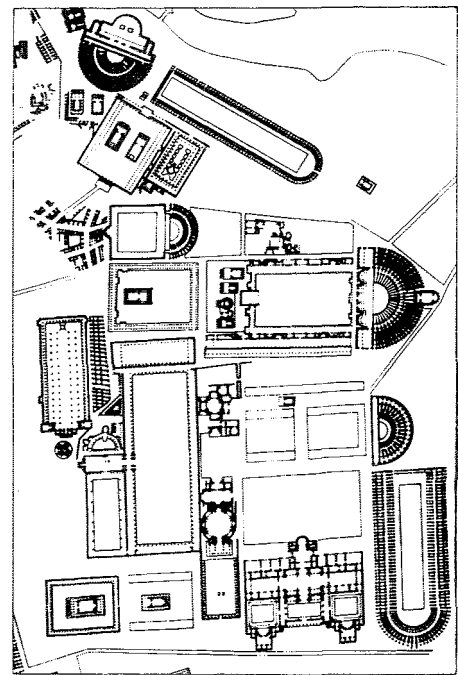
another, and finally, rendering access to them easy and pleasurable. . . .
"The second part of the project envisions the connection of the monuments to one another through an irregularly organized passageway. I have proposed a plan, drawn up under my direction, for one type of connection, to which I must refer you. . . . I will only add that the Palatine hill, an immense museum entirely covered with the magnificent remains of the palaces of the Caesars, must necessarily be comprised partly of a planted garden, a garden to enclose the monuments, for it is full of memories and will certainly be unique in the world."[28]

De Tournon's idea was not realized. It would probably have sacrificed most of the monuments to the design of the garden, depriving us of one of the purest of all architectural experiences; but as a consequence of his idea, and with the advent of scientific archaeology, the problem of the Forum became a major urban problem related to the very continuity of the modern city. It became necessary to conceive of the study of the Forum no longer as a study of its single monuments but as an integrated research into the entire complex, to consider the Forum not as the sum of its architecture but as a total urban artifact, as a permanence like that of Rome itself. It is significant that De Tournon's idea found support and was developed during the Roman Republic of 1849. Here too it was the event of a revolution that caused antiquity to be read in a modern way; in this sense, it is closely related to the experience of the revolutionary Parisian architects. However, the idea of the Forum proved to be even stronger than political events, and it persisted with various vicissitudes even under the Papal restoration.

When we consider this problem today from an architectural standpoint, many issues come to mind which demonstrate the value of the archaeological considerations of the last century relative to the reconstruction of the Forum and its reunification with the Forums of Augustus and of Trajan, and we can see the argument for actually reusing this enormous complex. But for present purposes it is sufficient to show how this great monument is still today a part of Rome which summarizes the ancient city, a moment in the life of the modern city, and a historically incomparable urban artifact. It makes us reflect that if the Piazza San Marco in Venice were standing with the Doge's Palace in a completely different city, as the Venice of the future might be, and if we found ourselves in the middle of this extraordinary urban artifact, we would not feel less emotion and would be no less participants in the history of Venice. I remember in the postwar years the sight of Cologne Cathedral in that destroyed city; nothing can conjure up the power that this work, standing intact among the ruins, had on the imagination. Certainly the pallid and brutal reconstruction of the surrounding city is unfortunate, but it cannot touch the monument, just as the vulgar arrangements in many modern museums can annoy but still do not deform or alter the value of what is exhibited.

This recollection of Cologne naturally must be understood only in an analogical sense. The analogy of the value of monuments in destroyed cities serves mainly to clarify two points: first, that it is not the context or some illusionistic quality that enables us to understand a monument; and second, that only by comprehending the monument as a singular urban artifact, or by contrasting it with other urban artifacts, can we attain a sense of the architecture of the city.

The significance of all this is epitomized, in my opinion, in Sixtus V's plan of Rome. Here the basilicas become the authentic places of the city; together they constitute a structure that derives its complexity from their value as primary ar-

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tifacts, 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."[29]

Sigfried Giedion, perhaps the first to understand the extreme importance of this plan, described it as follows: "His was no paper plan. Sixtus V had Rome, as it were, in his bones. He himself trudged the streets the pilgrims had to follow, and experienced the distances between points, and when, in March 1588, he opened the new road from the Coliseum to the Lateran, he walked with his cardinals all the way to the Lateran Palace then under construction. Sixtus spread out his streets organically, wherever they were demanded by the topographical structure of Rome. He was also wise enough to incorporate with great care whatever he could of the work of his predecessors."[30]
Giedion continues, "In front of his own buildings—the Lateran and the Quirinal—and wherever his streets came together, Sixtus V made provision for ample open space, sufficient for much later development. . . . By clearing around the Antonine Column and tracing the outline of the Piazza Colonna (1588), he created the present-day center of the city. Trajan's Column near the Coliseum with its enlarged surrounding square was a link between the old city and the new. . . . The instinct for civic design of the Pope and his architect is demonstrated again in their selection of a new site for the obelisk at just the right distance from the unfinished cathedral. . . .
"The last of the four obelisks that Sixtus V was able to set up was given perhaps the most subtle position of all. Placed at the northern entrance to the city, it marked the confluence of three main streets (as well as the often projected but never executed final extension of the Strada Felice). Two centuries later the Piazza del Popolo crystallized around this spot. The only other obelisk to occupy such a dominating position is that in the Place de la Concorde in Paris, set up in 1836."[31]

I believe that in this passage Giedion, whose personal contribution to the world of architecture has always been extraordinary, says many things about the city in general that go well beyond the plan under consideration. His comment that the first plan was not a paper plan but rather a plan derived from immediate, empirical experience is significant. Significant also are his remarks that the plan was, although fairly rigid, still attentive to the topographical structure of the city, and above all, that even in its revolutionary character, or by virtue of it, the plan incorporated and gave value to all of the preceding initiatives that had validity, that *were* in the city.

Added to this is his consideration on obelisks and their locations, those signs around which the city crystallized. The architecture of the city, even in the classical world, probably never again achieved such a unity of creation and comprehension. An entire urban system was conceived and realized along the lines of both practical and ideal forces, and it was thoroughly marked by points of union and future aggregation. The forms of its monuments and its topographical form remained stable within a changing system (recall the proposed transformation of the Coliseum into a wool factory), as if with the placement of the obelisks

in their particular places the city was being conceived in both the past and the future.

It might be objected that in presenting the example of Rome I am only concerned with an ancient city. Such a criticism can be answered with two different arguments: first, that a rigorously observed premise of this study is that no distinction can be made between the ancient city and the modern one, between a before and an after, because the city is considered as a man-made object; and second, that there exist few instances of cities which display exclusively modern urban artifacts—or at least such cities are by no means typical, since an inherent characteristic of the city is its permanence in time.

To conceive of a city as founded on primary elements is to my mind the only rational principle possible, the only law of logic that can be extracted from the city to explain its continuation. As such it was embraced during the Enlightenment, and as such it was rejected by the destructive progressivist theories of the city. One thinks of Fichte's critique of Western cities, where the defense of the communitarian (*Volk*) character of the Gothic city already contains the reactionary critique of subsequent years (Spengler) and the conception of the city as a matter of destiny. Although I have not dealt with these theories or visions of the city here, it is clear how they have been translated into an idea of city without formal references, and how they contrast, more or less consciously on the part of their modern imitators, with the Enlightenment emphasis on plan. From this point of view one can also make a critique of the Romantic Socialists, the Phalansterists, and others who proposed various concepts of self-sufficient community. These maintained that society could no longer express any transcendent values, or even any common representative ones, since the utilitarian and functional reduction of the city (to dwellings and services) had become the "modern" alternative to earlier formulations.

I believe instead that precisely because the city is preeminently a collective fact it is defined by and exists in those works that are of an essentially collective nature. Although such works arise as a means of constituting the city, they soon become an end, and this is their being and their beauty. The beauty resides both in the laws of architecture which they embody and in the collective's reasons for desiring them.

Monuments; Summary of the Critique of the Concept of Context

So far in this chapter we have principally considered the idea of *locus* in the sense of a singular place and event, the relationship of architecture to the constituting of the city, and the relationship between context and monument. As we have said, the concept of *locus* must be the object of specific research involving the whole history of architecture. The relationship between *locus* and design must also be analyzed in order to clarify the apparently unresolvable conflict between design as a rational element and an imposition, and the local and specific nature of place. This relationship takes in the concept of uniqueness.

As for the term *context*, we find that it is mostly an impediment to research. To context is opposed the idea of the monument. Beyond its historically determined existence, the monument has a reality that can be subjected to analysis; moreover, we can design a "monument." However, to do so requires an architecture, that is to say, a style. Only the existence of an architectural style permits fundamental choices, and from these choices the city develops.

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