Gijs Wallis de Vries

CITTÀ PENSILE:
PIRANESI'S ELUSIVE CONCEPT OF THE 'PENSILE CITY'

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the oeuvre of the Italian architect and engraver, G.B. Piranesi (1720-1778), and in particular the Campo Marzio. *Conceptualizing its architectural and urban idea, it addresses architects, urban designers, architecture historians and theorists. They will (re)discover the singular* ichnographia Campi Martii, *a large map engraved by Piranesi of ancient imperial Rome, in a trans-historical perspective and in the light of recent theory. The article consists of a prelude and ten paragraphs, grouped in three parts. The illustrations, indispensable to grasp Piranesi's 'elusive' vision, and a source of wonder in themselves, are selected in synchrony with the argument of the pensile city. Relevant scholarship is briefly reviewed and further relayed to the footnotes. The prelude introduces the* Campo Marzio, *which, above all other possible considerations, must be seen as a work of art. Then, two paragraphs introduce the main themes of the article: the concept of the pensile city and the interest of the problem it poses, then and now, which is the 'scaping' of landscape in the city. The second part consists of three paragraphs developing various related themes, concerning the relations of words and objects, of architecture and infrastructure, and of figure and ground. The third part delves conceptual aspects of the pensile city from their inscription in the ichnographia, in three paragraphs that analyse the flightline and the fugue, the correlation of plan and perspective, specifically in the* Carceri *and the* Vedute di Roma, *and the rare kind of graphic realism. The last two paragraphs propose a conclusion. The first resumes Piranesi's polemical position and poetical practice. The second is a note on history and theory, stating the pensile city is topical today, precisely as utopia.*

BIOGRAPHY

Gijs Wallis de Vries (1952) studied architecture and urbanism in Delft (Netherlands). He practiced as urban renewal consultant in Rotterdam. In 1990 he obtained his PhD at the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Eindhoven with a dissertation on Piranesi and the idea of the magnificent city. *As associate professor, he taught architectural history and theory and tutored Master's seminars and studios. He presented papers on conferences (ACSA, IASTE, EFLA, IGU). Articles appeared in architecture magazines (Archis, Forum, Oase) and other journals. He also wrote a number of (chapters of) books. In 2014, he wrote* Archescape, On the Tracks of Piranesi *(Amsterdam: 1001 Publishers) in which he speculated on Piranesi's 'Città Pensile', a concept he currently elaborates in new contexts.*

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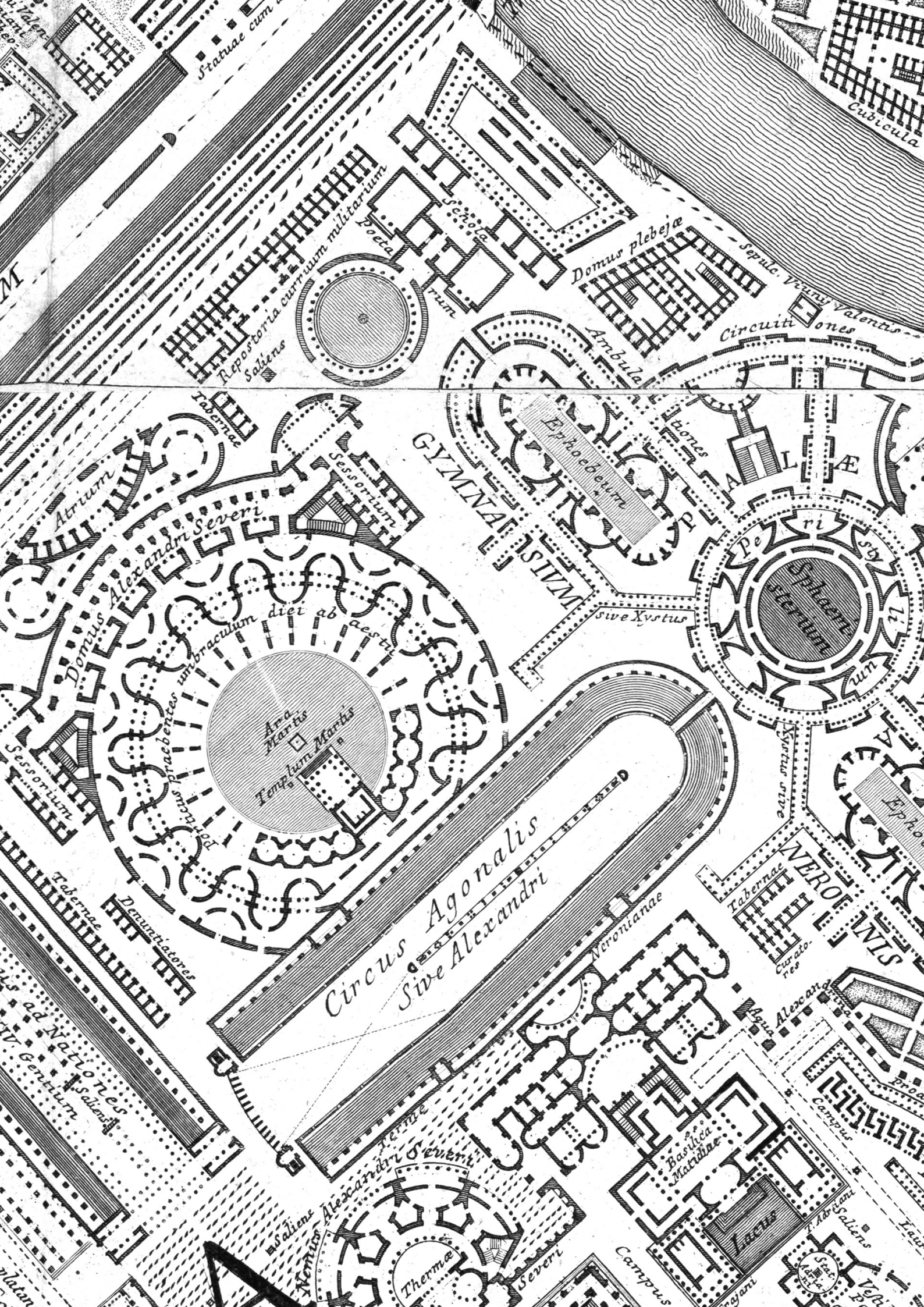
When we look at an engraving by Piranesi, it is first of all a work of art that meets our eye. Before other contemplations enter our consciousness, such as the theoretical concept we shall now consider, or historical interpretations that are equally discussed, or an evaluation of the vision of the city in the light of current issues, each and every confrontation with a work of Piranesi is an experience of art. Piranesi was a great artist and his works still draw massive and scholarly attention. In a constant flow of exhibitions and publications, his vision of ancient Rome - ruined and resurrected –takes centre stage. Yet, a discussion of its concept awaits a trans-disciplinary and trans-historical theory able to account for a possible revival of what we shall call the pensile city.[01] The suspense in space of Piranesi's vision of Rome and its pending fate in time may well be sensed by a public that intuits its haunting past and its evasive future. The sheer vertigo of Piranesi's vision may incite flights of fantasy towards a city to come, while affecting our perception of existing cities around the world. If the pensile city is a *fiction*, Piranesi definitely ensured it is first and foremost a *fact*: a work of art for our eyes to wander over and for our minds to wonder about.

THE CONCEPT AND THE PROBLEM

Launched in 1762 by Gianbattista Piranesi with a spectacular map of ancient Rome forming the centrepiece of the Campo Marzio, the concept of the *città pensile* or pensile city that Piranesi coined for it, did not take flight for a long time.[02] Contemporaries saw it as an archaeological study, the next generation rejected it as inaccurate, and then as pure fantasy. In 1978, at the bicentenary of Piranesi's death, his dazzling vision of Rome became a source of inspiration in the context of the postmodern critique of *tabula rasa* planning and a new awakening of the historical layering of cities. Manfredo Tafuri, the Italian architectural theorist, saw it as a polemical statement against classicism and a lucid negation of the power of architects to control the form of the city.[03] He interpreted the 'violated order' of Piranesi's city as comment on the impotence of architecture to face rising capitalism. At the occasion of the bicentenary of Piranesi in 1978, John Wilton Ely, the British Piranesi scholar, described the Campo Martius, *contra* Tafuri, as holding potential to shape a megalopolis.[04] The interpretations of Wilton-Ely stating the positive creativity of *Campo Marzio* and Tafuri postulating its 'negative utopia' may coexist, in the sense that the destruction of Classicism prepares Romanticism—Piranesi is often described as its precursor. Using an expression coined by Piranesi himself, I proposed the pensile city as an absolutely positive concept.[05] Dedicated to Robert Adam, a young Scottish architect about to start his career in London and Edinburgh after a tour to Italy, the Campo Marzio can be read as a treatise on architecture, dressed in archaeological clothes.[06] My interpretation vaguely resonated in academic circles, and was applied in wonderful student projects. If the concept of the pensile city is in the air, will it ever land in the real city or is it a flimsy idea destined to remain an imaginary city inspiring flights of fantasy? Is it a concept at all? Gilles Deleuze would have said that a concept that does not address a problem is not interesting.[07] What is the interest of the pensile city? What problem does it address? For


Statuae cum
Cubicula
Schola
Poeta
rum
Repostoria currium militarium
Saliens
Domus plebejae
sepulc. Vruni
Valentis
Circuiti
ones
Ambula
Tabernae
Sessorium
Atrium
Domus Alexandri Severi
GYMNASIUM
Ephoebeum
tiones
ALÆ
Peristylium
Sphaeristerium
sive Xystus
umbraculum diei ab aestu
Ara Martis
Templum Martis
Porticus praebentes
Sessorium
Tabernae
Denuntiatores
Circus Agonalis
Sive Alexandri
Neronianae
Xystus sive
Ephoebeum
Tabernae
NERONIS
Curatores
Aqua Alexandrina
Basilica Matidiae
Campus
Lacus
Thermae Severi
Campus
Saliens
Templum Alexandri Severi
Nymphaeum
Tabernae
Sessorium
Saliens
Templum Gentium
Templum ad Nationes
Saliens

Piranesi, it was the revision of Vitruvian dogma in the light of archaeology. He intervened in the debate on the classical orders, inaugurated by Perrault a century before, and not only subscribed to his conclusion that the proportions were arbitrary and conventional, but also defended freedom of invention regarding ornamentation. He attacked rigorists, ridiculed purists, and turned bizarre into a verb: 'imbizzarrire'.[08] The study of antiquity must not lead to slavish imitation but incite 'glorious emulation'.[09] Apart from style, what other problem could the pensile city have addressed? In the eighteenth-century architecture was inseparable from archaeology, and therefore knowledge of the exemplary ancients was critical, and a revision of it mattered hugely. Architecture was also identical with the design of cities, and in this respect, as we shall see, the fragmentation of the form of the city in the *Campo Marzio* is a shocking statement.

CITY AND LANDSCAPE

Throughout his works, Piranesi has stated that architecture must serve the interest of the public, calling the Romans exemplary in that respect. They knew how to build "per l'utile, per la permanenza, e per lo stupore" ("for utility, for durability, and for amazement").[10] If the unity of utility, solidity, and beauty is the issue, the question arises to *whom* it may concern. Piranesi dedicated the *Campo Marzio* to Robert Adam after having deleted a previous dedication to Lord Charlemont who failed to fulfil his promise to sponsor the publication.[11] Clearly, Piranesi believes architecture *ought to* concern those holding political and economic power, but if they fail as client or sponsor, it *still* concerns the architect, who is responsible for the free exercise of a noble profession.[12] If the problem addressed by the concept of the pensile city was the position of architects (as designers) and the status of architecture (as a body of knowledge), it would definitely be a matter of concern to the practice of architecture.[13] At the time there was no such thing as *urbanism*, which only became a distinct discipline in the nineteenth century.[14] From the onset, urbanism relied on the concept of *planning*, and a concept such as the pensile city would have held no interest for it, since in its view the proper form of the city must be derived from rational planning. Quite the opposite of scientific positivism, Romanticism loved the doom and gloom of Piranesi's etchings, inspiring reveries like those of Thomas de Quincey, who evoked the labyrinthine aspect of cities, both spatial and spiritual.[15]

Grounded in Rome, the pensile city transcended the history and geography that gave birth to it, as it took flight on the wings of Robert Adam, whose first project may be called 'pensile'.[16] On the eve of the French Revolution, the pensile city also landed in a project for an ideal city in France. Designed by Ledoux, it was partly realized as a salt town, but the simple concentric form hardly matched the complexity of the *Campo Marzio*. In the late twentieth century, the paradigm of the 'archipelago city' of Ungers and Koolhaas might count as an avatar of the pensile city, if it would focus less on generic typologies. Piranesi's extravaganza somehow relives in incredibly dense cities like Hong Kong, or in projects like the urban walkway on an abandoned railway viaduct in Paris and the highline in New York. Green reuse of industrial heritage pursues the way the pensile city *allows nature to penetrate into the built-up world: an architectural landscape*. Landscape is a cultural construct expressing our relation to nature in poems, pictures, and gardens.[17] Landscape culture offers a pastoral escape from the tumult of the city. To enjoy landscape is to celebrate the outside of the city, an escape that becomes destructive, as soon as it consumes the paradises it seeks. Countering this fatal quest, the pensile city would offer an escape from the city *inside* the city. Since antiquity, landscape is an art that also has its place inside buildings, in paintings, and its place in the city, in parks. As we shall see, the pensile character opens the city up to nature, liberating architecture to 'scape' both landscape and escape inside the city.[18] The concept of the pensile city transcends the opposition of city and countryside. Suspended between metropolis and wilderness, the pensile city is a place whose inhabitants roam among floating architectures surfing the waves of the in-between or 'terrain vague'.[19] In French 'vague' means both *vague* and *wave*, while in Italian, 'vaga' denotes the beauty we have no word for.

WORDS AND OBJECTS

> 'Nature is a temple, where living columns
> Sometimes utter confused words,
> Man wanders in a forest of symbols
> That watch him with familiar gazes.' [20]

As Piranesi wrote in a letter to Nicola Giobbe, whom he thanks for introducing him to the treasures of Rome, ruins are speaking. Did he only imagine that they speak? Stones do not speak our language, unless through inscriptions,

01:
Ichnographia Campi Martii (Map of the Field of Mars), detail, G.B. Piranesi, 1762.

but Piranesi renders brick and marble like animated objects. The ruins he loves are objects that speak to us, subjects. In the same letter, Piranesi recounts what the ruins speak about: 'that blissful perfection' ('quella beata perfezione'). To him ruins are not objects for melancholic contemplation, as they were for Gibbon, when he recalled that 'I sat musing amidst the ruins of the Capitol' when inspired to write 'The history of the Decline and fall of the Roman Empire'.[21] On the contrary, Piranesi perceives 'Roman magnificence' ('magnificenza Romana') and enthuses about 'that Queen of Cities' ('questa Regina delle Città'), which occupied such a vast and wide space ('vasta ampiezza di spazio'). If Piranesi makes the ruins speak to us, he can do so because they already speak.[22] That is why neither he nor we are the subjects but those objects speaking of a 'blissfully perfect' city. When these subject-objects come alive in the etchings, they bewitch us – another word for inspiration. What is inspiring is that stones do appear to have a spirit, and so does the copper that Piranesi etches, and the paper too, on which the metempsychosis of the stones is printed. We shall see how the *ichnographia*, the large map of Piranesi's atlas of the Campo Marzio, literally meaning 'writing of traces', emulates the *Forma Urbis*, the giant marble map displayed on a wall at the *Forum Romanum*—a true urban object.[23]

FIGURES OF MAGNIFICENCE

For Piranesi, magnificence meant more than greatness, in *Della Magnificenza ed Architettura de' Romani*, he equalled Roman architecture with magnificence.[24] In line with this treatise, published the year before the *Campo Marzio*, Piranesi celebrated the magnificence of the imperial city in it, culminating in the mausoleums of two deified emperors, Augustus and Hadrian. Even if they have a complex order themselves, they do not impose an order on the city. Nor does their awesome presence sweep away 'cubicula' and other tiny cells that keep close company to these and other grand complexes. There is another feature that nibbles at them, without diminishing their stature, and that is the empty in-between. Smallness and bigness coexist, as do form and formlessness. If the pensile city is composed of buildings, and if the mausoleums occupy extensive grounds, they never make up a city. Many complexes include atriums, gardens, porticoes and other open-air spaces, but no building, however big, is like a city. In the renaissance, Alberti conceived a building as a city, and vice versa, compared streets to corridors, and squares to rooms, but this analogy does not apply to the pensile city. Such an analogy does hold true for the famous map of Rome by Nolli, a contemporary of Piranesi.[25] Its seamless pattern of built form and urban counter form is absent from the jumping patterns of the Campo Marzio. There is no 'poché' or black-hatched mass that frames a space left white, and there are no forms to articulate the 'fond' or ground. In the *ichnographia* every figure exists by itself, and is independent from the ground, which it neither encloses nor discloses.[26] Symbolizing the marriage of the realm of death and the seasonal life of nature, the precinct of Hades and Proserpina touches the ground only lightly as its concave and convex figure dances around the 'Terentius occulens Aram Ditis et Proserpinae', the sacred hillock hiding an entrance to the underworld.

THE MAZE AND THE GROUND

The *Campo Marzio* is a maze of forums, theatres, stadiums, temples, sacred groves, graves, mausoleums, museums, libraries, zoos, baths, porticoes for aimless strolls, and gardens for carefree lingering... It is not a residential zone, and houses are few and far between, while the odd shop, factory or brothel hides between the great and the grand. And there are no roads![27] The most striking absence is that of the Via Flaminia, still present today in the Corso, which continues as Via Flaminia north of the Piazza del Popolo. In Piranesi's plan it begins as Via Lata, but disappears in the Forum of Marcus Aurelius. Stopped by the huge Augustan Sundial and the vast Mausoleum of Augustus, it appears to pop up in the *Equiria*, but that is a racing course and not a road. Piranesi was aware of his deviant view, on which he dwells extensively in the text, alleging precise topographical reasons that led him to situate the Via Flaminia up the hills.[28] And there indeed we find it on the plan as the only road worth the name. Convincing or not, the fact remains that Piranesi leaves the Campo Marzio otherwise devoid of roads; it is a pedestrian zone.[29] Even if we read the white space between the buildings as paved (distinguished from rough terrain, which is hatched), it is hard to imagine how the crowds would move about. The *Via Triumphalis*, the ceremonial procession from the Forum to the Temple of Mars is indicated by a dotted line zigzagging through vast architectural complexes. It crosses the Tiber not over the Pons Aelius in the axis of the Mausoleum of Hadrian (today's Ponte S. Angelo), but over a bridge next to it (no more extant). Sidestepping the order of the

mausoleum complex, on which it would offer a diagonal view (Piranesi's preferred perspective), it turns left to approach a complex polygon that enshrines the Temple of Mars. The bridges, their aesthetical and constructive aspects dramatically documented in the *Antichità Romane*, stand alone, heavily grounded, lightly jumping over the Tiber.[30] The aqueducts, exalted by Piranesi throughout his oeuvre, feature as dotted tracks going their own way, now and then interrupted by the pools, fountains, and baths they supply with water. Last but not least of the infrastructural works that the Romans boast, there are the sewers. The biggest, the Cloaca Maxima, was showered with praise in *Della Magnificenza*: it had survived earthquakes, floods, and ruins tumbling upon it.[31] Since it lies to the south of the Campo Marzio, it does not feature on the ichnographia, neither do other underground structures, although they are depicted in some of the views that accompany the plan.[32] This leads us to assume a maze of tunnels that transport not only water, but also people – an underground transport system, the pensile city being 'navigable underneath'. The infrastructure of the pensile city must have a logic of its own, distinct from that of buildings, which in their turn remain free to deploy the most fantastic figures. Deviating from the usual classical typologies, they explore symmetry, axiality, and centrality to excess, while composing figures of bold asymmetry, eccentricity, an-axiality, and other exceptions to classical geometry. And although the central part of the Campo Marzio is more or less orthogonal, a-parallel deviations occur from the north-south and the east-west axes, sacred to Etruscan city foundations, which the Romans followed up in the *cardo* and *decumanus*, here only inscribed in the Place of the Solstice. Strangely, the cartographical *wind rose* is smitten on top of the map like a meteor. Another unsettling feature is the *crack* in the upper right of the plan, which suggests a reconstruction of the ancient *forma urbis*. As the latter reveals its illusion, the former shows it as cosmic plane. All the while the Tiber moves along, as quivering hatchings conjure up how it flows under a bridge, passes a ship yard, lingers in a swimming pool, and curves around a ship-shaped island.

FLIGHT AND FUGUE

As we have seen, the pensile city is composed of intricate geometries, but they do not striate the Campo Marzio as a whole, which has no orthogonal or radial order. Deleuze and Guattari opposed striated and smooth space, the former characterised by lines of connection and by lines of division, and the latter by fault lines and flightlines that cross connections and open up divisions.[33] Whereas they conceived striated and smooth as a contradictory couple, Piranesi deploys their synergy in a joint composition. And although they accorded priority to the flightline, owing to its ability to be ever on the move, its movement would exhaust itself if it did not accord with a composition.[34] We may not see any flightlines as such in the Campo Marzio, although we detect fault lines where figures are cut off at the edge and crumble like ruins, and in the ichnographia as a whole, 'cracked' at the top right, clamped together as the restored 'forma urbis', found in fragments no archaeologist has been able to put together again. Are the flightlines to be found *outside* the striated figures, traversing the white and in the rough in-between, going beyond the lines that frame them? Surely, we may surmise them there, but we should also look for flightlines *inside* the striated figures, active within their doubled symmetries and exalted axes, which, besides weaving connections, jump orthogonal divisions and parallel formations in order to juxtapose divergent forms and generate the magnetic adjacencies that propel our gaze to the next figure and further and further. Like in a *fugue*, the Campo Marzio is composed of several themes, their introductory exposition, their fugal texturing, including an accelerated *stretto*, and a concluding superposition of themes. In this polyphonic development striated and smooth space form a *counterpoint* and not a contradiction. Thus, if the mausoleum of Hadrian, pompously announced in the bird's eye view frontispiece, constitutes the first theme, and the mausoleum of Augustus the second theme, and if the two themes are developed and 'stringed' in the rest of the map, then what could be their conclusion? The figure that resumes and superposes the themes figures on the last of the six plates that make up the *ichnographia*, beginning at the upper left, continuing to the lower left, then to the lower right, and continuing upwards. The axial configuration of the first and the radial configuration of the second theme are coupled in the triangle called 'Circulus Ludus', and the hexagon called 'Officinae machinarum militarium'. This triangulation is enhanced by symbolic features. The round atrium in the centre of the hexagon contains the 'Aedes Vulcani', the sanctuary of the God of metallurgy, the maker of weapons and wonders. In front of the arsenal, the dedication of the Campo to Mars, the God of War, is coupled with a tribute to Venus, the Goddess of Love. The temples of the two lovers stand on either side of a temple of Jupiter, the God of Heavens who gathers clouds


349
CARCERI
INVENZIONE
PIRANESI

and brandishes lightning. The embrace of the arsenal by the playground manifests the transition of the Tiber valley from exercise to leisure. The way the river nibbles at one of the three circles resumes the melody of the entire plan. The feature that affects all the keys of the fugal composition of the *ichnographia*, is the crack that runs through the upper 'circulus' and leaves us in suspense. The suspense is positive. When we stare in the abyss that opens up in the crack we realize, in a split second, this is an illusion caused precisely by the act of map making. The crack is part of its art. It would be nonsense to interpret it as an ironic gesture that casts doubt on the entire project. The crack makes sense as it expresses the vertiginous fact that in architecture the ground is never given. What is given is the natural terrain (and Piranesi is accurate in rendering its topography), which the architect leaves after having accepted it, to establish smooth levels rising on foundations that dig into the rough earth in order to lift the building up to celestial ceilings and flying roofs. Here and there on the ichnographia dotted crosses mark a hovering vault. Hanging above the ground, the pensile city itself is groundless.

MAP AND PERSPECTIVE

The ichnographia of the Campo Marzio is an exceptional kind of map, as it represents every building in *plan*. Perspectives supply additional information, but only partially. Clearly the plan comes first, as a means of representation. How do plan and perspective correlate? We can best investigate this question by looking at the *Carceri* and the *Vedute di Roma*. The *Carceri* are prisons, but they do not have cells and visitors walk freely in these endless underground spaces, which allow glimpses of the world above. It is like a city underground. The series of highly dramatic engravings was anonymously published when Piranesi was young, and again in an elaborate version under his own name at the time when he had become known as *vedutista* and archaeologist.[35] The *Carceri d'invenzione* constitute Piranesi's most enigmatic work and his most famous. Many have sung their praise, and exalted the doors of perception they opened.[36] In the *Carceri* both perspective and architecture are weird. As to the architecture, what strikes us first is massive masonry, towering pillars supporting flying arches and shaky vaults. Sometimes an inscription or a sculptural relief is visible, related to the history of Rome from its beginnings as an Etruscan kingdom and then a city republic, to its imperial rise and decadence. The architecture dwarfs the roaming visitors and the chained convicts. The *Carceri* stir feelings of horror by doubling image and reality, as in the plate where a man appears to meet a lion, the latter sculpted, the former alive. Absorbed in the study of these spaces, the viewer discovers between naked, solid masonry a flimsy, mobile architecture of beams, posts, floors, stairs, and ropes that dangle in the void. Thus, the rock-solid structure provides for a cladding of wood and hemp, living on it like creepers and hangers. In this cave-world, diagonal perspectives lead outside the frame, or cause disorientation, as our gaze goes up stairs leading nowhere. Sometimes, a split perspective produces a kind of temporal shock, as in plate V, where an execution in the Roman days is combined with visitors who might be our contemporaries, unable as they scramble over the ruins to witness the scene depicted on the left, doubling their imagination with our own, and that of the maker himself. If the *Carceri* were the 'underground' of the *Campo Marzio*, they would provide a baffling traffic system, a mind-blowing means of transport—the *pendant* of the pensile city.[37] The essence of the pensile city is that it defies the ground, as both architecture and infrastructure seem to rise and fall of their own accord. In fact, the ground is present—our engraver deploys an expressive burin to render its surface—but it does not determine the 'scape' of the pensile city. It is so dazzling, that our gaze clings to every scratch. Piranesi's art is groovy, the word taken both in its figural sense of to swing and feel good, and the literal sense of cutting a groove in order to join parts. In his perspectives lines only intermittently mark the contour, moving around stones, plants, animals, people, and clouds. The bodies they suggest groove like dancers. Groovy also qualifies the intoxicating atmosphere scratched onto his plates. The Dutch word 'groeve' stems from 'graven', to quarry, to dig—and just as Piranesi 'digs' Rome, lovers of his works 'dig' Piranesi.

REALITY AND IMAGE

The *Vedute di Roma* are an essential part of Piranesi's project to record and reconstruct Rome, depicting contemporary and ancient Rome. The former include late-baroque projects realized in his time, such as the Porto di Ripetta and the Spanish Steps. The latter are provided with texts that relate to his archaeological studies, leading to the speculative reconstruction of the *Campo Marzio*. While some *Vedute* suggest the resurrection of Rome, the

02:
Frontispiece of the *Carceri*, Second State, G.B. Piranesi, 1760-61.

Veduta della Facciata della Basilica di

Monaci Cisterciensi. 2. Muro moderno fabbricato sulle rovine dell'Anfiteatro Castrense. 3. Ava

Campo Marzio in its turn refers to *Vedute* of the ancient villa of Hadrian and its capricious architecture.[38] Produced in the course of a life-time, the 137 views, printed in large numbers, found their way all over Europe, and determined the perception of 'the eternal city'. Besides providing the tourist with the umptieth set of views of Rome, they offer *virtuoso* studies in perspective that draw the spectator in. To achieve this, the frame of the view is sometimes part of the scene, as a building casts a shadow over it or a visitor pauses to sit on it. Perspective, Piranesi had declared in the foreword of *Prima Parte*, is a means to set architecture free from clients, and give architecture a life of its own. The better a drawing approaches reality, the more it succeeds in *realizing what it represents*. In other words, *drawing* equals *building*. For Piranesi it is crucial that we *enter* the depicted space, as he sets our imagination to *inhabit* it. This does not only occur in Piranesi's perspectives, but also in the ichnography, which is exceptional, even though every map has a dreamy aspect. To read a map is not so much to have an *overview*, but to find a *way*. Take a map of a maze for example: it will only disclose its path when you follow the lines with your finger or force your eye to do so.[39] Piranesi elevates cartographic illusion to dazzling heights, abysmal depths, and intriguing flights. The *ichnographia* is the centre piece of the *Campo Marzio* for a good reason, because it lets us roam through the city in ways far superior to the bird's eye perspectives that form part of the atlas, and only show the Campo partially, seen in one direction, and offering a view too distant to involve the viewer.[40] Unsettling the space of perspective, the *ichnographia* performs miracles like the apocalyptic crack and the cosmic wind rose we have seen. The graphic tracks and tricks that push us to enter the Campo range from architecture to infrastructure, from ground to water, from trees and bushes to the earth and to the sun, from topography to text, from stone to paper. Piranesi inscribes the pensile city on copper plates, covered in wax, scratches them with a needle, submerges them in a biting acid that etches the grooves, which he then fills with ink, prints on paper, and finally publishes in a book. It is a magic alchemy, repeated hundreds of times—and today, with photography and digital rendering, millions of times, even though nothing surpasses the *ichnographia*. It is all surface, like a 'tapestry in the universe' on which acrobats perform.[41]

WRITING AND DRAWING

Piranesi is a polemical architect. In *Della Magnificenza, Parere su l'Architettura*, and *Diverse Maniere*, he explicitly rejects Vitruvian classicism, attacks international representatives of what came to be known as Neoclassicism, and advocates liberty of invention. His entire oeuvre proclaims this 'licentious' stance. Yet, what he *writes* never covers what he *draws*. And in the title page of the *Parere*, he points out that it is easier to write *on* architecture than to work *in* it, and it is obvious that he considers his etchings examples of the latter.[42] Thus, his plates matter more than his texts. That is not to say that Piranesi contradicts himself when he adheres to the Vitruvian triad of utility, construction and beauty, albeit exalted, and states that construction must come first and ornament after, even if his own designs follow no such order. Positioned not outside but inside the classical tradition, more radically than any other classicist, Piranesi is *extra-classical*.[43] It is fair to say that Piranesi pursues the logic of theory in texts, while developing the logic of practice in drawings. That is why the pensile city is not explained in words, and it is up to us to draw out the concept from the drawings in which it is inscribed. Piranesi is a great artist, and although he was criticised for his extravagance in his own time, admirers never lacked. The naked, overgrown, and ruined buildings in most of his works, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the excessive and bizarre ornamentation displayed elsewhere in his works, have always been the guilty pleasures of the Classicists, precisely because they go against their beliefs in purity. In more recent times the guilty pleasures of Modernists who admire Piranesi consist in the fact that their belief in rational and transparent space contradicts with Piranesi's glorification of the bizarre and the opaque. However, these pleasures are quite innocent in the architects and artists of Gothicism and Romanticism. If the guilty pleasures of the Classicist and the Modernist are but naughty escapes from discipline, the innocent plays of the Gothicist and the Romanticist tune in with the rules. Innocent plays demand serious study, while guilty pleasures are a mere distraction. The latter are evasive, the first elusive.

HISTORY AND UTOPIA

What is the interest of the pensile city in times of distress and disaster? Could a dead city save the living city? And

03:
Veduta della S. Croce, G.B. Piranesi, c.1760-78.

would a dead language, the Latin of architecture, inspire innovative design?[44] The pensile city does not prefigure the modern city. The *Campo Marzio* was recognized as an alternative to modernism by postmodern architects, and indeed, its broken configuration is as problematic for modernism as it certainly was for classicism.[45] The pensile city eludes matters of social and political nature, even if it honours the city as public domain. And although it escapes today's planetary concerns, it is in this flight that lies a promise. As Piranesi's pensile city crosses the boundaries of design and transcends history, it invents a mesmerizing city composed from archaeological findings, re-invented in a creative spirit kindled by all the findings. This spirit flies back and forth from a haunting past to a pending future. The pensile city *resources* history. History is terrifying in many respects, but in Piranesi's words: 'out of fear springs pleasure'.[46] Utopia is the realm of invention. It imagines a possible world. Because the world is ours, and ours the possibilities to envisage, utopia is essentially a realist concept. Utopia offers an escape from the unbearable.[47] According to Tafuri, Piranesi's project is utopian, and he found it negative. However, the pensile city is neither a project nor a design. It swings between history, theory, and utopia. It offers visions of paradise. Today, as ever, utopian thinking matters.[48] The actual interest of the pensile city resides in its amazing imagination. We have seen that Piranesi imagines the city great and magnificent, but not megalomaniac. In fact, the idea of a pensile city is poised against megalomania. The *Campo Marzio* may abound with huge buildings, expanding in vast estates, but they never crush the smaller buildings around them. Like in a blizzard, minute crystals insinuate themselves next to huge monuments and into them. In the ichnographia bigness is neither about size nor about form. Each and every 'vast and magnificent' building has its eccentricities.[49] And the space between the most magnificent architectures may be vague but not void, with tiny dots and lines tracing imperceptible movements. As Piranesi 'digs' bigness, he cherishes the groove.

04:
Pianta di Roma, detail, G.B. Piranesi, 1756.

diſegnata colla ſituazione di *tutti i Monumenti antichi, de' qua*

Roma antica, ſcavati, ſaranno *due ſecoli, nelle Rovine del Tempio di Rom*

NOTES

01 Spuybroek, Lars. 2020. *Grace and Gravity. Architectures of the Figure*, New York: Bloomsbury. Spuybroek develops a philosophical realism that inaugurates a 'pheno-technological' theory of spectral or 'figurate' architecture with trans-disciplinary notions set in an 'anachronic' history. In Chapter 8, 'The Stone Reckoner. Of Counting and Recounting', he gives a brilliant analysis of Piranesi's Carceri and Campo Marzio, referring among others to Rykwert, Bachelard, and Adrian Stokes, on the 'luminous life of stones'.

02 Vincenzo Fasolo was the first to analyse the Campo Marzio in detail in 'Il Campo Marzio di G.B. Piranesi', *Quaderni dell' Istituto di Storia dell'Architettura*, Vol.15 (1956), pp.1-15. Admitting that "it takes patience to walk through the Piranesian city," he mistook the racing course of Equiria for a stream, and misread the Villa Aruntii as being in a valley instead of on a hill. He reduced the buildings of the Campo to a tableau of axial-symmetric schemes.

03 Tafuri, Manfredo. 1973. *Progetto e Utopia. Architettura e sviluppo capitalistico*, (published in English as *Architecture and Utopia. Design and Capitalist Development*) Rome, Bari: Laterza. See also: Tafuri, Manfredo. 1983, 'Borromini e Piranesi: la città come "ordine infranto"' ('Borromini and Piranesi: the city as "violated order"'), in A. Bettagno, ed., *Piranesi tra Venezia e l'Europa*, Proceedings, Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Venice, 13-15th October, 1978. Florence: Leo S. Olschki, pp.89-101; and Tafuri, Manfredo. 1980. *La Sfera e il Labirinto. Avanguardie e Architettura da Piranesi agli anni '70* (published in English as *The Sphere and the labyrinth. Avantgardes and Architecture form Piranesi to the 1970's*). Torino: G. Einaudi.

04 Wilton-Ely, John. 1978. *The mind and art of Giovanni Battista Piranesi*. London: Thames and Hudson. See also: Wilton-Ely, John. 1983. 'Utopia or Megalopolis? The "Ichnographia" of Piranesi's "Campus Martius" reconsidered', in A. Bettagno, ed., *Piranesi tra Venezia e l'Europa*, pp.293-304.

05 *Braccio di città pensile, e navigata al di sotto* is the title of a capriccio of built-on bridges, G.B. Piranesi, *Opere Varie*, plate 22, 1750. He reworked this view for the frontispiece of the second volume of the *Antichità Romane*, 1756. It was a quote from the Roman author Plinius, which he used again in *Della Magnificenza* and the Campo Marzio.

06 Pasquali, Susanna. 2016. "Piranesi's Campo Marzio as described in 1757" in Debenedetti, Elisa (ed.), *Studi sul Settecento Romano. Giovanni Battista Piranesi; predecessori, contemporanei e successori, Studi in onore di John Wilton-Ely.* Rome: Edizioni Quasar, pp.179-190.

07 Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Félix. 1991. *Qu'-est ce que la philosophie* (published in English as *What is philosophy*). Paris: Editions de Minuit.

08 Piranesi, G.B. 1769. *Diverse Maniere d'adornare i cammini ed ogni altra parte degli edifizi desunte dall'architettura Egizia, Etrusca, Greca*. Rome: G.B. Piranesi. In his 'Apology' Piranesi writes that Rome is a mine of material able to "fecondare, e imbizzarrire l'idee d'un artefice riflessivo, e pensante" ("inspire inventive and thoughtful artists to make things bizarre"). See also note 46.

09 Piranesi wrote "per eccitamento di gloriosa emulazione" in the caption of the 'Ampio e magnifico Porto', Opere Varie, 1750. Emulation is a form of *mimesis*, the representation of reality. Opposed to imitation, which copies its model qua form, emulation creates a work that matches its source qua inspiration.

10 Piranesi's exalted version of the Vitruvian triad of *utilitas, firmitas, venustas* (function, construction and beauty) figures in his study of a tunnel from a volcanic lake for the water supply of Rome, *Emissario del Lago Albano*, 1762.

11 Piranesi deleted the dedication of the *Antichità Romane* to James Caulfield and replaced it by "utilitati publice" ("to public utility"). In a separate publication of an exchange of letters with the British aristocrat, he proudly added that where a nobleman owes his name to his forebears, an artist owes his to posterity. The four volumes of the *Antichità Romane* form the run-up to the Campo Marzio, which, though presented in the same archaeological fashion, is so speculative that it forms a genre in itself.

12 Piranesi, G.B. 1743. *Prima Parte di Architetture, e Prospettive*. Rome: G.B. Piranesi. The foreword, in the form of a letter to his protector Nicola Giobbe, not only praises "Roman magnificence" and critiques the powerful of today, "who should be Maecenas" ("che farsi dovrebbono Mecenati"), it is an eloquent defence of perspective drawing as autonomous architectural practice, which escapes the whims of clients.

13 Piranesi may have been aware of Lionelli Pascoli's proposals to modernise Rome projected on Nolli's map. Polledri, Paolo. 'Theory and Urban Design in Piranesi's Ichnographia Campi Martii', paper presented at *Rome: tradition, innovation and renewal*, a Canadian Art History Conference, Rome, 9-13 June, 1987.

14 Corboz, André. 1992. *L'Urbanisme du XXe siècle. Esquisse d'un profil*, Genève: FAS, reprinted in Corboz, André. 2001. *Le Territoire comme Palimpseste et autres essais*. Edited by Sébastien Marot. Besançon: Ed. de l'Imprimeur. Corboz' overview of the history of urbanism and its foundational texts has been translated into English and numerous other languages. Corboz calls Ildefonso Cerdà the founding father of urban planning with his 'Teoría general de la construcción de las ciudades' in 1859. However, Arturo Soria y Mata coined the word 'urbanism' in a proposal for a 'ciudad lineal' in 1882.

15 Poulet, Georges. 1966. "Piranèse et les poètes romantiques français," *La Nouvelle Revue Française*, Vol.160, pp.660-671, 849-862. Poulet discusses Hugo, Baudelaire, Gautier and Mallarmé. For a useful discussion of Thomas de Quincey as a precursor of situationism, see: Coverley, Merlin. 2010. *Psychogeography*. Harpenden: Pocket Essentials. Quincey is extensively quoted by Aldous Huxley in his essay on the *Carceri*. See also note 36.

16 Robert and James Adam designed the Adelphi Terrace on the Thames after their Grand Tour. The lower level, fitted with a grim and dour expression, serves trade, and the upper level is for residential purposes, clad in sleek elegance. The revolutionary project was the first to create a Thames Embankment. As it failed financially, the Adam brothers moved to Scotland, where their father William was a respected architect. In Edinburgh, Robert Adam gave a boost to the New Town with the palatial Charlotte Square, and turned the Old Town into a pensile city with the design of the North and South Bridges. Interestingly, William Chambers, who would mock Piranesi for 'styling himself as an architect', followed up on the Adelphi with the design of Somerset House, which in an initial design showed a similar heavily rusticated infrastructure. This was pointed out by John Wilton-Ely in "Piranesi and British architects in Rome," in Mariani, Ginevra (ed.). 2017. *Giambattista Piranesi, Matrici incise 1761-1765*. Roma: Editalia, pp.39-48.

17 Berque, Augustin. 1995. *Les raisons du paysage de la Chine antique aux environnements de synthèse* (*The reasons of landscape from ancient China to virtual environments*). Paris: Hazan. Berque sees the origin of a full-fledged landscape culture in China. Ancient Greece and Rome had no word for landscape. In Europe, the word landscape originated in

17th. century Flemish painting. In the 18th century, William Chambers, who published two treatises on Chinese gardens, initiated the creation of landscape gardens ('jardins anglo-chinois'). Piranesi's Campo Marzio might have been inspired by their 'wild' artifices.

18 Wallis de Vries, Gijs. 2014. *Archescape. On the tracks of Piranesi*. Amsterdam: Thousand & One Publishers.

19 In the letter to Nicola Giobbe at the occasion of the publication of his *Prima Parte* in 1743, Piranesi used the word 'vaghezza', when maintaining that perspective is the source from which architecture draws its greatest and soundest beauty ("tragga la sua maggiore, e più soda vaghezza"). See also: Stoppani, Teresa. 2009. 'The vague, the viral, the parasitic: Piranesi's Metropolis', *Footprint*, Vol.5, pp,147-160. Ignasi de Solà-Morales coined the concept of 'terrain vague' in 2015 in "Terrain Vague," *Anyplace*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, pp.118-123.

20 Baudelaire, Charles. 1861. *Les Fleurs du al*, Spleen et Idéal, IV: Correspondances. Paris: Gallimard. Translation by the author.

21 Edward Gibbon, *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, written 1766-1788. Since the Renaissance the Capitol Hill is a locus for reflections on ancient Rome. The Florentine humanist Poggio Bracciolini set the tone in "De varietate fortunae" ("On the vicissitudes of fate"), written 1447-8. The gaze would rest on the Forum where once Caesar walked and now the cattle graze. Piranesi on the contrary turned his gaze to the North, soaring high above the Capitol, in the *Scenographia Campi Martii* that shows a deserted Campo Marzio with the remains of the Pantheon and a few other ruins.

22 Plate XVII of the Campo Marzio depicts on the foreground a broken arch of the Circus Flaminius that appears to breathe or sigh, while a shepherd roams among the remains of the Theatre of Pompejanus, and an old woman stoops by an eroded column of a sanctuary of Apollo: expressing a melancholy Piranesi transcends in the ichnographia. Zooming in on the large scenographia, the Campo Marzio includes a number of such bewitching images of a city deserted after its fall.

23 The *Forma Urbis* measured 18x13 metres. The remains, about 10%, have partly been identified. For its relation with the map of G.B. Nolli (1748) and Piranesi's ichnographia, as well as their relation with recent architecture venues: Joost van Gorkom, Joost, Lubbers, Emma, Wallis de Vries, Gijs and Wuytack, Karel (eds.). 2013. *SEMINARCH*, Vol.5 (April): Thing Theory & Urban Objects in Rome. Eindhoven: Technische Universiteit Eindhoven.

24 Piranesi, G.B. 1761. *Della Magnificenza ed Architettura de' Romani*. Rome: G.B. Piranesi.

25 Giambattista Nolli, Nuova Pianta di Roma, 1748. In facsimile with an introduction by Allan Ceen, New York: J.H. Aronson, 1991. In 1978 Nolli's map became the cradle of postmodern architecture, its twelve sectors allotted to twelve famous architects who 'rewrote' the plan. Michael Graves, guest editor of the *AD Profile* issued on the venue called 'Roma Interrotta' reflected on 'the value of the figure made in the voids of the urban landscape'. In Nolli's plan this 'figural void' is architecturally rendered as public space (streets, squares, churches); the rest is 'urban poché' and rendered black (residential and commercial stock). Graves distinguished this position from the one taken by Piranesi in his Campo Marzio, and its 'set pieces' juxtaposed as 'figures without a common ground' (quoted and discussed in van Gorkom et. al, 2013, *SEMINARCH*, Vol.5, see note [23]).

26 Spuybroek, Lars. 2015. 'The acrobatics of the figure: Piranesi and magnificence', in Gijs Wallis de Vries. *Archescape. The Piranesi flights*, Eindhoven: Technische Universiteit Eindhoven, pp. 3-10.

27 Aureli, Pier Vittorio. 2011. *The Possibility of an Absolute Architecture*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. See: Chapter 3, "*Instauratio Urbis*. Piranesi's Campo Marzio versus Nolli's Nuova Pianta di Roma." Aureli aims at liberating the politics of architecture from the bureaucracy of urbanism.

28 Connors, Joseph. 2011. *Piranesi and the Campus Martius: the missing Corso. Topography and Archaeology in Eighteenth-Century Rome*. Milan: Jaca Book. In his patient and erudite reading of the ichnographia, Connors argues that Piranesi removes the Corso-Via Flaminia to make room for the Mausoleum of Augustus in a vastly expanded Campo Marzio. My dissertation (1990) discussed the arguments Piranesi himself alleges for this surprising removal: leaving the Tiber-plain free for exercise, a trajectory over the hills was also better to defend against the enemy. Plate XL shows remains of a bridge upstream of the bridge usually considered to be the north entry to Rome. Although the bridge does not figure on the large *ichnographia*, a small map on top of it, and three small plans (plate III), show the trajectory of the Via Flaminia (according to Piranesi). If the Campo Marzio is devoid of roads, or rather, streets, Piranesi called the Roman roads a world wonder in *Della Magnificenza*, and celebrated the Via Appia on a fantastic frontispiece of the *Antichità Romane*. Both Via Flaminia and Via Appia are interregional roads, the first to the north, the second to the south.

29 Piranesi's scenographies show only pedestrians. He must have known that the Campus Martius was forbidden for horses and carriages during daytime.

30 An entire volume of the *Antichità* is about the Tiber bridges and depicts their over-dimensioned construction, including foundations. Piranesi also indicates flood levels, and points at extra openings for highwater caused by melting snow.

31 Piranesi, G.B. 1761. *Della Magnificenza ed Architettura*.

32 Piranesi, G.B. *Campo Marzio*, pl. XX. It shows a partly underground aqueduct.

33 Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Félix. 1980. *Mille Plateaux, Capitalisme et Schizophrénie*. Paris: Minuit.

34 Deleuze and Guattari first proposed the flight line in *Kafka. Pour une Litérature Mineure*. Stating that "the problem of Kafka is language, architecture, bureaucracy, and flight lines;" (p. 136) they wrote that "a flight line may also happen on the spot, a flight in intensity." See: Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Félix. 1975. *Kafka. Pour une Litérature Mineure*. Paris: Minuit, pp. 136, 25. Tim Ingold developed a novel science of lines in *Lines, A Brief History* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007). He distinguishes two kinds of lines: made of matter (thread), and made in matter (trace). The anthropological scope of his 'lineaology' is pursued in Ingold, Tim. 2012. *The Life of Lines*, London and New York: Routledge.

35 Piranesi, G.B. 1745. *Invenzioni Capric. di Carceri*; Piranesi, G.B. 1760. *Carceri d'Invenzione*.

36 Huxley, Aldous. 1949. *Prisons, with the "Carceri" etchings by G.B. Piranesi*. London: Trianon.

37 Spuybroek, *Grace and Gravity*, p.313. Spuybroek describes the Carceri and Campo Marzio as nonidentical twins. My hypothesis of a Roman underground might be verified in Piranesi's map of aqueducts, both above and under the ground in *Antichità Romane* I, plate XXXVIII, 1756.

38 Wallis de Vries, Gijs. 2012. *Piranesi, le Vedute di Roma. A Journey through the Eternal City*. Ede, Netherlands: Heritage Editions.

39 Pieper, Jan. 1987. D*as Labyrinthische. Ueber die Idee des Verborgenen, Rätselhaften, Schwierigen in der Geschichte der Architektur* (*The Labyrinthian. On the Idea of the Hidden, Enigmatic, and Difficult in Architectural History*). Basel: Birkhauser.

40 Pasquali, 2016. "Piranesi's Campo Marzio," p.181. Pasquali found an early advertisement of the *Campo Marzio* in an English periodical of 1757, which describes the scenographies as perspectives inferred from the ground plans. Interestingly, the Italian text reads: "ricavate dalle piante" which means "delved" or "drawn from." Pasquali points out that the scenographies are in fact isometric projections. She convincingly reconstructs the initial composition of scenographies around the ichnographia, and argues that in the course of its production the Campo Marzio became less architectural and more archaeological. I do not agree. As architectural exercise, the ichnography is much more inspiring than the scenographies: not 'drawn out' but 'drawn on'.

41 Rilke, Rainer. 1912-22. *Duineser Elegien*, 5.

42 Piranesi, G.B. 1765. *Osservazioni*, frontispiece. See also: Wallis de Vries, Gijs. 2016. "Six theses after Piranesi," in Marc Schoonderbeek et al (eds.), *X Agendas for Architecture*. London: Artifice Books on Architecture, pp.22-29.

43 Extra-classical indicates the 'extravaganza' outside and beyond the classical tradition Piranesi was steeped in and from which he would only draw the *exception* to the rule. In 1778, in his last work, as he depicted the temples of Paestum, icons of the Doric order, Piranesi delighted in pointing at irregularities and 'bizarreries' (e.g. his comments on the Temple of Neptune, plate X and XI). Manfredo Tafuri called him anti-classical, pointing at Mannerist and Baroque experiments. John Wilton-Ely wrote that "[In the Ichnographia] Piranesi is far closer to the emerging ideals of Neo-Classicism [than to the Baroque style], even if at this date no other designer had pushed this logical process of pattern-making to such extremes." (Wilton-Ely. 1978. *The mind and art of Giovanni Battista Piranesi*, Chapter 4, Controversy). Piranesi certainly is innovative, but he is far from the neo-classicist's love of "noble simplicity" (Winckelmann). Lars Spuybroek coined the word para-classical (p.316) for Piranesi, which perfectly catches Piranesi's paradoxical course (Spuybroek, *Grace and Gravity*, Chapter 8).

44 Spuybroek, *Grace and Gravity*, Chapter 8: "The Campo Marzio is a spectral city drenched in perpetual golden sunlight, (...) where the risen meet the fallen and the dead meet the dead" (p.317).

45 Frans Sturkenboom constructs an interesting link between Mannerism and Modernism in *De gestiek van de architectuur. Een leerboek hedendaags maniërisme* (Arnhem: ArtEZ Press, 2017). Against the modernist concept of space, Sturkenboom analyses the interest in surface, already present in early modernism, which he conceptualizes in terms of tectonics and gesture, referring to, among others, Heidegger and Deleuze.

46 Piranesi, G.B. 1796. *Diverse Maniere*, p.10. Piranesi used the words "*di mezzo alla tema esce il diletto*" to distinguish the frightening gravity of Egyptian architecture from the pleasing grace of the ancient Greeks, and praised the "bold, stiff, and hard" ("ardite, risentite, e aspre") manners of the Egyptians as particularly suited to architecture. The full title of the trilingual book (Italian, French, English) is *Divers Manners of Ornamenting Chimneys and all other parts of houses taken from Egyptian, Tuscan, and Grecian Architecture, with an apologetical essay in defence of Egyptian and Tuscan architecture.*

47 Fokkema, Douwe. 2011. *Perfect Worlds. Utopian Fiction in China and the West*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

48 Bregman, Rutger. 2018. *Utopia for realists: And How We Can Get There*. London: Bloomsbury.

49 Piranesi uses the words "Ampio magnifico" ("vast and magnificent") to describe both the capriccio of a port (see note 09) and the plan of a university, which he endowed with a central stairwell that joins centripetal and centrifugal movement.

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