

# Log

SUMMER 2006

Toward a critique of  
sustainable architecture  
and landscape

## IN AUTOMOBILES – ALMOST EVERYWHERE

Imagine the business savvy of Julius Sämann when he invented the pine-tree shaped air freshener “Little Trees” for the automobile in 1951. A Swiss-born Canadian, Sämann established Car-Freshner Corporation in Watertown, New York, in 1952; the company diversified in the 1960s with foreign subsidiaries, including Arbre Magique® – magic tree. Given that today there are approximately 243,023,485 registered vehicles in the United States alone, whole forests, literally, may be hanging from the mirrors of autos on US roads. Little Trees are “the most recognized and popular automotive air freshener brand in the world,” the company states. The six “natural” scents, including pine, peppermint, and lavender, constitute only 51 percent of the product line sold; other scents range from “sport” to green tea, passion fruit, and the newly introduced “brilliant musk” and “sparkling ocean.” Each of the firm’s 21 unique fragrances can keep the car freshly scented for two months before the powerful odor of reality sets in.

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\$10.00



5. Martin Heidegger, "Die Zeit des Weltbildes" in *Holzwege* (1935-46), "The Age of the World as Picture," in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, translated from the German by William Lovitt (New York: Harper & Row, 1977).

6. Thomas Friedman, *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century*, (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2005).

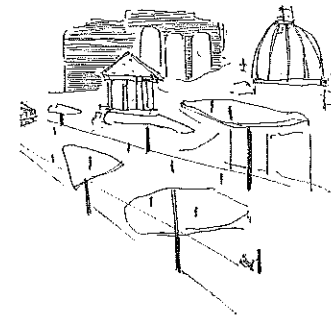
MARC ANGÉLIL IS PROFESSOR OF ARCHITECTURE AT THE SWISS FEDERAL INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY (ETH) IN ZÜRICH AND A MEMBER OF AGPS ARCHITECTURE, A COOPERATIVE WITH OFFICES IN LOS ANGELES AND ZÜRICH. CARY SIRESS IS ADJUNCT PROFESSOR OF ARCHITECTURE AT THE ETH ZÜRICH AND A MEMBER OF THE URBAN RESEARCH TEAM AT THE INSTITUTE OF URBAN DESIGN, NETWORK, CITY, AND LANDSCAPE.

of land by foreigners. From a business point of view, the undertaking is so successful that subsequent Palms are being planned. That the crown prince has become self-appointed designer is made more than evident by a poem he composed, which was promptly inscribed as planimetric calligraphy into the newest Palm.

At an appropriate distance from the coast, the most recent elaboration of dislocated fantasy is now taking shape. What appears as a mirage on the horizon is actually an archipelago of 300 islands tracing the contours of the world, a seemingly innocuous image superimposed onto the surface of the water. Again, the commodity traded is real estate, only now it is transformed into the floating currency of imagery. In order to up the ante and to give the work a patina of glamor, the project is studded with celebrities. As reported in the boulevard press, stars from film, music, and sports, such as David Beckham and Michael Owen, have already purchased islands, making one wonder if the city itself has not been branded by fame. Whether the rumors are true is hardly the issue, since what counts is not reality per se, but rather the surplus value of myth as cultivated through the representation of the world as image. "Dubai puts the World on the Map." The slogan used in the developer's advertising brochures underscores the enter-prise's ideological premise: Dubai is literally portrayed as a global city in the game of globalization. It is doubtful that this is what Martin Heidegger refers to in his essay "The Age of the World as Picture."<sup>5</sup> But perhaps he was not on the wrong track, insofar as the images we construct of the world stand as a measure of what we are. The one-to-one alliance between political economy and territory in the United Arab Emirates seems to keep faith in the principle of understanding the world as image. Although Heidegger is careful to distance himself from any notion of image as caricature, the tendency to level everything through imagery is realized in Dubai, thereby lending credence to the proposition that the world is undeniably flat.<sup>6</sup>

Paulette Singley

## Fascism Under Erasure: A Proposal For Via dei Fori Imperiali in Rome



MASSIMILIANO FUKSAS, SKETCH FOR VIA DEI FORI IMPERIALI PROPOSAL. COURTESY THE ARCHITECT.

As Richard Meier's recently completed pavilion for the Ara Pacis indicates, Rome is slowly opening up to the possibility of new buildings in its fragile *centro storico*.<sup>1</sup> As strong opposition to the project also shows, such building is not without certain controversy. For example, to protest Meier's design, Vittorio Sgarbi, former under-secretary for culture in Silvio Berlusconi's administration, publicly burned a model of the building near the Mausoleum of Augustus on June 10, 2004. An even more sensitive Roman site than Piazza Augusto Imperatore, home of the Ara Pacis, is the archaeological park that encompasses the Republican and Imperial forums. Here, on a street that bisects all of the Imperial forums, Massimiliano Fuksas and Doriana O. Mandrelli have proposed a renovation plan that also has provoked certain controversy. Like Piazza Augusto Imperatore, where the fascists removed an entire neighborhood, demolished a concert hall that once occupied the Mausoleum of Augustus, and built a large piazza surrounded by monumental palazzi, the area around the forums was radically transformed under fascism, although with far less visible moves. At the Imperial forums, the work was fundamentally to demolish the Pan-tano, a Renaissance-era neighborhood, in order to reveal the Roman ruins hidden beneath it. Almost no new buildings were constructed, however, thus now that the fascists' propagandistic iconography has been removed, their urban design activities are invisible to the untrained eye. This invisibility, combined with recent archaeological work in the forums, makes the site a highly charged, political stage upon which Fuksas and Mandrelli have carefully placed their proposal to reanimate this part of Rome.

From July 2004 to January 2005 the exhibition "Forma: la città moderna e il suo passato" ("Forma: The Modern City and its Past") was shown in the Roman Coliseum.<sup>2</sup> Here, Adriano la Regina, the former superintendent of archaeology

1. On Richard Meier's design for the Ara Pacis in Rome see John Seabrook, "Roman Renovation," *The New Yorker* (May 2, 2005).

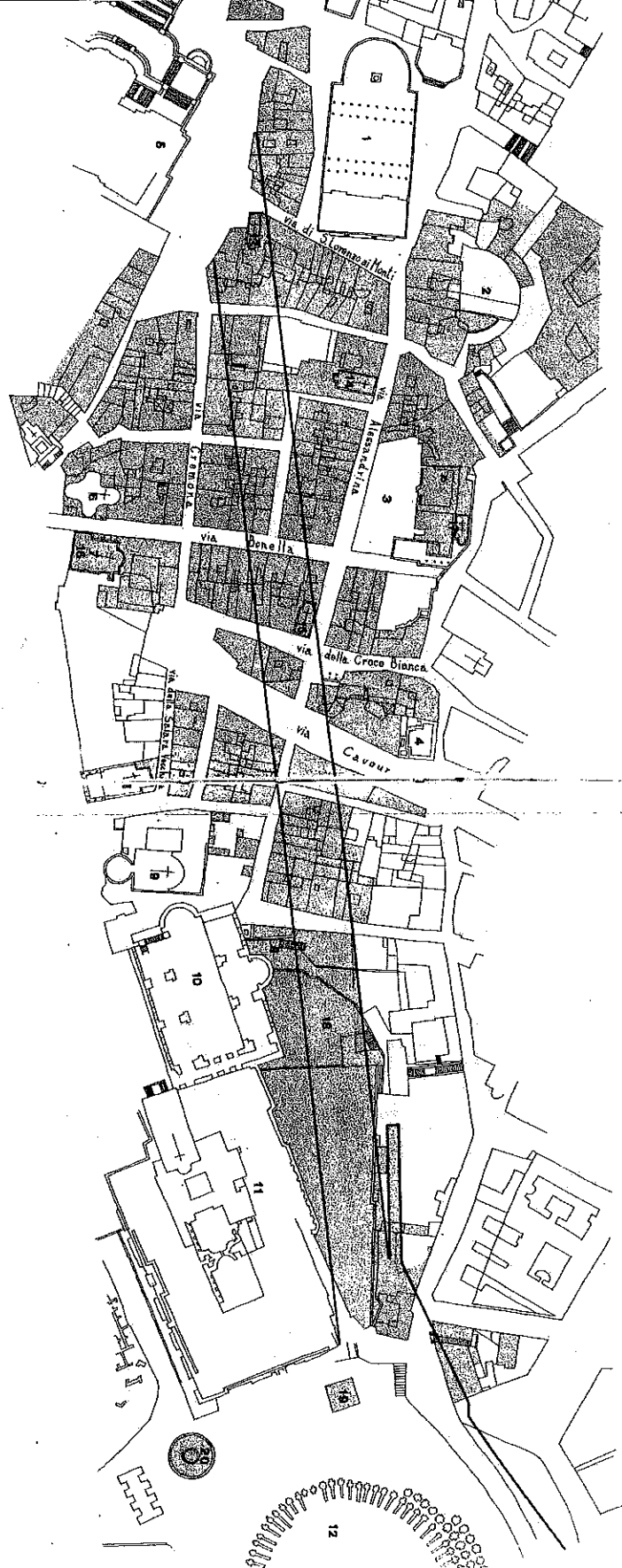
2. All references to Fuksas's comments on the project are taken from a conversation with him on July 19, 2006, at his office in Rome.



KEY:

1. TRAJAN'S FORUM.
2. THE HEMICYCLE IN FRONT OF TRAJAN'S MARKET.
3. THE FORUM OF AUGUSTUS.
10. THE BASILICA OF MAXENTIUS AND CONSTANTINE.
12. THE COLISEUM.

PLAN OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD THAT WAS DEMOLISHED IN THE 1930S IN ORDER TO EXPOSE THE ANCIENT RUINS OF THE IMPERIAL FORUMS. THE AREAS IN GRAY REPRESENT WHAT WAS DEMOLISHED AND THE PARALLEL BLACK LINES OUTLINE THE PATH OF THE FASCISTS' VIA DELL'IMPERO. FROM ANTONIO CEDERNA'S *MUSSOLINI URBANISTA: LO SVENTRAMENTO DI ROMA NEGLI ANNI DEL CONSENSO* (ROMA-BARI: LATERZA, 1979).



known as "Signore No" for his refusal to allow several important projects to be built in the historical city, finally said "yes" by inviting Fuksas and Mandrelli to design the installation, which included their urban design proposal to transform Via dei Fori Imperiali, the street that bisects the archaeological park, into a viaduct hovering above the ruins. The proposal not only provides an architectural framework for locating access to the forums and necessary public amenities, it also preserves Via dei Fori Imperiali, which Mussolini inaugurated as Via dell'Impero in 1932 while riding on horseback, with Blackshirts marching in unison behind him. Thus, nearly 75 years after Mussolini marked the tenth anniversary of the fascists' 1922 takeover of Italy by opening Via dell'Impero, the fate of this controversial street, now sanitized as Via dei Fori Imperiali, has been decided.

Or has it? The controversy surrounding Fuksas and Mandrelli's proposal to keep the street has stirred up much debate in Rome. According to Fuksas, his work on the project is only a conceptual proposal; now he would like to see a committee of various experts – archaeologists, art historians, urban designers, architects – formed to take his proposal forward. As Fuksas explains, the mayor of Rome is committed to implementing changes around the forums, but like most publicly funded building projects in this city (such as construction of Fuksas's Congress Center for EUR, the Esposizione Universale Roma), progress often is quite slow.

Whether or not the project moves forward, Fuksas and Mandrelli maintain that the preservation of this important artery in the city remains necessary for both functional and political reasons. The function is to provide vehicular access to the center of the city; the politics are whether or not an artifact from an oppressive moment in Italian history should be preserved. As Fuksas willingly acknowledges, fascism too is part of Rome's history. But more, as a city that has been continually inhabited from its mythological foundation date of April 21, 753 BCE, Rome is an urban model of sustainability by virtue of its sheer endurance, with a density that promotes pedestrian activity, comprehensive public transportation, and the adaptive reuse of historical monuments. The questions concern what we choose to preserve: only pleasant or also unpleasant histories? Only the ancient urban fabric or also the modern one? In Rome the challenge is how to maintain a functioning, modern city that dwells on top of an ancient one.

Since about 1996, excavations in the forums have created something of a wasteland in what has become a vast archaeological park connecting the forums with the Palatine, the

3. From an interview with Dr. Allan Ceen on July 18, 2006, in Rome. For more information on Dr. Ceen's work in Rome see [www.studiumurbis.org](http://www.studiumurbis.org).

4. Aymonino has been intent on achieving this reconstruction since the early 1980s, when he proposed it at an architectural conference published as *The Charlottesville Taper: Transcript of the Conference at the University of Virginia School of Architecture, Charlottesville, Virginia, November 12 and 13, 1982* (New York: Rizzoli, 1985).

Circus Maximus, and the Baths of Caracalla. Dr. Allan Ceen, director of Studium Urbis (a research institute on Roman topography) and an expert on Roman cartography, suggests developing the area of the forums in a way similar to Fuksas's proposal, with elevated walkways above the ruins. Ceen, who lectures extensively on this topic, asks "whether or not what they call an archaeological park is really an urban desert."<sup>3</sup> Although the areas of the forums and the Palatine look like they are open to the public, at least 85 percent of the sites remains inaccessible. If built, Fuksas's proposal would transform the archaeological zone between Piazza Venezia and the Coliseum into an outdoor museum framed by contemporary architecture that provides elevated pathways for getting close to the ruins without necessarily touching and potentially damaging them. Fuksas and Mandrelli's plan includes needed restaurants, public toilets, bookshops, and information centers. These are attached to a series of interconnected bridges that float above the ruins of Roman antiquity and terminate in curvilinear, bubble-shaped pavilions. Fuksas argues that these small floating walkways and pavilions eventually might even be removed so that the site, if needed, could return to its presently empty condition.

Carlo Aymonino, an architect who protested the Fuksas-Mandrelli design, proposes removing Via dei Fori Imperiali and creating a large archaeological park that would feature travertine pavilions for ticket booths or information kiosks, temples reused for similar tourist purposes, a newly constructed Colossus of Nero through which one could view the forums from a raised position, and a fully reconstructed Coliseum.<sup>4</sup> Likewise, in the late 1970s, Leonardo Benevolo had proposed removing all of the layers between the modern city and the ancient city in order to create one enormous archaeological park. While Fuksas and Mandrelli's exhibition and its accompanying catalogue drive their ideas into the public realm, Aymonino's project offers a useful contrast, given that it effectively erases the troubling memory of fascism that Via dei Fori Imperiali epitomizes. Yet the Coliseum itself, notwithstanding the more general history of the Roman Empire that the Imperial forums symbolize, stands for memories as troubling as those of fascism, thus Aymonino simply privileges one political regime over another. For Fuksas, one period of history is not necessarily more important than another; Rome should sustain multiple historical layers, which include the present as well as the distant past. As Fuksas points out, in order to fully restore this area to its ancient Roman past, a hill needs to be reconstructed behind the Basilica of

Maxentius and Constantine in order to replicate the Velia, the hill Mussolini removed in order to create his Via dell'Impero. With this observation Fuksas makes the point that we simply cannot go backward and rebuild urban histories.

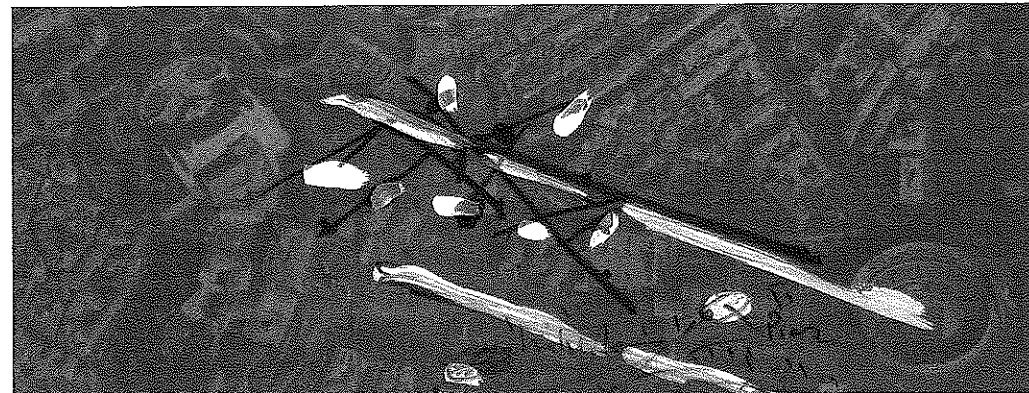
Writing in 1973 for the exhibition catalogue *The Third Rome 1870-1950: Traffic and Glory*, Spiro Kostof detailed the substantial effort of demolition and reconstruction required to build Via dell'Impero. According to Kostof: [when the street] was inaugurated, on 28 October 1932, 280,000 cubic meters of earth and 50,000 of rock had to be removed; 5,500 units of housing demolished; and 12,000 cubic meters of retaining walls erected to shore up what remained of the Velia on two sides of the road. Three churches – Santa Maria in Macello Martyrum, Sant'Urbano dei Pantani, and San Lorenzo ai Monti – were pulled down, as well as the base of the Colossus of Nero and the ancient fountain called the Meta Sudans which impeded the view of the Arch of Constantine. At the orders of the Duce, bronze statues of the emperors associated with the fora were lined up along the new road, and stone maps of the growth of Roman power, from antiquity to the Fascist present, were affixed to the northern wall of the Basilica of Maxentius.<sup>5</sup>

5. Spiro Kostof, *The Third Rome 1870-1950: Traffic and Glory* (Berkeley: University Art Museum, 1973), 60.

Somewhat paradoxically, because it was more an act of demolition than of construction, the fascists' transformation of this area of Rome represents their most successful urban design, because it was an effective display of their own ideology. Today, evacuated of the historical context leading from ancient to modern Rome, the area no longer participates in the city's rich palimpsest of historical layers superimposed one upon the other.

These are the layers that Giuseppe Terragni included in his presentation documents for two projects – the Danteum and the Palazzo Littorio – that were both to appear on the same site, across the street from the Basilica of Maxentius and Constantine, but were designed at different times and ultimately were never built. Although the area around the forums has become an empty quarter bereft of the animating population that inhabits residential parts of the city, the exposed ruins stand perfectly composed for the desiring lenses of tourists who flock to this site. Originally intended to create a visual link between Mussolini's balcony at the Palazzo Venezia and the Coliseum, Via dei Fori Imperiali frames a view of the ancient ruins that in no way betrays its political origins. In other words, the fascists' appropriation of this part of the city as an archaeological park rests less in any actual building activity – the prevalence of the Lictorial or imperial architectural style still found throughout Italy –





MASSIMILIANO FUKSAS AND DORIANA  
O. MANDRELLI, CONCEPTUAL  
SKETCH FOR RENOVATING THE AREA  
AROUND VIA DEI FORI IMPERIALI.

and more on its seamless erasure, the few signs of built activity being retaining walls, low exedrae, and statues. The loss of the important neighborhood of Pantano and the ideology of power implied by the fascist scenography of Via dell'Impero are forgotten by the casual tourist awed by the revealed aura of ancient Rome. Nevertheless, this street, even renamed, remains a powerful, if strangely silent, fascist monument, a slash in the urban fabric that quietly speaks of decades of maneuvering between city planners, classical archaeologists, and Mussolini's attempt to laminate his regime with *Romanità*, the spirit of Romanness.

While most of the fascist inscriptions found throughout Italy have been scratched out in an act of *damnatio memoriae* (eradicating the memory of unpopular predecessors), a handful still remains on the many monuments built under the fascists. In what might be seen as a shocking response to a dark moment in time, a small number of cities throughout the country have maintained buildings decorated with fasces, Mussolini's name, and other fascist iconography. In Rome, one potent example is found at Foro Italico, the former Foro Mussolini, where a marble obelisk standing outside the Stadio Olimpico is still inscribed *Mussolini Dux*. If these remaining traces of fascism seem to celebrate that moment in Italian history, they also serve as cautionary notes of a movement that went terribly wrong.

In contrast to such areas of Rome as EUR and Foro Italico, which still bear Mussolini's imprint on the city, there are no overt labels or monumental buildings around the Imperial forums to indicate that their excavation was a fascist project. Consequently, for those unschooled in this chapter of Italian history, the political affiliations of these spaces operate covertly. The generic brick retaining walls, the modest arboreal apses, the now invisible demolitions, and the axis of the street itself carry a message concerning monumentality

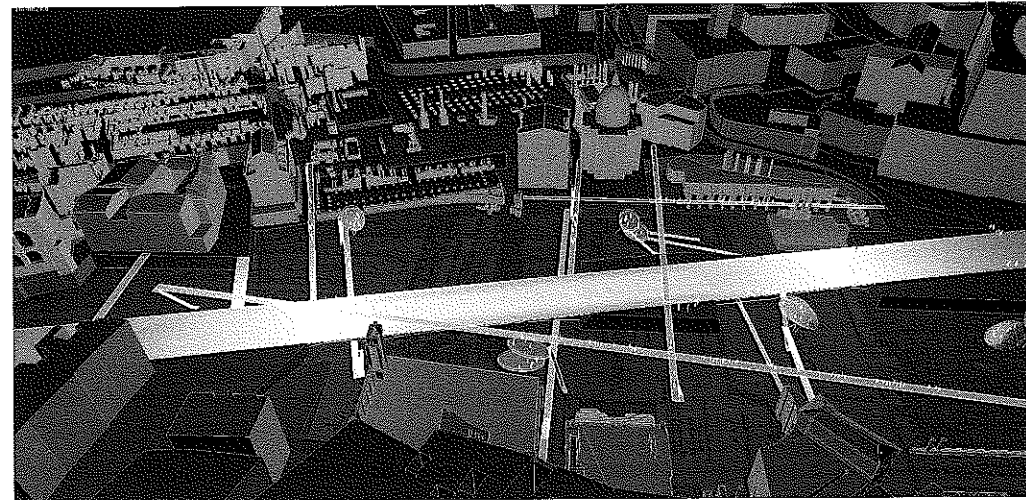
that is not framed by or tainted with any overt associations with the regime. If for no other reason than the naturalization of such a monumental view, the fascist scenography remains entirely effective at reshaping a city through a frame positioned at Mussolini's balcony.

The archaeological work finally occurring again in the forums, substantial excavations having been stopped after the 1930s transformation of the area, responds in part to the archaeologist's desire to dig down to the layers of Imperial Rome located under the fascist parks and streets, which conceal important connections between the various forums. Another reason to remove Via dei Fori Imperiali is to show the Imperial forums in their organic relationship with the Republican forum, as whole entities rather than as fragments divided by the wall of a boulevard. And finally, to remove the street would be to erase the political scar it represents. The current excavation of the Imperial forums, under Adriano la Regina's directorship, raises the concern that contemporary archaeologists and architects are performing the same erasure of Rome's complex stratigraphy as did the fascists. Today's archaeologists – like those of the 1920s and '30s – are eager to get to the Imperial level that this street covers by removing almost everything in the way of the anticipated ancient marble pavements.

But beneath the fascist layer of public parks, portions of those Renaissance buildings that were demolished in the 1930s also once existed. For the most part, these too have been removed by recent archaeological work, which has created deep, inaccessible pits, at times 30 feet below street level. Consequently, this area of the city, already stripped down under Mussolini, has become an even vaster wasteland. The area around the Republican forum has been opened up so that anyone may enter this site, from morning to sunset, without paying an entrance fee. But in so doing, the monuments themselves are sectioned off so that hundreds of tourists converge on the few narrow walkways remaining open to visitors. The Imperial forums are even more problematic because they require special permission for visitation, and several of the new excavations remain accessible only to the archaeologists.

The small fascist-era parks that have now been removed once provided space for trucks that sell snacks and bottled water and for places to sit under shade trees. With the fascist transformation of this area having resulted in the removal of narrow streets shaded by tall palazzi and, in turn, with today's archaeologists having removed most of the trees that the fascists planted, during the summer this area of Rome





COMPUTER RENDERING OF THE FUKSAS-MANDRELLI PROPOSAL FOR RENOVATING THE AREA AROUND VIA DEI FORI IMPERIALI WITH ELEVATED WALKWAYS AND PAVILIONS.

6. Thanks to Dr. Elisabeth Sandberg for pointing this out. *BOOK XV*, A.D. 62–65. See <http://etext.library.adelaide.edu.au/t/tacitus/tla/annals12.html>.

becomes an inferno, while the denser parts of the city, though hot, offer public amenities such as cafes, shade, and places to sit. Even today, Tacitus's description of Nero's transformation of Rome describes the condition of the area around the forums:

*These changes which were liked for their utility, also added beauty to the new city. Some, however, thought that its old arrangement had been more conducive to health, inasmuch as the narrow streets with the elevation of the roofs were not equally penetrated by the sun's heat, while now the open space, unsheltered by any shade, was scorched by a fiercer glow.*<sup>6</sup>

Now that the remaining parks have all but been removed and only Via dei Fori Imperiali remains, the archaeologists have duplicated the fascist *isolamento*: the isolating of ancient monuments. As part of the larger archaeological park that stretches all the way to the Baths of Caracalla, this substantial section of Rome remains inhospitable, barren of shops and housing, and scorched by the sun, with almost no nighttime pedestrian activity and consequently no public surveillance of the streets.

Likewise, if the street is eventually removed, then today's archaeologists will have surpassed the fascists' compulsion to preserve Imperial Rome at the expense of all other histories. Does the act of removing Via dei Fori Imperiali lend too much importance to the fascist plan of Rome, or is it simply necessary to undo what has been done? Does architectural preservation only protect supposedly historically innocent monuments, and if so, how does it pass comparative value judgments on works that are so remote in time that they no longer carry the memories of the totalitarian impulses that constructed them? Furthermore, is architectural preserva-

tion only interested in monuments, and not in urban spaces such as a seemingly insignificant street? Does the government-sanctioned erasure of Rome's stratigraphy, in order to reach the Imperial levels, reflect a natural archaeological urge, or is it tainted with fascism? Should Via dei Fori Imperiali be maintained as a necessary circulation route connecting two parts of the city or for its role in Rome's history, or should it be removed in an effort to erase the memories of fascism that linger in this area?

These are the challenging questions that Fuksas and Mandrelli address in their design proposal, arguing that the *stradone*, the big street, should remain. Their decision to preserve the street (even if it is only open to public transportation and emergency vehicles) is a striking move. We must wait to see what will transpire as the project works its way through the bureaucracy of Rome, but even as a highly provisional rendering, Fuksas and Mandrelli's design speaks volumes. The street floats above the forums in icy solitude, suggesting the idea of surgically dissecting Via dei Fori Imperiali as a fragile, trace memory of what came before. A second model containing the elevated paths that lead to enclosed programmatic volumes depicts the street as an avenue supported by arched passageways that give pedestrians access to either side of the forums at ground level. Displaying Fuksas and Mandrelli's signature design strategy of contrasting rectilinear forms with complex curvilinear forms, the enclosed volumes stand in stark contrast to the context of the remaining classical fragments. The architects' rendering of Via dei Fori Imperiali as a separate entity in the larger archaeological park serves as a solitary reminder of fascist megalomania, war mongering, and the second modernizing of Rome. Indeed, by preserving what remains of this horizontal artifact, Fuksas and Mandrelli simultaneously marginalize and monumentalize its position in the forums. Their proposal to make connections between the forums while keeping the street is a conceptually brilliant response to the archaeologists, both fascist and contemporary, and their work of *isolamento*. As Fuksas said, "We have to be a little more careful with our history." The decision to keep Via dei Fori Imperiali remains a powerful response to the challenge of developing the forums into both a modern and an ancient map of Rome.

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