

Rome *qua* its sprawling peripheries, immortalised by Italian literature and cinema in their bleakest and most dramatic aspects (e.g. Pier Paolo Pasolini), has also become a well-known aesthetic trope, which is itself parasitic upon Rome's paradigmatic historic centre, whose time-honoured beauty and wealth stand in stark contrast to the more recent peripheries. Whilst the former aesthetic reception of Rome is tied indissolubly to the classical age and later classicism, the latter is a standard case of modernity *qua* urban phenomenon, i.e. the pre-modern city centre being surrounded and eventually dwarfed by ever-growing circles of newly populated areas marking the inexorable advent and advance of the modern age.

The contributors of the volume hereby reviewed attempt to overcome this aesthetic dichotomy and present a *postmodern* understanding of the city, drawing primarily from architecture, psychoanalysis, art history and film studies, the book's cinematographic references spanning from Enrico Guazzoni's 1913 *Quo vadis* to Michele Placido's 2005 *Romanzo criminale*. Whereas classical and modern narratives aim at establishing fixed points of reference and final evaluations, a postmodern one contents itself with their plurality, which reveals implicitly the irreducible variety of perspectives characterising human affairs and the incessant flow of human life, individual as well as collective, which no abstract concept or conception can truly grasp once and for all.

The first three essays in the book pursue their postmodern interpretation of Rome by focussing upon: (1) the ever-changing urban landscape around, against, through, within, beneath and upon the Aurelian Walls ("Between Rome's Walls: Notes on the Role and Reception of the Aurelian Walls", by Marco Cavietti); (2) the impressionistic and idiosyncratic depiction of ancient and modern Rome in Federico Fellini's cinema, which has itself become part of the internationally shared imagery of the city ("The Explosion of Rome in the Fragments of a Postmodern Iconography: Federico Fellini and the *Forma Urbis*", by Fabio Benincasa); and (3) the further expansion of the re-presented Rome in recent Italian films, which bear witness to the gradual cultural acceptance of more and more sections of the modern city in the same imagery ("Centre, Hinterland and the Articulation of 'Romanness' in Recent Italian Film", by Lesley Caldwell).

The second lot of three essays focuses instead upon specific places and notable artefacts in

Rome, the fame of which may often hide the very different meanings that they have had in the course of their history or with regard to their observers. The chosen items are: (1) a number of famous buildings, monuments and neighbourhoods in Bernardo Bertolucci's 1979 film entitled *La luna* ("Topophilia and Other Roman Perversions: On Bertolucci's *La luna*", by John David Rhodes); (2) the 2<sup>nd</sup>-century equestrian bronze statue of emperor Marcus Aurelius and emperor Augustus' 1<sup>st</sup>-century BCE *Ara Pacis* ("Marcus Aurelius and the Ara Pacis: Notes on the Notion of 'Origin' in Contemporary Rome", by Filippo Trentin); and (3) the gigantic gas holder built in the Ostiense area in the 1930s to provide the citizens of Rome with cooking gas and street illumination ("A Postmodern Gaze on the Gasometer", by Keala Jewell).

The concluding three essays discuss Rome's two-way links with foreign architectural experiments. Specifically, they address: (1) the growingly innovative and daring architecture of the churches built outside Rome's historic centre in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century, especially after the 1962-5 Second Vatican Council, in line with analogous developments in Glasgow ("Ecclesiastical Icons: Defining Rome through Architectural Exchange", by James Robertson); (2) the thirty-year-long international success of the itinerating architectural exhibition called *Roma interrotta*, in which twelve architects from different countries reinterpreted Giambattista Nolli's seminal 1748 Great Plant of Rome ("'*Roma Interrotta*': Postmodern Rome as the Source of Fragmented Narratives", by Léa-Catherine Szacka); and (3) the influence of Rome's architectures on two of the most influential 20<sup>th</sup>-century American architects, i.e. Charles W. Moore and Robert Venturi ("Las Vegas by Way of Rome: The Eternal City and American Postmodernism", by Richard W. Hayes).

The volume edited by Holdaway and Trentin is the second instalment of the Warwick series in the humanities and it offers an engaging exploration of Rome as an evolving cultural hub of important significations for architects and artists, well beyond the firmly established waves of classicism that, recurrently, have swept the shores of Western creativity. Also, it offers a convincing example of coherent application of "postmodernism" as a useful hermeneutical tool and an established category of academic thought. Although the level of scholarly detail of the chapters is not homogenous, the overall quality of the volume is noteworthy, since this book offers many a refreshing perspective over a city about which countless perspectives have already been offered. Moreover, interesting considerations about the city's

demography, politics and economic life punctuate the chapters and make this book even more appealing. Above all, a genuine fascination with Rome's vast and complex architectural and artistic history informs the whole endeavour, turning the book into an erudite act of love for the city. The reader who has never visited Rome will feel compelled to do it. The one who has already visited it will wish to do it again, in order to savour it in a new way.

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