ARCHESCAPE. The Piranesi flights

Piranesi’s Campo Marzio has been at the focus of Gijs Wallis de Vries’ academic career. It comes as no surprise therefore that after his doctoral dissertation on the subject in 1990, an illustrated English version of his observations appears today. The interpretation of 25 years ago has acquired a more haptic dimension in the form of three-dimensional models for an exhibition. Four graduate students researched and realized this three-dimensional interpretation: Manon Deijkers, Christian Hazeleger, Mieke van Herwijnen, and Jorrit Klaver.

Gijs Wallis de Vries’ reading of Piranesi’s Campo Marzio is about two different types of spatial experience he has identified in Piranesi’s reconstruction of old Rome, two ways of ‘tuning’ spatial experiences using architectural elements to orchestrate the impression of blended styles and scales of various buildings. Piranesi imagined a splendid version of what had been left of ancient Rome: its ruins and vestiges, as well as its preserved buildings, such as the Pantheon. Embedded in the way that Piranesi added parts of what may have been, to what has been left, Wallis de Vries observes basic differences:

1. A classical way of sequencing in order to provide the experience of a delicate balance, with a sense of equal ‘weight,’ on both sides of the observer (four types of such ways of lining up are demonstrated in the exhibition), and
2. Another type of coherence in which the relation between the observer of architectural and landscape elements suggests movement, very much controlled, in order to raise the experience of a ‘tension’, a kind of ballet performance with fireworks, and the symphonies from Piranesi’s time (four types of such sequences are demonstrated in the exhibition).

Wallis de Vries recently gave the name ‘Archescape’ to his reflection on what could link Piranesi’s dreamlike archeology to contemporary architectural theory and practice. With this concept he continues his journey of discovery and interpretations.

Jos Bosman
ARCHESCAPE. The Piranesi flights

Contents
Lars Spuybroek, The Acrobatics of the Figure: Piranesi and Magnificence, page 3
Gijs Wallis de Vries, ARCHESCAPE. The Piranesi flights, page 11
Tables and Models, page 22
colophon, page 36
The Acrobatics of the Figure: Piranesi and Magnificence

Lars Spuybroek

In the history of aesthetics, Giambattista Piranesi’s case is an extraordinary one, and the fact that he inspired and influenced such a vast number of authors, artists and architects clearly signals that he was both a unique and elusive figure. Aside from the obvious reasons for his continuing relevance, such as the nature of his interests and the extreme, uncompromising way he handled such content, we need to acknowledge Piranesi’s invention of what we would today call “speculative drawing”; that is, architectural drawing not as a study, a design or a preparation for a materialized object but as a practice in itself. Piranesi himself stated that this practice was explicitly not that of the architect, who spent – and often wasted – most of his days trying to find clients, adapt plans, gather political support, and negotiate more variations.1 Dissociated from building, the drawing’s realm suddenly expands enormously. Certainly, it still relates to architecture and the notion of a future project, but also to scenography, as we can see in the case of the Carceri; and to fantasies, as in the Grotteschi; to artist’s perspectives, as in the Vedute di Roma; to illustration, as in the Antichità Romane; even to archaeological observation, as in Della Magnificenza; and, of course, to the merging of several of these disciplines, as we can see in the plans for the Campo Marzio. By keeping as close to the architectural drawing as possible, Piranesi could deploy a project’s power to speculate on the future while at the same time speculating on the past as much as novelists and painters are allowed to do. Speculative drawing enabled him to introduce mood, thought, fantasy and fear into architecture in a way that mere architectural practice would never have allowed him to do.

Of course, the invention of such a medium can only be sustained if it makes full use of its new powers. So many architects have struggled with the question how to do this. We could think of the late-Victorian architect William Burges, whose romantic drawings for a new, wholly Gothicist Law Courts building in London enchanted the public but never had the slightest chance of being built.2 Or we could think of John Soane,
one of architecture’s absolute greats, and Joseph Gandy’s watercolor renderings of his projects: looking at them, we can never fully rid our minds of the idea that these warm, golden pictures are actually more beautiful than the projects themselves. And this is true for a very specific reason: not because Gandy’s drawings were of higher quality or Burges’ project was unpractical but because Soane, Burges and Piranesi aimed to revive and glorify a past. And though they project that past into a future, they do not mean it to arrive in the present just yet. All three, and especially Piranesi, made a very specific claim on the notion of glory, or, as he called it, magnificence. Piranesi understood that architecture by its nature has an intimate relationship with magnificence; he understood its formal, “ascending” and “cumulative” qualities; moreover, he understood that ascent to a sunlit state of glory cannot be disconnected from descent, from the groundless and endless that we so often associate with the sublime.

Now, mentioning the two aesthetic categories of the sublime and the magnificent opens up a millennia-long history of aesthetics too convoluted to properly disentangle in this context. However, a few pointers can be given that afford us at least a sense of their relationship. First, it is not true that the sublime is merely associated with the groundless and the endless; its original meaning lies with the notion of the “high” as we recognize it from Longinus’ *Peri Hypsous*, generally translated as *On the Sublime* but literally meaning “on the high” or “on the elevated,” which is close to the German term *Erhabene*. The reasons why the sublime is sometimes associated with the high and sometimes with the deep are complicated, but in general it is safe to say that when it is associated with the high, it is derived from Plato’s heavenly Forms, which are located, outside of time, in the transcendent world of the mind. And since Plato’s Beyond is fundamentally defined as an Above, we could argue that transcendence is of a singularly spatial nature. Wherever it is, it is there. In contrast, when the sublime is associated with the deep, it relates specifically to time: the genesis of things is now not instantiated by earthly shapes “participating” in heavenly Forms; rather, they “emerge” from a unified past.

4 According to Plato, all particular forms relate to ideal universal Forms through what he calls “participation” (*methexis*), which has connotations with gift exchange and sharing as well as metaphysical issues concerning the whole and the parts. The gift cycle would allow the Forms to be conceived as eternal yet not as static, the latter being the standard interpretation. The sun (Plato’s central metaphor) is not fixed but circulates in the sky, and Plato often refers to it as doing so.
The deep sublime, therefore, coincides with the Romantic notion of Bildung and formation as opposed to mere form. Formation is generally considered a purely immanent category; in fact, a force more than a form. We should not view this opposition as one of extremes within a philosophical debate but simply acknowledge that the sublime contains both spatial and temporal aspects, which necessarily coexist. For instance, Kant’s appreciation of the infinite as essential to the sublime involves the endless in time as well as the infinite in space. Kant calls the sublime essentially formless and without measure; this is why it tends to confiscate the mind, and why the aesthetic of the sublime was the favorite of abstractionists such as Mark Rothko and Barnett Newman, who in 1948 wrote the influential article “The Sublime is Now.” Before we proceed any further, we should state clearly that the magnificent is not of the same order. Sublimity and magnificence are close, even akin, but there is a major difference: magnificence is always a quality of form – yet, I hasten to add, of a very special type of form.

In a similar vein, the earlier Kant of the 1764 Observations on the Feeling of the Sublime and the Beautiful positioned magnificence – or, in German, das Prächtige—close to the sublime, though it also contained aspects of the beautiful. For Kant, the sublime was an extreme category, followed on a spectrum by the Schreckhaft-Erhabene (the terrifying), then the Edle (the noble), then the Prächtige (mostly translated as the splendid but coinciding exactly with the magnificent), then the Schön, and finally, in diametrical opposition to the sublime, the Hübsch, or the pretty. At this point, we should not be distracted by the question of how correct his organization of the aesthetic categories is; rather, we should take note of the fact that Kant sees the magnificent as a mitigated and measured version of the sublime, because it mixes aspects of the noble and the beautiful. One of his examples is St. Peter’s, which he describes as a combination of a “large and simple frame” with “beautiful mosaic and gold.” And indeed, magnificence combines two essential aspects of architecture: the abstract, geometric structure and the ornate, shining surface – an argument that brings us very close to an understanding of Piranesi. But let us first go back to the notion of magnificence, before we start discussing its programmatic function in his works.

5 The German notion of Bildung is related to that of the Bildungstrieb, the “formative drive.” The latter concept stems from the biological debate in the mid-eighteenth century between preformationists and epigeneticists. Epigenesis theorized an initially undifferentiated state of the embryo, which developed through stages of progressive differentiation. This coincides with Schelling’s notion of the Ungrund, which he had earlier spelled as Urgrund. In the beginning, all was One, in a state that was “unhinged” (Unbedingt) but not at rest, filled with a chaos of opposing forces. The notion of Ungrund quickly developed into that of the unconscious; the term was used long before Freud appropriated it. Therefore, to understand the depth of the “unground,” we should conceive it as a depth in time, a geological and archaeological depth. It is very close to the Abgrund that we encounter so often in Caspar-David Friedrich’s paintings.


9 Ibid., 49.
The term “magnificence,” which etymologically combines magnus (“great”) and facere (“to make”) to signify “the doing of great deeds,” is consistent with the Aristotelian term megaloprepeia from the Nicomachean Ethics, defined as the “disposition to expend substantial private wealth on projects that both benefit the city and... bring credit on the individual.”\textsuperscript{10} In short, greatness lies in the relative size of the gift and the subsequent esteem it brings to its donor. The fact that magnificence is derived from gift-giving is crucial, since it implies that the term was originally reserved for acts and deeds before it was applied to objects.\textsuperscript{11} In the history of aesthetics the conflation of activity and object is not uncommon, as in the case of beauty, a term that can be applied to a face, a phrase, a walk in the park, a way of walking, anything. And the same applies to ugliness, ridiculousness, vulgarity, cuteness, and all other categories. In fact, in aesthetics no fundamental distinction is made between things and actions or between objects and events. In this spectrum, magnificence takes its own place and emphasizes the verticality that we encountered with the sublime, in contrast to categories such as the pretty and the vulgar, which emphasize the horizontal, shallow and flat. Therefore, alongside the great, we quickly recognize as synonymous with the magnificent the splendid, the glorious, the illustrious, the superb, the grandiose. That does not mean all powerful and elevated positions are wholly magnificent, but it is no accident that many kings’ and emperors’ names—including Alexander and Peter—have been suffixed with “the Great,” and that Lorenzo de Medici was called “Il Magnifico.” On the other hand, it goes without saying that, though kings and emperors get magnificence for free, this by no means signifies that they can claim it: one has to perform great deeds to earn such praise. Similarly, objects such as books, buildings, or symphonies, can qualify as magnificent, relatively independent of their size. A movie can be great, a poem magnificent. Greatness has nothing to do with bigness. What counts is that great things combine various aspects of radiance (glory, splendor, luster), wealth (affluence, abundance, gift) and power (nobility, excellence, structure), without any external structure to hold them in an elevated position. Things that are magnificent are so by themselves, and in that sense they are neither big nor small.

\textsuperscript{10} Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics 4.1122a-b.\textsuperscript{11} Lars Spuybroek, “Charis and Radiance,” in: Giving and Taking: Antidotes to a Culture of Greed, eds. J. Brouwer and S. van Tuinen (Rotterdam: V2_Publishing, 2014), 119–50. This essay develops the idea that beauty as an aesthetic concept evolved from gift exchange, which in ancient Greek culture centered around the notion of charis, usually translated as “grace,” though it also means favor, gratitude, pleasure, and beauty. The gift cycle embodied by the Three Graces (giving, receiving and returning) exists in all cultures in one way or another.
It is the pure reversibility of object and action that makes a thing scaleless, not a connection to anything larger, such as a network, *Umwelt* or *Welt*. In the realm of the aesthetic, an act can present itself as an object, and an object as an activity. Things act (and eventually act on us), and acts are things. In aesthetics, we often refer to this idea using the notion of the motif or the figure, and each has an elaborate history. A figure can be a form but also a gesture or a set of gestures or movements. We describe the motifs on a frieze as “meandering” while realizing perfectly well that nothing is actually moving. This reversibility of path and trace, of channel and movement, lies at the heart of how things exist aesthetically. And in the case of magnificence, it means that we need a specific type of figure that allows a scaleless thing to qualify as great. What makes a thing, which is not big as an object, great? When we return to the work of Piranesi with this thought in mind, we quickly discover just such a special type of figure in his etchings and drawings: what I would call the *cumulative figure*. It is a heaping, cascading, stepping, aggrandizing figure with which he organizes his *candelabri*, his *grotteschi* and his *vedute*, from the smallest object to the largest, and from perspective to frontal views. We encounter cascading proliferations of arches, bridges and colonnades; stacks of wholly disparate objects; views leading to other views and again to still others, generally leading the eye upward. The *cumulative figure* is not as smooth as the *serpentinata* figures of Giambologna and Hogarth but rather stepped, rough and incremental; nonetheless, it is a figure, that is, a conflation of object and movement. It is a figure of richness and abundance that adds to what has already been added and then adds again, not so much by layering but precisely by accumulating and spilling over. For Piranesi, every thing is a cornucopia.

When we look at his vases in the *Vasi*, his chimneypieces in the *Diverse Maniere*, his man-sized candlesticks (especially those), the high altar in S. Maria del Priorato, the stairs that seem to go on forever in the *Carceri*, the terraces of the *Campo Marzio*, the decorations in the *Parere su l'Architettura*, the frontispieces of the *Antichità Romane*, we see the same thing again and again: figures exceeding themselves iteratively, leaping from themselves while remaining with themselves, generally engaged in the most prodigious antics and exhibiting the most elaborate acrobatics. Everything aims for the highest point,
be it a facade, a view, a candlestick, a city, anything – but it does so without leaving itself. Striving is not a matter of ecstasy, which we typically associate with the sublime. Things definitely take a turn in Piranesi’s universe, but as they do so, they define themselves – at least aesthetically. In his world, and maybe ours, things are like athletes or acrobats: while striving for the best, they show themselves. Or, to put it more paradoxically: in their acrobatics, things stand on their own, simply because the object has turned into a figure. When we look at the wondrous architecture of the Campo Marzio, we don’t see fragments, or Tafuri’s *bricolage*, or a “critique” of classical order, or any other type of deconstruction; no, we see figures standing on their own, organized entirely within themselves. We should not take this lightly: the order that creates things is not shared with other things, which are in turn created by their own order. Things are not nested according to some ontological set theory in which parts form wholes and wholes in turn are parts of bigger wholes, et cetera; no, there are only wholes.

It is like a universe of snowflakes: each flake is perfectly organized, but that organization is not shared spatially between them. Nevertheless, we haven’t entered a world where all contact consists of chance encounters and blind dates; things do connect precisely and intimately, but on their own terms. In the realm of architecture, this would mean that urbanism’s claims over the object would be declared null and void. There is in fact no space external to the figure, no outer, universal order holding these things together: they only come together to add more glory, more verticality. Again, let us not mistake such a world for one where things blindly elbow their way upward; there is great generosity (in Aristotle’s sense) and no lack of communality (though there is definitely a lack of solidarity). And each flake constitutes a palace, or a mausoleum, a garden, a circus, or a bathhouse, all of them appearing in large numbers. The *Campo Marzio* is a world devoid of work and workspaces. Huizinga’s notion of play offers us a powerful conceptual tool for comprehending its program, turning our notion of the plan of the *Campo Marzio* into a *ludic* plan – unsurprisingly, since it concerns the field of Mars. Things are added to another in pure competition, in *agon*, but not in space – there is no mediation, no overall mediator. These are *figures without ground*.

---

And here we arrive at a crucial point. Piranesi was perfectly aware that a magnificent city is not just a city full of palaces and memorials: as the palatial objects competitively aggregate, the ground underneath opens up further and further, into what he so aptly designates the Hanging City, the Città Pensile. Of course, we recognize this concept of suspension from the Carceri and Della Magnificenza, where it often takes the form of underground structures such as massive sewers and foundations: the nonhuman spaces of technology. Needless to say, today every thriller and suspense movie uses ducts and sewers to house the monsters threatening the lives of the terrified humans. More importantly, in the light of our comparative analysis of the sublime and the magnificent, we should comprehend that this polarity of the vertical axis plays a role in both categories. In the sublime, the vertical axis extends between the high and the deep; in Piranesi’s world, we cannot have the glory of the magnificent without the suspense of the groundless, of the porous, unstable earth.18 Pointing upward, toward the sun and its golden rays, we call one pole magnificent; pointing downward into the dark and unknown, we call the other tragic.

The tragic is not simply the opposite of the magnificent; it is the temporal, event side of that axis, while the magnificent stresses the spatial side of it, the side of objects. 19 It is the space of the fall, and very well illustrated by the Carceri, which is conceptually the mirror image of the Campo Marzio. While the latter is essentially a plan, an ichnegraphia, the Carceri is without plan. Ulya Vogt-Göknıl’s excellent analysis from the 1950s clearly shows the impossibility of reconstructing a plan from the perspectives of the Carceri series.20 The perspectives are ambiguous, consisting of views constructed from multiple plans that overlap and contradict one another. The infinitude of the proliferating21 structures of the Carceri creates a universe where “the center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere,”22 of course, but most of all, the drawings of the Carceri depict a setting for an event, a tragic event – or, if you will, a tragic play. With the magnificent, it is always the object that has our focus; with the tragic, we ourselves are the focus. They are of the same order, but whereas the magnificent object is located in space, the tragic event happens in time. Therefore, while the architecture is fleeing from us, we come to

18 Sarah Maclaren, La magnificenza e il suo doppio (Milano: Mimesis Edizioni, 2005). Maclaren follows a route to appreciating Piranesi similar to the one I take here. Using a somewhat idiosyncratic formulation, she positions Piranesi’s works between two forms of magnificence, one “politically correct” and the other “black,” the latter functioning as the Doppelgänger of what we generally view as magnificent. I’d say that the magnificenza nera is nowadays the more politically correct notion, and maybe we should start to reconsider the other more seriously – even so, Maclaren’s book, partially based on the work of Mario Perniola, is a valuable one.

19 For further clarification, see: Lars Spuybroek, “The Ages of Beauty,” in: Vital Beauty: Reclaiming Aesthetics in the Tangle of Technology and Nature (Rotterdam: V2_ Publishing, 2012). In this essay, I analyze Charles Hartshorne’s aesthetic diagram, in which he splits the sublime downward into the tragic and upward into the magnificent, with the two aligning vertically. I think Hartshorne’s diagram, which is based on Whitehead’s later ideas, offers the only proper framework for understanding relations between aesthetic categories, and it is surprising how much of Piranesi’s work fits within the diagram’s systematics.

a stop. While the architecture seeks the endless, we come to our end. The tragedy of the Carceri is that its infinity matches our finality. Things not only stand on their own but collapse in on themselves too. We should understand the groundlessness and the ever-ascending figures of the magnificent as comprising one vertical axis, or better, one vertical horizon. The space of the tragic fall is the same space as that of the acrobatic jump. Each acrobatic figure in Piranesi’s universe stands on its own because it spins around its own vertical axis.

Coming to a conclusion of this brief exercise, I think we could say that Piranesi’s project is one of a radical pluralism; his world is completely granular. Things meet, negotiate, bounce and break, certainly, but without such behavior being directed by external orders. All order is internal, and all radiance external. This might seem surprising if we look at it from the perspective of the Roman Empire, which never hesitated to force an iron grid over any foreign landscape whatsoever. But it does not if we take the archaeologist’s viewpoint. Piranesi’s archaeology has often been ridiculed as fantasy, but his quest was never one aimed at excavating or uncovering a hidden truth; on the contrary, it was a project of bringing things into the sunlight, and in the process, accepting that things remain on that vertical trajectory and consequently become disjointed. Indeed, instead of seeing the Campo Marzio as a city of palaces, we should call it a favela or a slum of palaces, where affluence and abundance lies in each distinct whole, not between them. The Campo Marzio shows that palaces, mausoleums, and circuses, in all their glory, cannot be added up without friction, nor without opening to the void below, but that their frictional addition adds up to more magnificence.

21 Ibid., 46: “Obwohl diese Bauten stellenweise eine sehr solide Tektonik vortäuschen, ist ihr eigentliches Formengesetz die Wucherung... Aus Brücken sehen wir tatsächlich Türme wachsen, aus denen wieder neue Brücken hervorgehen... Die Wucherung, zum architektonischen Gliederungsprinzip erhoben, läßt die einzelnen Bauelemente sowie ihre Funktion stets als miteinander vertauschbar erscheinen.”
24 Famous pluralists – to mention just two – include William James, who called his philosophy “mosaic” and wrote A Pluralistic Universe, and Paul Feyerabend, author of Conquest of Abundance, a title that interests us for obvious reasons.
ARCHESCAPE. The Piranesi flights

Gijs Wallis de Vries

‘Da haben Sie eine Sonate, die den Pianisten zu schaffen machen wird, die man in 50 Jahren spielen wird.’ (‘You have here a sonata, which will make the pianist work, and which will be played fifty years from now.’ translation: Mary Withall)

Ludwig van Beethoven (on the Hammerklaviersonate, B flat major, op. 106, 1819).

The exhibition ‘Archescape, The Piranesi flights’ intends to demonstrate the visual power of ‘archescape’, a concept based on Piranesi’s Campo Marzio and its ever-challenging idea of the pensile city (‘città pensile’).1 Eight three-dimensional models of architectural objects placed on two-dimensional prints of their surroundings incorporate the classical and modern figures that constitute the principles of Piranesi’s speculative reconstruction of the Campo Marzio, the northern extension of imperial Rome. In 1956 Vincenzo Fasolo made a geometrical analysis of Piranesi’s architectural vocabulary, which he reduced to axial-symmetrical figures.2 Tafuri reproduced them in his interpretation of Piranesi’s Campo Marzio as a ‘fair’ of forms that lead nowhere – according to him a conscious aporia that sealed the crisis of the symbolism of classical architecture, while abandoning the whole idea of architecture as keystone of the form of the city.3 In 1990 Stan Allen published a deconstruction of the Campo Marzio, in which he projected Piranesi’s graphic forms into architectural volumes, extruded as it were from the plan.4 Rejecting Tafuri’s interpretation of surrender to the indomitable chaos of the capitalist city, the advent of which Piranesi would have intuited, this exhibition stresses the fugatic character of the figures of the Campo Marzio and the way out it promises. I share Wilton-Ely’s interpretation according to which the Campo Marzio expressed ‘the positive affirmation of confidence in the creative powers of the imagination’.5 This imagination resides not only in drawings themselves (‘paper architecture’) but also in the spatial,

---

3 Manfredo Tafuri, La sfera e il labirinto (op. cit. n. 2). The aporia, from (Greek) a-poros (non-passage) denotes the impossibility of reaching certainty, an impasse. However, in the porous fabric of the Campo Marzio there are passages galore!
material vitality they express. In these drawings dawns the city of tomorrow, the problem of which concerns its ‘footprint’ on the Earth. The pensile city is a concept for the future. Its topicality lies in the urgent project to counter urban sprawl and foster urban density in order to reduce the planetary impact of the human habitat. The city to come that the Campo Marzio heralds, satisfies the desire to escape to a pastoral countryside or into the wild, by creating an architectural landscape in the city itself. The prerequisite is a radical change in the relation of architecture and infrastructure, by ending the submission of architecture to city planning imposed by the new discipline of ‘urbanism’ at the beginning of the industrial age. The liberation of architecture from infrastructure would result in the ‘pensile city’: a suspense in space, and in time a pending event.

Figures
The eight models of objects selected from the *ichnographia Campi Martii* visualize four classical and four modern figures in three dimensions. In fact, Piranesi challenges us by withholding the third dimension, which he only gives partially. The models are placed on sections of the plan of the Campo Marzio that demonstrate the intricacies of their urban setting. Views from the Campo Marzio itself, as well as from the *Antichità Romane* and the *Vedute di Roma*, show the correlation of perspective and plan. Illustrations of contemporary projects highlight the complementary relation of Piranesi’s drawings and architectural practice. The models are classified according to four classical figures: 1) the concentric figure (with a centripetal, radial movement), 2) the orthogonal figure (developed in squares, a cardinal order), 3) the axial figure (often with parallels, finite), and 4) the symmetric figure (limited, closed). They are exemplified by the models of, respectively, the *Mausoleum Augusti*, the *Mausoleum Hadriani*, the *Porticus a SPQR amoenitatis dicata*, and the *Pantheon*. Systematically opposed to the classical figures, there are four modern figures: 1) the eccentric figure (with a centrifugal, rotating movement), 2) the an-orthogonal figure (developing a diagonal, tilting movement), 3) the an-axial figure (causing a-parallel deviation, infinite), and 4) the asymmetric figure (unlimited, open). They are exemplified by the models of, respectively, the *Minutia Vetus*, *Porticus Neronianae*, *Septa Julia*, and *Horti Luciliani*.

---

6 About the materiality of the works of Piranesi: Gijs Wallis de Vries, Karel Wuytack, ‘What’s the matter of concern? A parliament of urban objects’ in Maria Voyatzaki, ed., *What’s the matter? Materiality and materialism at the age of computation* (ENHSA, 2014), p. 657-760

7 In Archescape. *On the tracks of Piranesi* (op. cit. n. 1) the city to come is evoked in a rêverie of a stroll through New Hague on an artificial island in the North Sea across from Scheveningen.

8 G. B. Piranesi, *Il Campo Marzio* (1764). The second frontispiece shows the Mausoleum of Hadrian in great detail - it seems as if the river moves and shadows signal the moment. Three rather small bird’s eye perspectives (pl. XLVIII) show parts of plate VII of the *ichnographia*: *Elevazione de’ Teatri di Balbo, e di Marcello con gli altri edifizi ch’eran loro vicini* (‘Elevation of the Theatres of Balba and of Marcellus, and adjacent buildings’ - including the Minutia Vetus which Piranesi mentions in the chronological account); *Elevazione del Pantheon, e degli altri edifizi che gli eran vicini* (‘Elevation of the Pantheon and the other buildings around it’ - with spacious room for water plays); *Elevazione dell’Anfiteatro di StatilioTauro, e degli altri edifizi che gli eran vicini* (‘Elevation of the Amphitheatre of Statilius Taurus and the other buildings in its neighborhood’ - including the place that marks the quotidian and annual revolutions of our planet, the Earth, around our star, the Sun – a cosmic place confirmed by today’s archeologists without allowing the magnificence attributed by Piranesi).
G.B. Piranesi, *Campo Marzio*, 1762, with sections indicating the eight models of the exhibition.
The exhibition does not propose a stylistic dialectic in which Piranesi is modernized or modernity is endowed with classical antecedents. In both the classic and the modern figures Piranesi’s drawings bring flight lines into play, operating in synergy with fault lines, which, in their turn, interrupt the division lines and connection lines. The latter couple may be called classical, the former couple modern. Piranesi took classical architecture beyond its forms and thus prepared modernity - and it is the flight line that allows this anticipation. The flight line is ever on the move, halfway, in the middle. As any line, it is woven as a thread, or traced as a track. The thread is material, while the track is immaterial, although inscribed in a material. Architectural figures play with these lines, and especially the architecture that Piranesi depicted (in fact, created, for he did not just render visible objects but made them visible in a way never seen before). All architecture consists of two kinds of frames: those that enclose an interior with walls or columns, and those that open it with doors, windows, and intercolumniation. The first are tectonic, the second I call fugatic. Satisfying desires of escape, the fugatic frames exchange inside and outside, near and far. The tectonic frames form as it were the wings of the movement the fugatic openings allow. Light of course is essential, since architectural frames, traced or woven, are about vision. Piranesi knows the art of profiling architectural frames in the light that rolls over its material and casts shadows on it. The gaze touching the spatial enclosure feels for a way out, and comes to a rest halfway in order to take in the view and breathe the horizon. This is the haptic experience of the incorporated gaze, the tactile eye that Piranesi engraved in his etchings – and which the exhibition models emulate.

The flight and the frame
The works and workings of Piranesi have been interpreted over and over, but since Manfredo Tafuri’s groundbreaking analysis there has been no new theoretical perspective. There are interesting initiatives such as the ‘viral’ lecture of Piranesi’s depictions of the eternal city in terms of ‘terrain vague’ and everyday appropriation. A truly fundamental contribution is provided by the theory of absolute architecture of Pier Vittorio Aureli, tested against the works of Palladio, Piranesi, Boullée, Mies van der Rohe, Ungers and

---

10 The modern figures refer to roman tic anticlassicism, which appreciated Turkish, Arabian, Persian, Indian, and Chinese architecture, and embraced the Gothic. I postulate a ‘Chinese connection’ in Piranesi’s architecture Archescape. On the tracks of Piranesi (op.cit. n. 1), p. 33-34.
11 Teresa Stoppani, ‘The vague, the viral, the parasitic: Piranesi’s Metropolis’ (Footprint, 5, Delft: 2009).
Koolhaas, and of which an application to the Campo Marzio was presented in the ‘Piranesi Variations’ at the Biennale of Venice in 2013. Like Aureli, I endorse the concept of *archipelago city* that proposes the separation of architecture and infrastructure (the latter being a matter of management, the former of design – and the decision about their roles a matter of politics). I also share Aureli’s idea of architecture as a frame that ‘stops’ the city, crystallizes its sprawl, and invites its outside, although in my view the essence of the frame is not naked repetition but infinite variation.

The incredible formal thesaurus of the Campo Marzio begs the question what it all means. Piranesi consciously confronted us with a riddle. Michel Serres has argued that Rome is the cradle of the European city, together with Athens and Jerusalem. Rome is the material, Athens the political, and Jerusalem the spiritual origin – and Rome the most architectonic of the three. For Piranesi Rome is the European city per se. The restoration of the eternal city, repeatedly destroyed and incessantly changed, is an obsession. Piranesi gave a new meaning to the ‘renovatio urbis’ by lifting the issue above the architectural object and the urban fabric, and embedding it in the landscape – an *architectonic landscape*. These words are compressed in *archescape*, while another word echoes in it: *escape*. For I interpret the Campo Marzio and the pensile city in terms of escape. Today, the desire of escape is a matter of concern. It seems a fatal desire that leads to the unsustainable sprawl of the city, the sacrifice of landscape, and the destruction of the paradise it seeks to regain. Instead of the fatal confusion of city and landscape, *archescape* proposes the vital fusion of city and landscape. Source of a rich Arcadian culture, the escape from the city is as old as the city itself. Landscape is the word this culture has coined to name the desire to rejoin ‘the outside of the city’, once the privilege of an elite of rulers and merchants, and an avant-garde of philosophers and artists. Since the industrial revolution, inhabitants of cities massively invade seacoasts, forests, lakes, and mountains. An enormous infrastructure allows this frequent movement, whipped up by the tourist industry, which has kidnapped the heritage of the Arcadian culture. The cultural geographer Augustin Berque, who investigates the worldwide landscape culture, states that it originated in China in the 5th century. According to him, the second source of
landscape culture is the Renaissance and the creation of an anthropocentric cosmology that revived Greek and Roman antiquity, which, as Berque points out, still ignored a word for landscape. The cultivation of landscape not only supposes the desire to return to a lost paradise, but also the words to express this desire, and the art to satisfy it. Thanks to poetry, literature, painting, gardening and architecture, the return to paradise can also be created in the city, even at home (which was first achieved by Flemish and Dutch landscape painting – the murals of Pompeii being a precursor). Archescape is an attempt to theorize possibilities to gratify Arcadian escape motives by urban artifacts, applying the concept of the flight line, borrowed from Gilles Deleuze.\(^\text{18}\) According to him, the flight line does not result from the situation one wishes to escape from; it follows a primary and active impulse that requires imagination. Deleuze is well known for his multitude of concepts, some of which have been translated in architecture, such as the fold or the diagram. To my knowledge the flight line has not yet been elaborated in architectural theory. This theory does not propose a typology or morphology but a tropology, a doctrine of tropes, or turns, which I not only conceive in the figural sense of linguistic turns but also in the literal sense of spatial turns.

My figural analysis of the visual discourse of the Campo Marzio describes three circles of relations: first, the audacious juxtapositions with other figures in the plan; second, even more freely, the correlations of plan and perspective, and third, almost aloof and yet crucial, the complementary relations to Piranesi’s practice as designer and to his position in contemporary culture.\(^\text{19}\) The prominent context is ‘The Grand Tour’ of Europeans educated in the taste of antiquity as well as of landscape, who would come to Rome to buy Piranesi’s views or perhaps one of his vases or chimneypieces. Part of this context is the debate on neoclassicism (a word coined after posteriories), which turned around the question if, and how we should follow the Greeks, a debate in which Piranesi took a polemic stand for the Romans and against the purism ascribed to the Greeks.\(^\text{20}\) Another, more practical context, is constituted by a number of urban projects: Prato delle Valle designed by Andrea Memmo, depicted by Francesco Piranesi (the son of our protagonist), realized in Padua, to reclaim a marshy ‘common’ and give it the magnificent appearance


of a \textit{naumachia} it has retained to this day. Memmo published the lessons of Carlo Lodoli, a Venetian monk, who gave architecture classes to young noblemen and was the first to use the concept of ‘function’ in architecture. Piranesi, who may have met him, sent him his treatise on the Magnificence of Roman Architecture in veneration.\footnote{Joseph Rykwert, \textit{The First Moderns. The Architects of the Eighteenth Century} (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press 1980), p. 376-77.} Other (almost) contemporary projects are the \textit{Nuovo Campo Marzio} by Giuseppe Valadier, commanded by Napoleon, when he made Rome the second capital of his empire. It was not executed, but the axial plan forms the basis of the Flaminio district, mainly built in the 19\textsuperscript{th} c., the triangular ‘patte d’oie’ Valadier designed in the semicircular Tiber curve being reversed. Then there is \textit{Arc-et-Senans}, a design by Ledoux for an ideal city in the French Jura, structured around the salt industry. Half of it was realized, not for the king who commanded it, but for the leaders of the French Revolution, who embraced the idea. Last but not least, there is \textit{Adelphi Terrace} in London, a grand design of Robert and James Adam. Executed shortly after their Grand Tour (today nearly entirely demolished), this first project for the embankment of the Thames, which united a quay, a wharf, and merchant palaces into a superb whole, was a revolutionary emulation of the idea of the pensile city that Piranesi had dedicated Robert Adam.

\textbf{The Campo Marzio: an architectural treatise}

Master of suspense, Piranesi never says what he shows. What he draws is illusion and what he writes is allusion. An example of such an allusive text is the dialogue of Protopiro and Didascalo, which sets out a design doctrine accompanied by images that don’t show the rule but the exception. The Campo Marzio seems to be an atlas concluding the four parts of the \textit{Antichità Romane} that document Piranesi’s archeological research of Rome. According to me, it is an architectural treatise about the \textit{città pensile}, pendant of the hanging gardens in Babylon. Piranesi knew its depiction in the famous ‘essay on architecture’ by Fischer von Erlach.\footnote{Johann Bernhard Fischer von Erlach, \textit{Entwurf einer historischen Architektur} (Vienna, 1721). Fischer mentions the pensile gardens of Semiramis in plate III: ‘Die prächtigen Gebäude der Stadt Babylon als das Erste Welt Wunder’. He translated ‘hangende Gärten’ in French as ‘jardins suspendus’, in Latin as ‘hortos pensiles’.} He borrowed the description of the Campo Marzio as pensile city from Plinius, who used the following words (quoted by Piranesi): ‘\textit{In order to drain all the water that nature itself and manmade works conducted to the Campo Marzio, Agrippa turned it into a pensile city that one could navigate underneath through giant sewers that spilled}'
into the Tiber.’ Piranesi also quoted Strabo, who conjured up the delightful landscape between the Tiber and the hills upstream of Rome, calling the Campo Marzio the ‘appendix’ of the old city on the seven hills that would eventually be eclipsed by it. Piranesi devoted the extensive text that accompanies his reconstruction to archeological fieldwork and to ‘doxography’ (discussion of scholarly opinions), but he did not formulate a design-oriented discourse. Yet, he dedicated the Campo Marzio to Robert Adam, the Scottish architect who befriended Piranesi and sponsored the publication. Therefore, I think we are entitled to read it as a design treatise, the argument being visual rather than textual. This exhibition makes the argument more explicit through models that demonstrate the design principles. In Piranesi’s reconstruction the Campo Marzio appears as a city without a centre, without a boundary, and without regularity. Enormous structures clash among each other, right next to minute cells and formless in-between spaces. There are hardly any roads in the dense urban fabric (except the truncated Via Lata, the zigzagging Flaminia, and the circuitous procession way to the Temple of Mars), but leafy promenades and monumental arcades abound. The Campo lacks a geometrical system that determines the shape and size of plots and blocks, let alone the forma urbis (the form of the city, and also the name of the broken ancient marble plan of the city – a puzzle unresolved till this day). What makes this apparently impossible city possible, or at least plausible, is the independence of architecture and infrastructure. The aqueducts, running above and under the ground, and the sewers constitute a kind of ‘metro’ that opens up an archipelago of neighborhoods. Piranesi called himself a Venetian architect and admired not only the architecture of Palladio and his ‘antique revival’ but also the weirs and other utility works of his hometown, that he familiarized himself with when he was employed by the Magistrato dell’Aque. Once in Rome, he worked as ‘vedutista’, and soon published the first of his architecture books, ‘Prima Parte’, in which he defied the building practice and proudly announced that he preferred the freedom of perspective. One of his interests concerned aqueducts, ‘castelli d’acqua’ (water towers and fountains), and sewers, of which he documented the largest, the ‘Cloaca Maxima’, in ‘Della Magnificenza’, his treatise on Roman architecture.
Chaos and order

Chaos at first sight, the Campo Marzio nevertheless (or precisely because of it) breathes a decidedly urban atmosphere. Its order is hidden in the way Piranesi breaks the *concentric, orthogonal, axial* and *symmetric* figures of the classical order, exploring excessive variations in favor of a composition of *eccentric, an-orthogonal, an-axial*, and *asymmetrical* figures. The plan composes a fugue that plays with the topography, here following the ground, there cutting or jumping it, meanwhile tracing flight lines. In the Campo Marzio three kinds of flight lines may be distinguished: the *labyrinthine* line, which withdraws from the tumult, the *axis mundi*, which links earth and heaven, and the untraceable line that dissolves in the in-between. The flight lines collaborate with fault lines that open up the form of the city, making room for untamed nature, locally framed by artifacts – sometimes with bravura. The Tiber flows freely through the city, without quays, incidentally vaulted by bridges, pausing a while at the semicircular swimming pools by the Gardens of Agrippa, or, further down stream, cleft by the naval form of the Tiber Island. Many of these moments are caught in Piranesi’s views. For him, the art of the veduta is to frame the perspective flight in such a way that it seduces our gaze to ‘enter’ the depicted space, de-framed at the very moment that the things we look at ‘touch’ us. This mental effect is possible thanks to a physical one, caused by the tricks and traces of the burin of our etcher steeped in the intimacy of the ‘speaking ruins’ that enraptured him.

Leisure is inscribed in the wonderful plan of Campo Marzio, the Roman word for it being *otium*, the opposite of which is *negotium*: commerce and industry. In the Roman Republic leisure was devoted to the exercise of science, philosophy, and art. In the Roman Empire it became a spectacle, when, as Piranesi wrote, ‘the people had to get used to luxury’. Habituation to luxury required exercise just as much as military training did, for which the Field of Mars was originally intended. Piranesi did not wallow in complaints about decadence. He might have thought that a new culture of leisure had resulted from the union of Mars and Venus – their cults combined in a temple complex he situated right in front of a military complex. Many figures of escape seem to be placed under the sign of Venus, the goddess of love and beauty. Gardens abound, offering

---

24 Officinae Armorum, plate X, Campo Marzio (op. cit. n.8)
epicurean escapes, and everywhere arcades of various shapes and sizes offer stoic escapes from the city in the midst of its tumult. We, who, after diving from the heights of the great ‘scenographia’ read the traces of the ‘ichnographia’, and touch the ground of the pensile city, are at once struck by the beams of the sun, whose course is inscribed in the giant Place of the Solstice, and feel the vicinity of the abyss that cuts through its illusive support. Yet, from it emerged this delightful reconstruction, a playful throw of the dice, a divine conjecture. 25 According to Piranesi: ‘In the midst of fear springs forth delight’. 26

25 In Italian Piranesi used ‘da indovino’ (guesswork), and ‘divinatio’ in Latin, which means the same, but is more ritual.
CLASSICAL FIGURE

1) Mausoleum Augusti

The mausoleum of emperor Augustus was a built mountain clad in marble, topped with trees, the remains of which are still visible today. Its concentric figure sends flight lines into the Nemus Casearium (forest of emperors), where the lanes are lined with the ‘res gestae’ (exploits) of Augustus. The radial movement culminates in the circular space of the Bustum (funeral pyre), which Piranesi symmetrically configures with the angular ‘moro torno’ (a slanting wall still existing today). To flank the entrance he invented two phallic buildings ‘pro statione lugentium’ (for waiting mourners) which would inspire Ledoux’ ‘oikema’.

G.B. Piranesi, Campo Marzio, Scenographia Campi Martii, pl. II, detail
CLASSICAL FIGURE

2) Mausoleum Hadriani

The mausoleum of Hadrian (today Castel S. Angelo) commands a square lay out. This orthogonal figure develops along an axis of which Piranesi gives a magnificent perspective in the second frontispiece of the Campo Marzio. Piranesi’s speculative reconstruction is a skyscraper *avant la lettre*. Its foundations are plunging deep into the earth, united with those of the bridge (today Ponte S. Angelo), of which Piranesi had drawn the section as well as an amazing subterranean perspective, published in ‘Antichità Romane’ (vol. IV, pl. VI and IX). The whole complex endowed with two stadiums evokes a festival ground. Its axial composition is met *off axis* by the ‘Via Triumphalis’, a procession route from the old city to the Temple of Mars. A remarkable arcade fans out between the Mausoleum and the Bustum (funeral pyre), the plan of which could be seen as an angel – the soul of Hadrian? From the broken chain of arcades around the mausoleum a flight line shoots into the sky.

G.B. Piranesi, Campo Marzio, frontispiece II, detail
The axial figure of the ‘Arcade by the Senate and People of Rome devoted to pleasure’, entirely invented by Piranesi, is composed of an incredible repetition of columns, doubled, mirrored, paralleled, and stacked (the last being the invention of our model). The repetition is finite, but the circular stairwells at the far ends return the movement, making it potentially infinite. Thus, the repetition propels the difference that motivates it. The Porticus frames a flight line sought by lonely citizens for a shaded stroll along the flowing river, or by the crowds that come to watch the horse races on the Equiría.
4) Pantheon

Best-conserved ancient monument of Rome, the Pantheon has two parts: a domed cylinder that inscribes the axis mundi in a perfect sphere, and the vestibulum, a columnar portico. The latter orients it in the city, the former in the universe. Piranesi included in the Campo Marzio two vedute of the Pantheon standing alone in a deserted city, and noted odd remains at the back to support his idea that it must have been the centre of an enormous complex (pl. XXIII, XXIV). In his reconstruction, also shown in a scenographia (pl. XLVIII) he expanded the Pantheon to a symmetric figure that includes an ornate pond, two thermal baths and other water works fed by the Arcus Ductus Aqua Verginis (the aqueduct that still feeds the Trevi Fountain). It is as if the vertical, cosmic axis framed by the oculus of the vault is coupled with a more terrestrial, horizontal flight line.

G.B. Piranesi, Campo Marzio, Scenographia Theatrourum Balbi, etc., pl. XLIYIII
MODERN FIGURE

1) *Minutia Vetus*

This building originated entirely in the imaginative brain of Piranesi, who took a minor clue from an ancient text that mentioned an arcade founded by Minutius Rufus and destined for meetings. Piranesi designed a building that seems to be spinning. On the *scenographia* the six semicircles that surround the central dome are alternatively open and closed. In the *ichnographia* a central staircase is drawn by hand directly on the copper plate – an afterthought that seems to repeat the fascination for eccentric stairwells he expressed in his *Carceri* and already in *Opere Varte* (pl. 49 and pl. 51). Crowning an eccentric figure these stairs launch a centrifugal flight line.

G.B. Piranesi, Campo Marzio, detail copper etching plate VII
Another invention of Piranesi’s effervescent brain, Nero’s Arcade is a composition of square ‘coenationes’ (dining halls) set in a ‘clitaporticus’ (pergola) that circles around it. It is an-orthogonal figure, for although the central arcades mark an orthogonal order, it is tilted as it were by four ‘atriola’ (small atriums). Perhaps intended for withdrawing after dinner, they offer shelter from the city, while two of them frame flight lines to triangular follies that look like a pun on the thesis of Pythagoras.
This enclosure served the Roman Citizen to vote, with courts, arcades and innumerable rooms (Piranesi may have assumed they served the organization according to clans). It is situated just outside the Porta Catularia of the old city, on the Via Lata, from which it deviates by an acute angle. The enormous gathering place seems claustrophobic, barring escape, except perhaps in allowing people to give their vote on the forma urbis. As a matter of fact, Piranesi based this an-axial figure on the plan on a fragment of the forma urbis, the broken ancient marble plan of Rome, this puzzling thing (the etymology of which signifies gathering), which still occupies the archeologists.
These gardens lie between the valley and the hills, which they connect with stairs reminiscent of the Spanish Steps, but grander. The Atrium Minervae crowns the axis, which is then diagonally diverted by two ‘oeci’ (halls). These delicate combinations of concave and convex forms act as hinges that turn the garden complex into an asymmetric figure. One hall casts a screened view on the Via Flaminia, while the other offers a glimpse of the gardens. Gardens like these were founded by private persons (Lucilianus in this case), who opened them to the public – as a token of their love of the city, and a variation on the anagram of Roma: Amor.
COLOPHON

Jos Bosman
Director, Casa Vertigo,
Faculty of the Built Environment,
University of Technology Eindhoven

Jac de Kok
Graphic Design of Book and Exhibition

Manon Deijkers,
Mieke van Herwijnen,
Christian Hazeleger,
Jorrit Klaver
Research, Design, and Production
of models

Rob van Wendel de Joode
Photography of Models

Gert-Jan van Dijk
Distribution, 1001 Publishers,
Amsterdam

Gijs Wallis de Vries
Concept

A catalogue record is available from the
Eindhoven University of Technology
Library

Piranesi’s Campo Marzio has been at the focus of Gijs Wallis de Vries’ academic career. It comes as no surprise therefore that after his doctoral dissertation on the subject in 1990, an illustrated English version of his observations appears today. The interpretation of 25 years ago has acquired a more haptic dimension in the form of three-dimensional models for an exhibition. Four graduate students researched and realized this three-dimensional interpretation: Manon Deijkers, Christian Hazeleger, Mieke van Herwijnen, and Jorrit Klaver.

Gijs Wallis de Vries’ reading of Piranesi’s Campo Marzio is about two different types of spatial experience he has identified in Piranesi’s reconstruction of old Rome, two ways of ‘tuning’ spatial experiences using architectural elements to orchestrate the impression of blended styles and scales of various buildings. Piranesi imagined a splendid version of what had been left of ancient Rome: its ruins and vestiges, as well as its preserved buildings, such as the Pantheon. Embedded in the way that Piranesi added parts of what may have been, to what has been left, Wallis de Vries observes basic differences:

1. A classical way of sequencing in order to provide the experience of a delicate balance, with a sense of equal ‘weight,’ on both sides of the observer (four types of such ways of lining up are demonstrated in the exhibition), and

2. Another type of coherence in which the relation between the observer of architectural and landscape elements suggests movement, very much controlled, in order to raise the experience of a ‘tension’, a kind of ballet performance with fireworks, and the symphonies from Piranesi’s time (four types of such sequences are demonstrated in the exhibition).

Wallis de Vries recently gave the name ‘Archescape’ to his reflection on what could link Piranesi’s dreamlike archeology to contemporary architectural theory and practice. With this concept he continues his journey of discovery and interpretations.

Jos Bosman