

ROMA ININTERROTTA. BUILDING THE OTHER MODERNITY

ALESSANDRO CAMIZ

DEPARTMENT OF ARCHITECTURE,
“G. D'ANNUNZIO” UNIVERSITY OF CHIETI - PESCARA

BOOK REVIEW OF

Lejeune, Jean-François (ed.) (2025) The Other Rome. Building the Modern Metropolis 1870–1960, Birkhäuser Verlag, Basel. ISBN: 978-3-0356-2536-3, 368 pages.

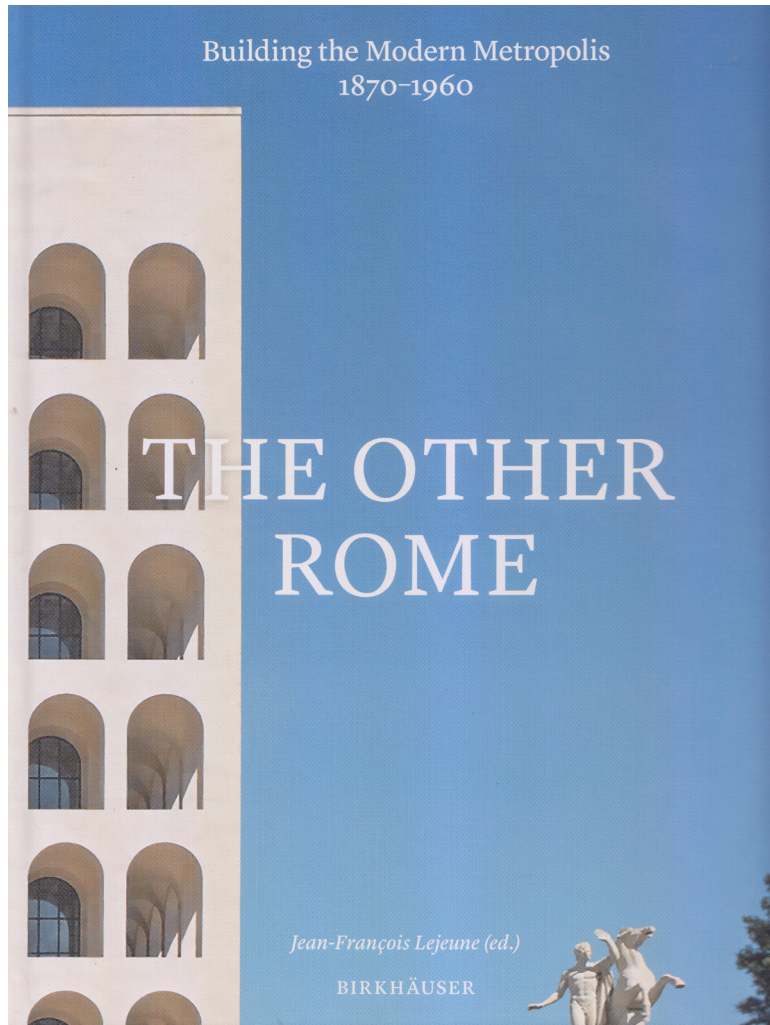


Figure 1. Book cover: Lejeune, Jean-François (ed.) (2025) *The Other Rome. Building the Modern Metropolis 1870–1960*, Birkhäuser Verlag, Basel. ISBN: 978-3-0356-2536-3, 368 pages.

The volume describes and represents vividly the architecture and urban planning of modern Rome, starting from its annexation to the Savoy kingdom in 1870 all the way to the Olympic Games of 1960. Within this *longue durée* period, perhaps transcending any historiographical or stylistic category, the editor outlines the characters of a Roman school of Architecture, inscribed within the notion of the other modernity. Besides Lejeune's contribution the volume includes also essays written by Lucio Barbera, Anna Irene del Monaco, Salvatore Santuccio, and Daniel Solomon, and is extensively illustrated by photographs, archive drawings, and axonometric reconstructions of the most meaningful projects.

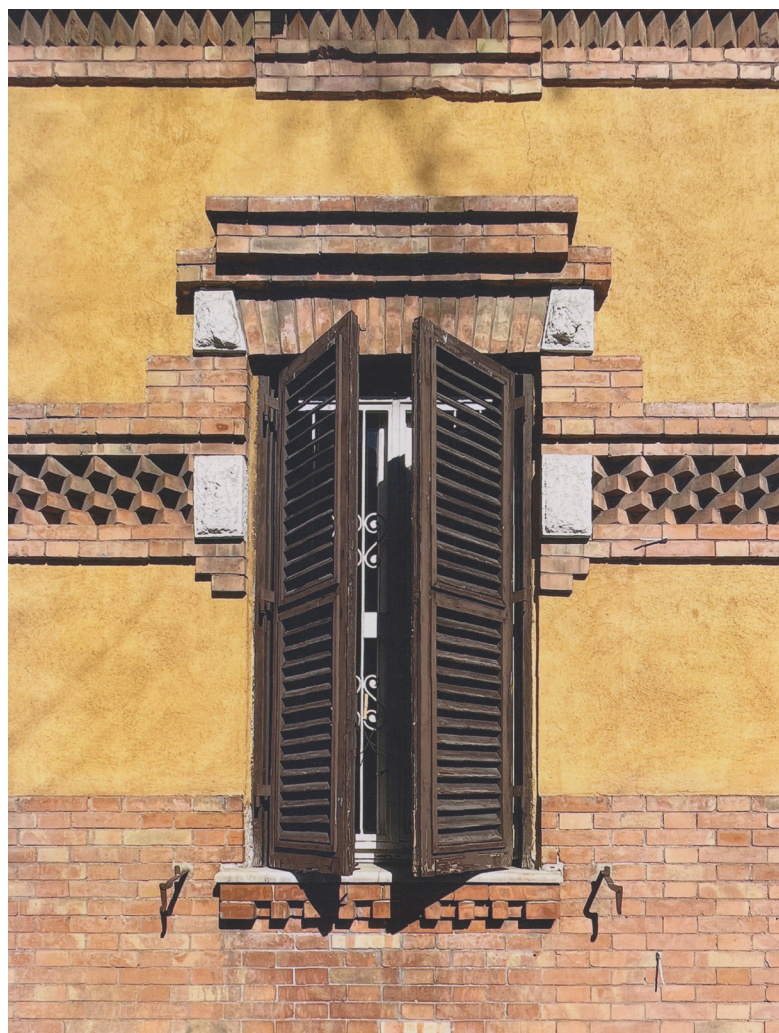
In the introductory essay, titled *Roma non Interrotta*, Lejeune explains the thesis behind his work, in open contrast with the *Roma Interrotta* exhibition designed by Piero Sartogo with *Incontri Internazionali d'Arte* in 1978 (Sartogo, 2014). Lejeune believes that Rome was not interrupted during its modern development, and indeed, in the eternal city,

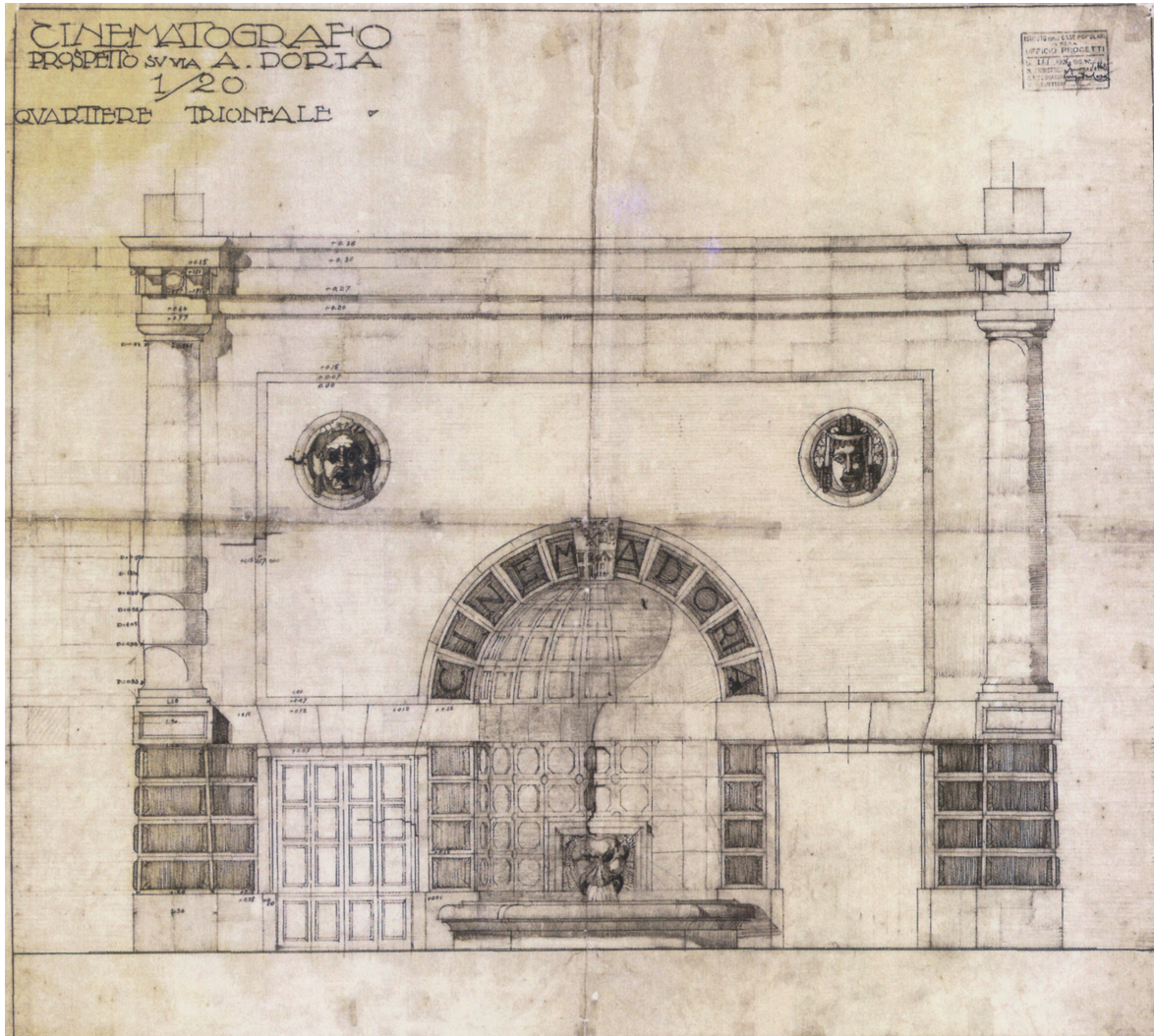
the hiatus between tradition and modernity appears less abrupt than elsewhere. This same idea was the base of a lecture given by Antonino Saggio (Saggio, 2014) entitled *Roma ininterrotta*, presented during the international conference *Giambattista Nolli: Imago Urbis and Rome*, organised in 2023 in Rome by Alan Ceen and the Studium Urbis.

Daniel Solomon's contribution *The splendid Ordinary*, quotes Gianfranco Caniggia (1989) in the beginning of his essay. Caniggia referred to Rome as "the world's capital of modernity without modernism", clarifying that the continuity of Rome is a typo-morphological one.

Lucio Valerio Barbera, in his *Waltzing the Third Rome*, displays with great clarity the different phases of Rome's transformation in the last century, and is de facto the core of the volume, providing a complete and very well illustrated history of Rome in modern times. He organised the periodisation consistently in three chapters: *The Pirate times 1870-1900*, *Form Reform to Fascism 1907-1943*, *From the Reconstruction to the Olympic Games 1945-1960*.

Figure 2. Quadrio Pirani, Viale Giotto, wall and window detail, 1906-1923.





In the following chapter, *Neighbourhood Typologies: Reform Blocks, Palazzine and Metropolitan Density*, Lejeune outlines the typological continuity of Rome's urban fabric. He supports the idea that in Rome, the urban block, remained in time the model for a dense and compact city, following the evolution of the main residential building types, from the row house, to the palace, to the apartment building (*casa in linea*) to the *palazzina*. This typological continuity is another consequence of an uninterrupted development devoid of that discontinuity that the modern movement caused in many other European capitals. In the chapter called *Neighborhood Portraits*, Anna Irene Del Monaco, Lejeune and Daniel Solomon, analyse 18 different neighbourhoods built between 1870 and 1960 describing them in detail and placing each project within a broader historical context. In the conclusive chapter, *Modern Rome and the Cinematic Gaze*, Salvatore Santuccio engages in a parallel narrative based on the city as seen through the camera lens in movies, concluding with a cinematic representation of the eternal city.

Figure 2. Innocenzo Sabbatini, Cinema Doria, Via Andrea Doria, elevation drawing, 1926.

The volume rotates mostly around these two main questions: whether Rome was interrupted or not, whether it is modern or vernacular, or if it represents instead another modernity. Somehow, it does not address properly these questions in relation to the 1978 Roma Interrotta exhibition. Roma Interrotta was conceived as a design experimentation in strong continuity with the ancient city, based on Giambattista Nolli's 1748 map. Sartogo asked twelve architects (Costantino Dardi, Antoine Grumbach, James Stirling, Paolo Portoghesi, Romaldo Giurgola, Robert Venturi, Colin Rowe, Michael Graves, Robert Krier, Aldo Rossi, Leon Krier, and himself) to redesign Rome as if the inconsistent urban transformations that followed the Italian unification, the fascist regime, and post-war real estate speculation had not occurred. This way of conceiving urban design, excluding the bourgeois city but in continuity with the pre-capitalist city and closely related to contemporary art, criticized by some as an academic undertaking, was already revealing itself at the time as a truly avant-garde undertaking. That experiment based on Carlo Argan's (who was at the time the city mayor) motivation, "Rome is a city interrupted because we have stopped imagining it" (Argan, 1978) was calling for design invention and creativity in continuity with the ancient city, it was not stating that Rome was modern or vernacular. In other words, Rome is neither modern nor vernacular, it is instead mostly Roman.

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