CULTURE MEETS ECOLOGY IN THE PUBLIC SPACE
'TRIUMPHS AND LAMENTS' ON THE TIBER

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"Because cities gather together differences, strangers need a center, they need somewhere to meet and to interact. But the sheer arousals of the center are not enough to create and urban polity; the polity requires further a place for discipline, focus, and duration."
Richard Sennett (1998)

"There are things we should hold on to but forget. And historical memories, things that society should remember, that get forgotten."
William Kentridge (2016)

1. Foreword

As Rome rushes forward in its fourth millennium, its ongoing experiment in urban transformation is as riveting as ever. Few cities offer as rich a spectacle of starts and stops, of sacks, sieges and stagnation alternating with growth spurts, strategic developments and spon-

taneous expansion. The world's most resilient city, Rome has always found a way to rebuild, but never from scratch.

In today's global urbanization, city-making often means inserting new pieces of architecture, or even complete pieces of city, what Fumihiko Maki called "collective form" (Mayne, 2015 p. 14) especially in urban areas where large tracts are abandoned or devastated by disasters. Even in the Eternal City there is a role for big thinking, for regional strategies, and for projects which address infrastructure as a catalyst for urban regeneration. Roman leaders have imposed collective form onto sites cleared by fires and floods, or in its *disabitato*, tracts of green space abandoned by a shrinking population. Nero rebuilt after the fire of 64 AD with wider, straighter streets, and the Renaissance popes from Julius II to Sixtus V cut axial boulevards through the historic fabric to establish new urban connections. In the twentieth century Mussolini's *sventramenti* scarred the city while gouging out historic fabric and replacing it with over-scaled monumental architecture. And already decades before Fascism, after becoming capital of unified Italy, Roma Capitale saw the radical transformation of its most central historic infrastructure, the Tiber river.

But such bold moves are not the only way to shape cities. Sometimes – and this is true especially in cities like Rome where architecture has had centuries to accrue – urban architects can leverage the existing fabric and artifacts and produce successful urbanism with the most minimal of interventions. This chapter will chronicle one such intervention along Rome's riverfront: the establishment of a new public space dubbed Piazza Tevere and the production of the largest public art project ever produced, "Triumphs and Laments", by artist William Kentridge. My hope is that, using the Kentridge project as a case study, we can better understand how art can serve as a catalyst to spur social change, and how the city can leverage its existing resources to do more with less.

2. The Site

Rome's Tiber Riverfront has not always been the desolate *terrain vague* that presents itself to us today. In 1704 Alessandro Specchi completed the Porto di Ripetta, a bustling baroque *scalinata* descending from the city to its river banks, and inversely welcoming merchants and visitors arriving by boat up into the Campus Martius. Images of the Tiber from this time show lively boat traffic, floating mills, and great numbers of people lounging around the river banks. Fishing and swimming were so popular that they were regulated by papal decree. As Rome's most important economic, environmental, ecological, and recreational resource, according to architect and Tiber historian, Maria Margarita Segarra Lagunes, the Tiber didn't just run through the city; it was part of the city.

The river would frequently overflow its banks and invade the city streets, as documented in the hydrometer on the wall of the Church of San Rocco, flooding ground floors and filling monuments such as the Pantheon with muddy water. It was hard to ignore the river's fickle presence. The Tiber was both a blessing and a curse. The lifeblood of the city could also prove a menace when heavy rains upstream filled its narrow channels causing it to breach its banks. Reflecting on the eternal city, Henry James wrote of "the sad-looking, evil-looking, Tiber beneath (the colour of gold, the sentimentalists say, the colour of mustard, the realists)" (James 1909). Goethe barely mentions it, nor do Lord Byron, Charles Dickens, or Mark Twain. The river where Romulus and Remus supposedly washed ashore attracted little attention from the travelers of the Grand Tour, more interested in seeking out monuments and works of art rather than reflect on the natural setting which gave birth to Roman culture. And yet it was there, alive and connected.

On 28 December 1870, just months after Italian nationalists breach the Aurelian Walls (establishing Rome as the nation's new capital), the Tiber river breached its banks and flooded the city to a level not seen since 1637. The nascent nation's capital was mortified by the embarrassing inaugural performance, and flood-prevention measures,

which had been discussed and debated since the late Republic, became urgent. Smart solutions such as bypass canals to mitigate extreme water levels were set aside in favor of the most destructive option: demolition of the fabric along the river and construction of the tall embankments walls, the *muraglioni*, which we see today.

Between 1880 and 1900 vast tracts of land on both sides of the Tiber were commandeered and cleared. The narrow streets of the former Jewish ghetto and the dense wall of buildings which had stood directly along the river, forming an occupied architectural edge, were all razed to be replaced by speculative modern structures. In fact, the creation of the Tiber embankment served both infrastructure and urban renewal, in the worst sense of the word, not unlike the cleansing efforts which would mar American cities and infuriate Jane Jacobs in the middle of the following century.

Rising forty feet from the lower riverside paths, these travertine walls effectively severed the city from its river. In her touchstone 2009 essay entitled *Rome's Uncertain Tiberscape*, Kay Bea Jones describes how "with street life, bridge crossing, and public activities now thriving fifteen meters above the Tiber's water level, which rises and falls with little effect, the relationship of modern Romans to their river was detached and would be changed forever" (Jones 2009). Since the completion of the embankment walls, Rome's riverfront has stood as a piece of obsolete and abandoned infrastructure, marginalized like the distant periphery despite its location in the heart of Rome. For many Romans and foreign *romaphiles* alike this neglect is unacceptable.

3. Tevereterno Onlus

Of all the initiatives to reactivate Rome's river, none have had such a tangible presence as Tevereterno, the creation of New York artist Kristin Jones. I first met Kristin in 2005 when she asked to meet me to talk about how the non-profit organization I had co-founded and was then serving as President, the American Institute for Roman Culture, might

become her fiscal sponsor. Kristin had come to Rome in the 1980s with a Fulbright, and later returned as a Fellow at the American Academy where her project was focused on the potential of the Tiber riverfront as a site for artistic programming. Not the whole riverfront, but a particular section, between Ponte Sisto and Ponte Mazzini, which Kristin dubbed "Piazza Tevere", where the embankment walls run parallel to one another for a half a kilometer, cut perpendicularly by the two bridges to form a perfectly rectangular space. She observed that the space was like two New York blocks, four times as long as London's Tate Modern turbine hall, and the same size and proportions as Rome's largest ancient racetrack, the Circus Maximus.

Like most piazzas in Rome, there was water. Unlike typical Roman piazzas though, there was also vegetation, making it a rare example of green infrastructure in the heart of Rome (though Rome has more green space per capita than any other European capital, little of this is in the city center where most visitors concentrate). What was missing was the recognition as a public space and a reason to go there. In 2007, makeshift "street signs" appeared along with the first artistic programming and Piazza Tevere started to come to life.

Up to this point Tevereterno had been a vision, but in order to turn this vision into reality, an organization was needed. Kristin called on friends, old and new, in Rome's cultural community – Architects Carlo Gasparrini, Rosario Pavia and Luca Zevi – and, together, three Italian architects and one American artist, they formed the Associazione Tevereterno Onlus. The Italian term "Onlus" is short for non-profit organization with a social mission. With the help of other artists, composers and activists, Italian and American, Kristin began to plan and develop the first artistic programs to activate Piazza Tevere.

Kristin Jones has always been the main force behind Tevereterno, and the first projects were of her own creation. In 2005, with the aid of Capitoline Museums Director Claudio Parisi Presicce, who helped provide hundreds of images, she drew twelve *She Wolves* first on paper and then, using transparent plastic stencils, onto the embankment walls. She used a process of power-washing which would a decade later be

used by William Kentridge. Later that year, on the night of the summer solstice, thousands of torches illuminated the river's edge (one for every year since the city's founding). An even greater number of people (estimated at close to 4.000) attended the event and heard the 100-member harmonic international choir directed by Roberto Laneri.

It would become a Tevereterno tradition to celebrate both the solstice and Rome's birthday on Piazza Tevere. In 2006, thirteen visual artists and composers were invited to propose site-specific works. A high-fidelity sound system and six high-resolution video projectors were used to activate the site with light, images and sounds. The following solstice, a line of floating flames snaked upon the Tiber's surface in a program entitled *Flussi Correnti* which brought a collaboration between Kristin Jones, architect Daniel K. Brown and a live, musical performance by the Roman ensemble Ars Ludi.

As Tevereterno's reputation grew, other creative individuals were drawn to Piazza Tevere, collaborating with the organization on projects of their own. Jenny Holzer projected massive written texts, a project entitled "For the Academy" in May 2007. In 2010 Robert Hammond (Co-Founder of New York's Friends of the High Line), with composer Lisa Bielawa produced *Chance Encounter.* Iconic red cafe chairs were purchased and scattered across the site, to be activated by passersby and documented in time-lapse photography.

The parallels between Piazza Tevere and the High Line were many: two examples of abandoned infrastructure in the heart of major cities, one (in New York) a success story of civic place-making, and the other still in the process of emerging. Even before Hammond's involvement, Tevereterno began to resonate globally, born of an international team in a city long-dubbed "caput mundi." In 2008 it brought Rome to New York's River To River Festival. In 2010 Tevereterno was present at the Architecture Biennale in Venice.

The international press loved it, but in Rome itself the project remained enigmatic. It seemed as if the potential of the Tiber could be seen better from afar. Or that the ephemeral, circumscribed interventions were too subtle for the city's administrators. Initiatives with am-

bitious titles such as "Progetto Millennium" were being launched, proposing new tourist hubs, airports, seaports, stadiums and a new metro line. The Tiber, although recognized as crucial in the 2004 Master Plan, was simply easy too (to) ignore. After all, it had been essentially forgotten since the embankment walls went up in the 1880s.

In a small way my own design work had touched on the Tiber over the years, addressing difficult sites adjacent to the river such as the abandoned Mira Lanza soap factory off Viale Marconi and the former Papal Arsenale near Porta Portese. The Tiber lent itself to the application of a methodology I had developed in my teaching about sustainable urbanism. I had pinpointed seven interconnected themes and insisted that any urban design intervention be accountable for addressing issues of water management, green space, urban fabric, energy use and conservation, waste reduction, mobility, and community (Rankin, 2015). The Tiber is Rome's most visible water resource, and even after the embankment walls it still poses a flood threat to the island and the river walkways and bikeways. It is also the most central green infrastructure in Rome and provides a welcome respite from the dense fabric of historic Rome and Trastevere. Today its role in hydroelectric energy production is minimum, but the Tiber has a history of floating mills which could return.

On and alongside the water, the river can serve Rome's mobility needs as an alternative to its clogged and dangerous streets. Tiber navigation, like its energy production once a major activity, is today limited to a few tourist boats, but the potential is great. As a cyclist, I often bike along the riverside bike trail (and was happy when the city finally paved it in about 2010.) In collaboration with Engineer Antonio Tamburrino I have been developing a proposal for new transit infrastructure, a major piece of which is tied to the Tiber. Finally, the Tiber is Rome's drain, taking its wastewater and quite a lot else out to sea. How can this be improved, reducing the river's pollution?

In short, the Tiber presents a series of environmental challenges and opportunities, but until it is recognized as a significant place in the city's cultural landscape, there is little political will to enact change.

It was for this reason that in early 2013 I accepted Kristin Jones' and the Tevereterno Onlus Board's invitation to serve as Director, to help usher in a new phase. Maybe a shot of public art would change the negative identity the river projected at present.

I had a dozen years of experience administering non-profits. I had created and run the Italian non-profit cultural association Scala Reale from 1996-2004, and then co-founded and managed the US 501c3 American Institute for Roman Culture until 2008. I knew that the first step to bringing order to the loose-knit organization was to draft and pass a strategic plan. The five-year plan approved by the board in October 2013 clarified the structure of Tevereterno which had previously been a personal artistic project of one artist, Kristin Jones. It set forth two independent but related organizations: the existing Italian organization and a planned "Friends of Tevereterno" which would be a US 501c3, run by an independent board, dedicated to raising funds for the Tiber projects and mission.

It established three divisions (Operations, Development and Projects), coordinated by the Director, who in turn would work under the governance and oversight of the Board. And of course this was accompanied by a five-year projected budget with allocations and expectations for these divisions. Predicted Revenues would start at about $80,000 in 2014 and reach almost half a million in 2018. The Strategic Plan contained a rudimentary campaign for crowdfunding and project sponsorship, as well as an outline for a necessary major outreach effort. With the plan approved, the organization started to grow; new board members, volunteers, and donors came on board and the authorities and press began to take notice.

4. William Kentridge

The administrative reorganization taking place behind the scenes, though essential to the health of the organization, was thoroughly eclipsed by the arrival in Rome of William Kentridge. The South

African virtuoso is one of the world's most important living artists, although in my ignorance I had never heard of him until Kristin introduced us and I attended his production of *Refuse the Hour* at the Teatro Argentina. I was immediately hooked, entranced by his rich interweaving of sound, text, image, of science, history, literature, and personal anecdote. *Refuse the Hour* reawakened the passion for theatre I had had just out of college, orbiting around the work of Robert Wilson and Philip Glass among others. At the same time Rome's MAXXI museum was showing Kentridge's installation entitled "The Refusal of Time", built around the same themes from the work of Peter Galison, a Harvard-based historian of science. I went back again and again.

Kristin had been following Kentridge's work for years and pressing him to consider a project for Piazza Tevere. In November 2012, while he was in Rome for *Refuse the Hour,* she set up a test projection of images and video onto the embankment walls in order to show Kentridge the possibilities. He watched from above, and then descended to the riverbanks below, observing the scale of the images (his own drawings from the recent performance).

After the last performance of *Refuse the Hour* there was a party in the spacious, art-filled home of a mutual friend off of Piazza Venezia. People who had been instrumental in Tevereterno over the years were in attendance, people like Andrea Canapa, Damiana Leoni and Pino Fortunato (who I learned held the position of Director, for which I was being recruited). Missing, because she was taking a rare leave of absence, was Diane Roehm who, after Kristin herself, was the single most active individual in the project, although she had no official role in the organization.

But none of the confusion of Tevereterno mattered; all eyes were on William Kentridge. When he spoke, it was his creative mind and his love of Rome that mattered, and his decision, after years of persistent cultivation on the part of Kristin, to embark on his first ever experience in free public art, here, on Piazza Tevere. "If not now, when?" he announced.

5. Triumphs and Laments

It was as if the floodgates had opened and the creative forces rushed on through. The proposed medium, selective cleaning of the river walls, had been tested and approved, but the exact subject had not yet been identified. Kentridge wasn't going to start drawing without assurance that permits and funding would be in place to make the project a reality, but ideas started to take form. He was interested in iconography from Rome's long and ongoing history, specifically images recognizable as victory or defeat, triumphs or laments. Under the direction of art historian Lila Yawn, professor at the nearby John Cabot University, a team was organized to collect images for Kentridge to draw from, and eventually a selection which he would draw in his studio. Two databases (one for triumphs and one for laments) were quickly merged into one when it became clear that every victory represented another's defeat, for every triumphal celebration someone else was mourning their losses.

Kentridge is remarkably humble for an artist of his stature. He listened with childlike fascination to explanations of images, to stories from Rome's history. He learned, he made connections, but as a visual artist, not a historian, he gravitated to the images themselves independent of the story they told. An emaciated horse from the base of Trajan's column, the Renault 4 with its hatch swung open to reveal the body of Aldo Moro, the war-worn prisoners carrying their treasures from the Arch of Titus, all were chosen for the emotions evoked, not for the specific message conveyed.

Parallel to the first iconographic research, another process was underway, the quest for signatures. Tevereterno Vice-President Valeria Sassanelli and I sent around documents, scheduled appointments, rescheduled appointments, met with officials, and patiently and persistently pushed to obtain the necessary permits. At each pass I filed away contact information in our growing database and added nodes to a map I called *Tiber Bureaucracy*. So many stakeholders played a role in Rome's river. Some thirteen were directly responsible, from the Lazio

Region to Roma Capital down to the Primo Municipio, AMA, ACEA and the Polizia Fluviale, but many others had an indirect interest in the river's health: international cultural institutes, embassies, environmental organizations, sporting clubs, and many, many others. The map became a sort of octopus.

And the process became what Kentridge would describe as an operatic drama: "One could do an interesting timeline of refusals and newspaper articles and phone calls […] waiting for this politician to be thrown out or to resign and for a new one to come in" (Kentridge, 2016b). We met with Maria Costanza Pierdominici, 'Soprintendente per i Beni Architettonici e Paesaggistici per il Comune di Roma' who spoke positively of the project, and days later sent us a menacing letter critical of the project. Architect Federica Galloni, who first affirmed that she would never allow the project to take place, would in the end become one of its most ardent supporters and even write the dedication in the Ministry's publication about the project. We met with Raniero De Filippis of ARDIS who pledged his support, but days later he was arrested for alleged involvement in a corruption scandal. We spoke with the Minister of Cultural Heritage and the Performing Arts Massimo Bray who said he supported the project but had little power over the technicians working under him. We sat down with Ilaria Borletti Buitoni, then Undersecretary of the Ministry, and received her pledge of support. Actor Carlo Verdone met with us and agreed to become Tevereterno's *presidente onorario*. I brought U.S. Ambassador John Phillips and his wife Linda Douglass to Piazza Tevere where they participated in our annual 'Tevere Pulito' clean-up. Rome's MAXXI museum of contemporary art agreed to partner with Tevereterno, especially President Giovanni Melandri who is a great fan of Kentridge. The network of supporters mushroomed.

But at the same time there was a mixed reaction in the press, beginning with a headline in Rome's daily newspaper "Il Messaggero" which included the word 'graffiti'. The mistaken idea that a foreign artist would be invited to scrawl his graffiti on the walls of Rome's monuments (not at all what the project entailed) obviously aroused the

rage of many Romans and it took a huge public relations effort on our part to explain that as an organization we were cleaning up the site, and the artistic medium was actually cleaning the walls. But the press, especially the art journal "Artribune", began to see the importance of the work and positive articles appeared worldwide.

In June 2014 Tevereterno organized an event at the MAXXI, an artists' workshop culminating in a projection and performance. Rome's art world was present in numbers, as were journalists, but with few exceptions the event was boycotted by all levels of public administration. Each time I spoke with Mayor Ignazio Marino, he said he supported the project, but he never made a proactive effort to bring it to fruition. When a meeting between Marino and Kentridge finally took place it was a fortuitous one, the artist on a boat, filming footage for a future documentary, the Mayor on his bike along the riverside path. It was thanks to Kristin Jones' quick thinking that the impromptu meeting even happened.

By mid-2015 the arduous permitting process was achieving its desired results and Kentridge began drawing without reserve. Now that "Triumphs and Laments" was moving forward it became urgent to raise the required funds, but the management of the project was problematic. The Artistic Director Kristin Jones, who was to report to me as Tevereterno Director in order to coordinate fundraising efforts, continued to act autonomously as she had always done. Kentridge's studio, rather than risking what must have seemed a disorganized collaboration with an inexperienced team, chose a professional outside producer with whom they had worked in the past. The project soon had three competing fundraising efforts running in parallel, only one of which brought funds to the organization that had launched the project years earlier and was working full-time to make it happen. As the deadline came closer, the strategic plan which the Tevereterno board had approved was boldly and bombastically disregarded, like the traffic laws on Rome's streets. Jones changed password access to the organization's website, and the whole communications and outreach plan

came to a standstill just months from the anticipated initiation date of the selective cleaning work.

If it weren't for Kentridge's galleries taking on the responsibility for paying for the cleaning and the inaugural events, the project would have failed at this point. There was simply not enough money. Some compensation was also paid to certain Tevereterno board members but not to the administrative staff nor the development team who continued to work for free. However, the project was too exciting to be sidetracked by financial limitations.

Despite these obstacles, "Triumphs and Laments" moved forward to completion. Gianfranco Lucchini oversaw the technical production, specifically the transformation of the digital drawings emerging from Kentridge's studio into polycarbonate stencils. Starting in early March 2016, these were suspended against the embankment walls while workers in cherry pickers sprayed water against the stone surface, cleaning away the dirt. As the first stencils were removed, the figure of Mussolini on a horse emerged, his raised hand severed and floating ominously in a Roman salute just above the horse's tail, the whole thing riddled with what looked like shrapnel. Then Pasolini's body, Remus, the head of Cicero, and Minerva. The cleaning started in the middle and worked outwards until early April when all eighty or ninety figures (depending on how one counts them) were visible. Soon preparations would be underway for the inaugural events, the most ambitious theatrical spectacle William Kentridge had envisioned to date.

6. The Disappearing Frieze

From the moment the 500-meter long frieze was completed it began to decay back into nature. This is inherent in the ephemeral nature of the technique, and one of the reasons there was a sense of urgency to shine the spotlight on the work while it was fresh. Ironically the same authorities who had voiced opposition to the project early on, and who we had attempted to assuage with assurances that it was just a temporary

work, now bemoaned the figure's impermanence. Once they realized that Rome had its own William Kentridge piece, they wanted it to be eternal, but Kentridge refused any suggestions of conserving it artificially. Rome, we pointed out, has a long tradition of ephemeral phenomena, from triumphal processions to Baroque processions to the Estate Romana festivals under cultural commissioner Renato Nicolini. The ephemeral actually leaves a more lasting impression on the viewer, Claudio Strinati pointed out, because the memories are left unadulterated by later transformations. "L'opera svanirà ma farà parte della storia e rimarrà nella coscienza della persone" (Strinati, 2014). What is certain is that anyone present 21-22 April, 2016 at the performances of Triumphs and Laments on Piazza Tevere will remember the experience for the rest of their lives.

That night, on a boat in the middle of the Tiber with good friends, in the company of William Kentridge who was also watching for the first time the unfolding of this performance, I felt that it had all been worth it. Thousands of people thronged the river's left bank and bridges to watch and experience the spectacle. It was evident that our mission, to reactivate the Tiber riverfront with site-specific art, had been achieved. The job was done, thanks to Tevereterno, its board and its founder Kristin Jones, thanks to William Kentridge, thanks to hundreds of supporters and volunteers, and even thanks to some administrators with a vision. The world had rediscovered Rome's river, and now things would change.

It would be nice if the story ended here, with the anticipation of improvements, of the physical transformation of the riverfront to make it more amenable to visitors, now that city officials had been shown what an important resource they had. An article in the New York Times by Elisabetta Povoledo, a few weeks after the inauguration, focused on the grassroots volunteer efforts of Tevereterno and others which indicated a change of current for Rome's river (Povoledo, 2016). It was clear that the next step would be to improve access, seating, lighting, to upgrade maintenance, in short to render Piazza Tevere a more presentable civic space on the international stage. Days before the inau-

guration, Tevereterno had been busy with almost a hundred volunteers cleaning the site, urging officials to find a reasonable solution for the homeless under the bridge. With the huge success of the event, I had no doubt that the playing field had changed.

Then a few weeks after the frieze was unveiled white tents began to be erected in front of it, tents which, if completed, would have effectively blocked its visibility. This should not have come as a surprise; for years agreements with other non-profit organizations had been in place to construct temporary structures along the riverfront, ostensibly for cultural activities, though in truth it seems that the organizations holding these concessions simply sublet them for a much greater fee than they paid to the city.

I had announced my resignation from Tevereterno at the completion of "Triumphs and Laments" and wasn't in a position to intervene. The organization's board remained silent, as did the authorities who had pleaded with Kentridge to make his work permanent. Only a group of private citizens spoke up, circulating a petition and staging protests, until the city suspended the construction of tents on Piazza Tevere.

But even so, Piazza Tevere fell back into a state of abandon. The homeless living under Ponte Mazzini returned, the weeds began to grow back, the stench, broken bottles and syringes again filled the stairs. In early July a young American student enrolled in a study abroad program at John Cabot University was found dead in the Tiber. The last people to see him alive were the denizens of Ponte Mazzini with whom he had been seen having an altercation, the same people who apparently still occupy the public space illegally today.

People came to see Kentridge's masterpiece but the dirty Tiber and its abandoned riverfront left an uncertain impression. When tagging showed up on the frieze in April 2016 the city acted to have it removed. But the tagging elsewhere on the site remained, although AMA was ready to clean it if the city gave the go-ahead. When the annual Tevere Pulito civic cleanup came around on Earth Day no one from Tevereterno or from the city government showed up.

Even Google recognizes Piazza Tevere as a place in its map database. Thousands of people have made the pilgrimage to the site to see Kentridge's biggest artwork. However, even after the huge international success of Triumphs and Laments, the city of Rome may not be ready to rethink its riverfront.

7. Conclusions

What could Piazza Tevere become with proper public investment, interventions, regulation and maintenance? "Triumphs and Laments" made its potential clear as a public space. It fills a void in Rome's rich offerings. The city has a plethora of *piazze* but they are, for the most part, hard-scaped urban spaces with a dearth of green space, little public seating, and no real sanctuary from ubiquitous motor vehicles. Piazza Tevere and the Tiber riverfront in general would provide an alternative public space for Rome, a linear green park where residents and guests could unwind from the intensity of urban life.

In lower Manhattan the transformation of the abandoned rail lines into the High Line brought about enormous change in the way that neighborhood is perceived and used. It also led to a huge increase in property value and tourist revenues. Similarly, Rome's forgotten infrastructure, its riverfront, could spawn an urban renaissance. The hard part has been done. Now is when – in a normal city – the administration would step in to provide the much needed upgrades and maintenance. Working with local associations, first and foremost with Tevereterno, it could fund competitions for public seating, lighting, and new ramps and elevators to make the site accessible. In place of the large-scale disorderly and banal tents which infest the riverfront each summer a competition could be launched for limited-scale, high-quality, temporary constructions, more Venice Biennale than country fair. The administration would treasure Rome's resources, especially its abandoned infrastructure, and work to instill new vitality in the city's many forgotten places.

Good architecture is like editing; we take what has come down to us over the ages, and analyze it critically, evaluating what works and what doesn't work. We use the existing as our raw material, whether it be vertical facades, stratified landscape, perspectival views or consolidated culture and commerce. The challenge for designers in a rich and complex urban context (none more so than Rome) is not to compete and to stand out. Nor should our objective be to embalm the past under glass, as if history has ended.

The early history of Piazza Tevere has shown that sometimes the most promising resources are right before our eyes, awaiting a fresh approach and a vision that artists serve to provide. The experience of "Triumphs and Laments" teaches us that good ideas are very often met with opposition or indifference, but that with perseverance they can reach fruition. Like so many initiatives in Rome, the creation of public art on Piazza Tevere was possible despite all of the obstacles the public administration placed in its way. Imagine what could result from a collaborative process involving progressive leaders and a motivated, innovative and international private sector.

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