

Interrupted City: Grafting Rome, New York

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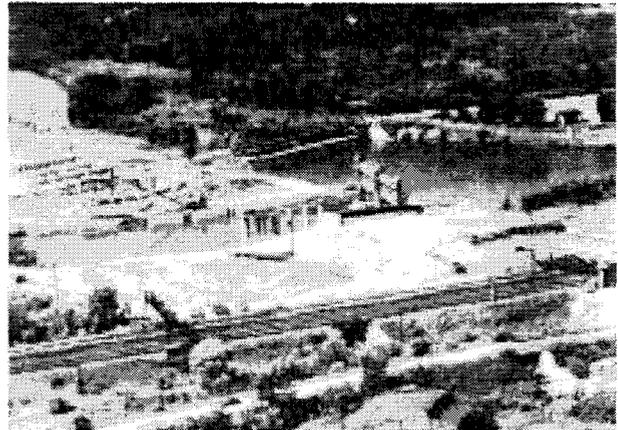


1.0

Introduction

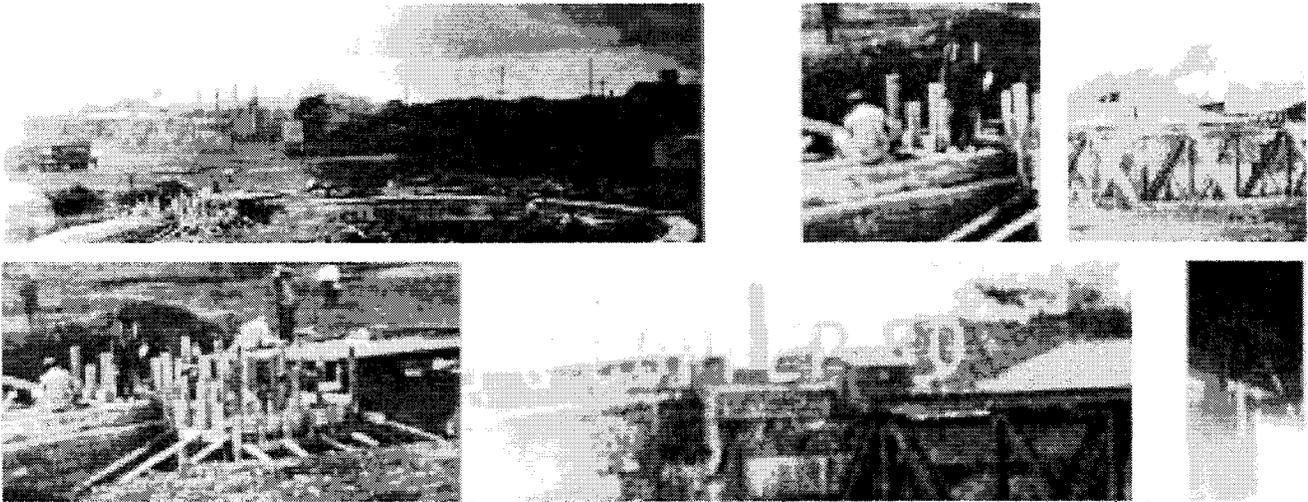
Rome, New York is unknown to most people in the United States, rather unlike its namesake across the Atlantic. However, that choice of name puts at play a kind of surplus value. What aspirations underlie this attribution? One approaches Rome through a landscape of freeway interchanges, rail lines and mucklands, feeling increasingly let down as the center, such that it is, nears. On the final stretch, as one is lifted off the ground by the concrete piers of US Rte 49, rising above an overgrown canal bed, we cross a threshold marked by a reflective green highway sign which announces: "site of Clinton's ditch." The sign interrupts our passage in order to insert the history of the Erie Canal. It begins to construct an authenticity through historical narrative. One is entering a place whose identity, it would seem, is heavily mediated by historical allusions. Proceeding forward into the city, one is confronted by an enormous reconstruction - another, more aggressive, interruption - that of Fort Stanwix. Had we surfed to Rome via the web, we would have been presented with this same narrative: Fort Stanwix is Rome.

Interrupted City: Grafting Rome, New York is a joint



project of an architect and a cultural geographer. It creates city "encounters" in two ways: the project cuts trajectories through Rome's deep settlement history, and grafts data from cognitive maps, popular press and official documents to form new representations of the city. Our map technique brings together practices of field study, archival research, and citizen interviews and cognitive mappings, in order to address how cultural dimensions of physical form may be mapped as a changing landscape. It interprets fragments of the city scene - parade routes, protests, housing genealogy - and through their superimposition, provides a thick description of place. It accepts the predominance of GIS as a mapping tool, yet critically grafts within it "alternative cultural and social conceptions of property, land, historical meaning"¹ of aid to citizens, planners and policymakers in viewing the future of their city.

The work addresses a marginalized segment of the US urban landscape, that of economically distressed small cities and towns, virtually disregarded by architectural and cultural geographic study, disenfranchised through recent military and industrial down-sizing, and made peripheral through decreases in population and ongoing economic recession.



Narrative photographic survey, as apt of a 'predella' on industrial manufacturing in Rome, incorporated into an interactive website.

1.1

Multiplicity over singularity as a mapping goal

Cities are rarely singular, holistic or seamless entities. They are, as Wim Wenders renders Berlin in *Wings of Desire*, full of chance encounters, both physical and imagined. They are full of remnants and memories of former selves. The angel Damien drives through a Berlin simultaneously inhabited by the present day and its war past, seen together, neither able to fully extricate itself from the other.² Cultural aspirations expressed in urban form help structure our personal identities, and yet as human constructions are mutable in response to conflict. The cultural imagination takes on form in the city through new constructions, changing patterns of use, erasure and decay. Cities are landscapes of interruption, and require tools to be studied as such.

To drive through Rome today is to drive through a landscape of contradictions and interruptions: Founded on the new canal economy, the Erie Canal's beginning point is now a small town of 40,000, in which the canal no longer figures as an economic resource. Ravaged by the effects of de-militarization and de-industrialization, it housed, until 1995, Griffiss Air Force Base, and yet on September 11, 2001 it was a sergeant at North American Aerospace Defense Command's (Norad) Northeast Air Defense Sector (NEADS) in Rome who first notified of a possible hijacking aboard American Airlines Flight 11³. Home to major copper and wire companies, one's impression is that Rome has been completely

deserted by industry.

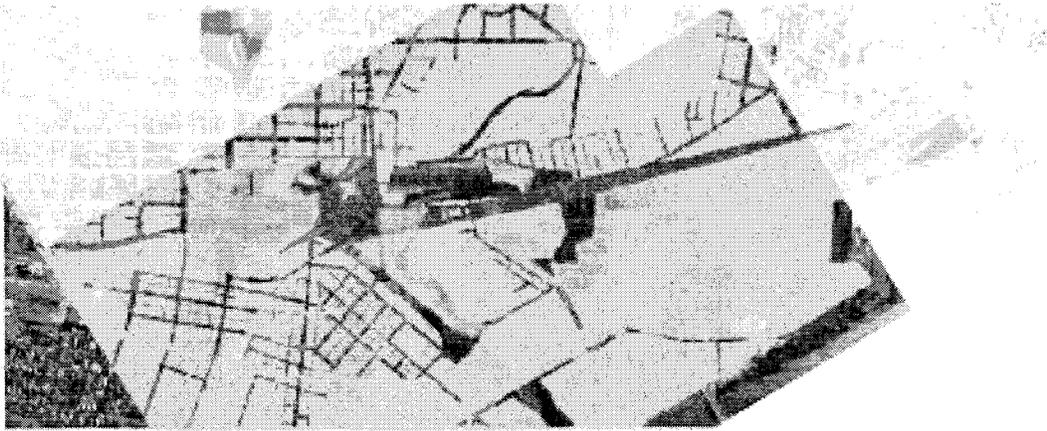
Rome is marked by rapid early growth yet remarkably little sprawl, by sites of state (Erie Canal), national (Fort Stanwix) and federal (former Griffiss Air Force Base, Rome laboratory, Norad) presence, by significant industry (Revere Copper), sustained physical and economic change over the past 40 years, and yet a small population of 40,000. This is the context of spatial and institutional compression in which our project took root. In discussing Geertz's notion of thick description, Stephen Greenblatt notes certain expressions of this culture appear to be compressed and thus *expandable*. We have found that Rome has this characteristic of compressed and interpretable matter, which we have expanded into our technique of grafted mapping- resulting in mappings we call *grafmaps*.

1.2

Interruption and grafts

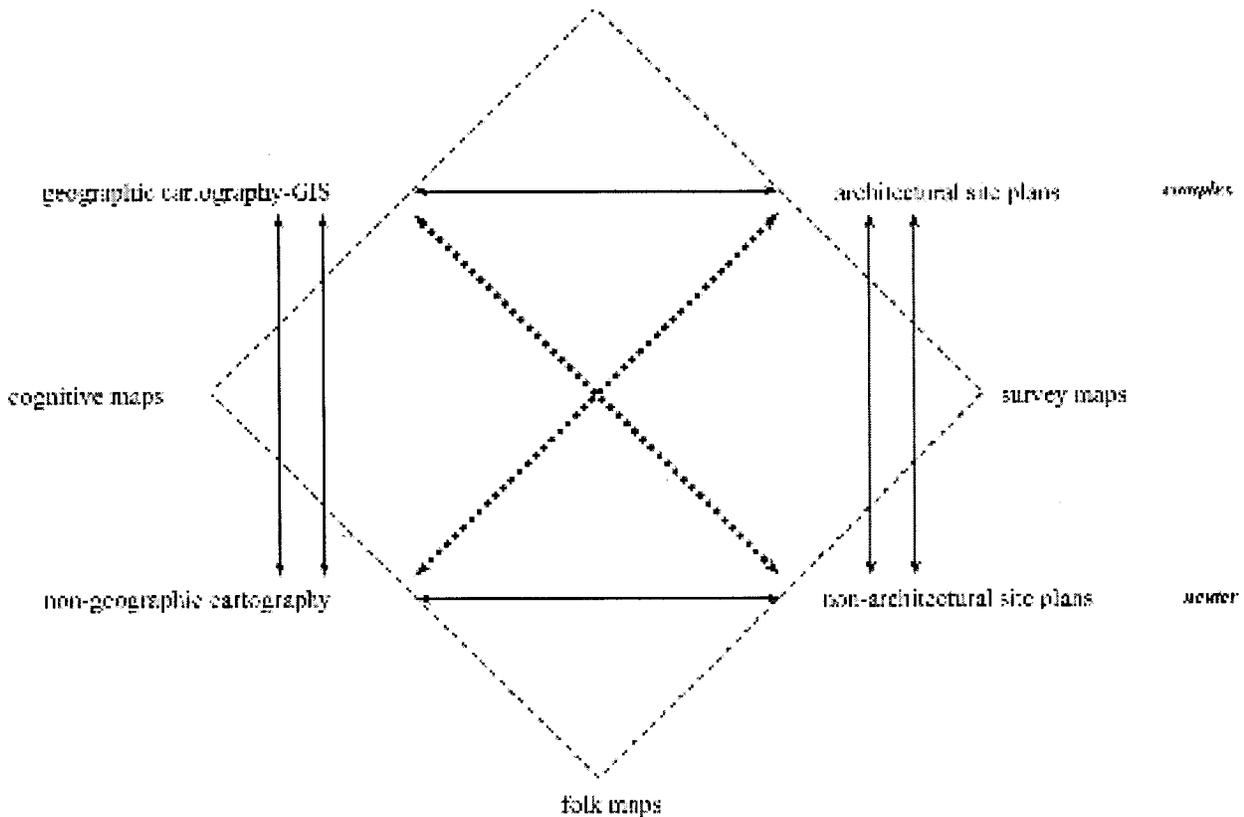
The technique of *grafting* looks at specific themes emerging from the human occupation of a place, and maps these themes together in a thickened description, a grafted map. Brought out from a network of data sources, these maps offer complex and nuanced images of the city, a city analyzed through its *interruptions*.

Three themes and events specific to Rome were identified:



Overlaid GIS topologies of two events: urban renewal and strikes.

Our thick *graff map*



- Historical Sport/urban renewal: the landscape of historic markers and the re-emergence of Fort Stanwix
- Manufacturing/industry: the landscape of de-industrialization and the 1919 strike
- Domesticity/work: the landscape of workers housing and the creation of the new factory village of Riverdale

We juxtapose various accounts (official, popular, personal) of these events and graft them into an existing GIS geo-database of Rome. While GIS software resists this sort of interpretable data, we felt that our maps gain legibility through their superimposition on this official base map. To isolate them would remove them from this essential iconographical context. To paraphrase Gregory Ulmer in

his discussion of Derrida's technique of the graft,⁴ we borrow the terms utilized by the GIS database, but detach those terms from the perceived 'objective' precision of GIS, and re-attach them to another field. This other field is diagrammed below as a set of relations of map/image types. Our diagram is closely based on the Klein diagram developed by Rosalind Krauss in her article *Sculpture in the Expanded Field*⁵. With it we were able to think through the attributes and potential of our maps.

2.0

Outline of process

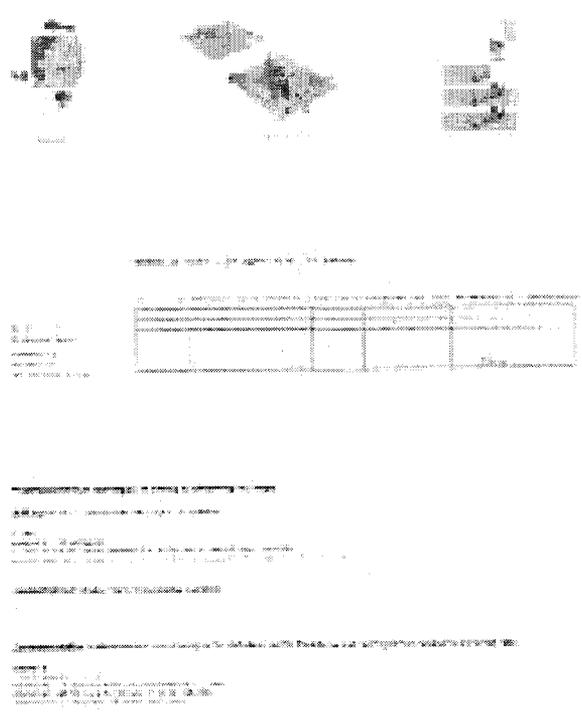
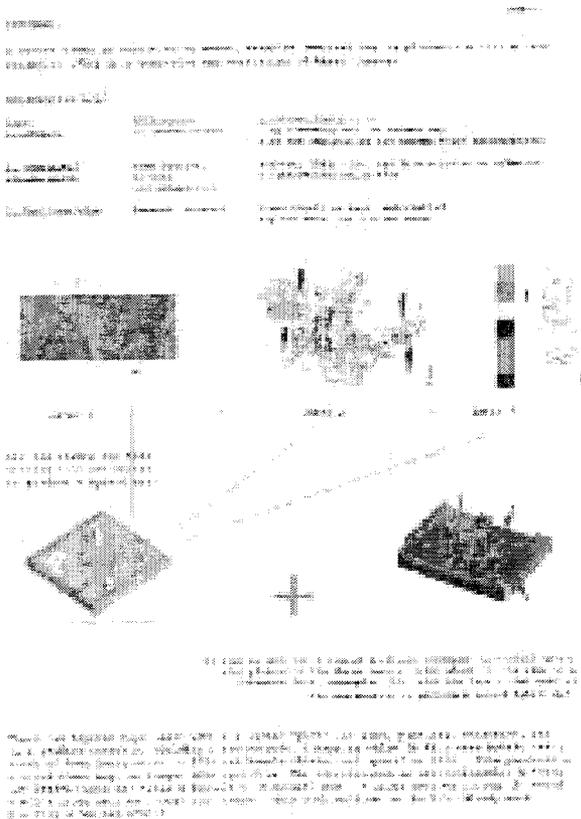
The geography of a chosen theme or event, for example, 'manufacturing/de-industrialization and the 1919 strike', is mapped within a specific timeframe. The map is a composite of three layers of data: that from official documents (OD), popular press (PP), and personal accounts or cognitive maps (CM). In the case of Rome, official data includes the GIS geo-database, Sanborn fire insurance maps and manufacturers' executive board reports; popular

press data includes reportage, for example, from La Vita, The Rome Daily Sentinel and Revere's company magazine, and personal accounts include interviews and cognitive maps from over 40 citizens.

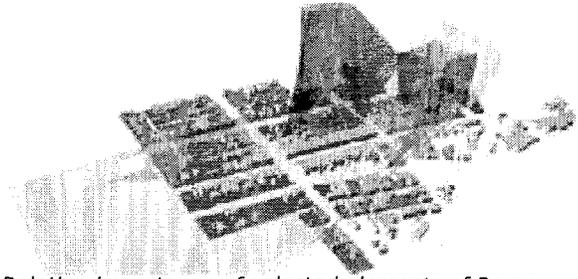
These layers are selectively grafted onto one another, producing a thickened map.

The same is done for a second condition, for example, 'historical sport/urban renewal and the re-emergence of Fort Stanwix', and also developed in the three layers as discussed to produce another thickened map.

These two maps, each containing multiple narratives of a single event, are then grafted together, yielding a new product - a mapping which in this case superimposes a study of de-industrialization and of urban renewal. From these thematic and place-specific sketches, girded with the everyday accounts and memories of citizens, and re-inscribed into the official GIS environment, emerges an image of the perceived landscape of Rome. The maps can show a full range of responses, as opposed to an average. Seeing the city through the lens of interruption, they favor changeability over stasis,



mutation over ideality, multiplicity over singularity. These thickened representations of the city challenge reductive, binary evaluations such as 'industrial success/industrial decline'. The thickened mappings are brought together in an interactive environment, designed to allow for different social constructions of space, so as not to be forced into a single viewpoint or resolution.



Relative importance of selected elements of Rome as recalled by her citizens, overlaid with the urban form in several periods

2.1

Process with the cognitive maps

Utilizing an interview and drawing session with 42 respondents, we asked each to draw a map of Rome on an 8 ½ x 11 sheet, giving 5-10 minutes for this part of the exercise. Their maps were in some respects drawn twice, for part of the interview occurred after their drawn map was placed in a protective acetate sheet, and we found that the maps then acted like a mnemonic, drawing out other remembrances, associations and clarifications. We then analyzed these drawn cognitive maps of Rome against the respondents' responses to a series of questions on their use of, and relationship to, Rome. We were particularly concerned with the perceived edge of the town, which features were included and



Sample cognitive map and GIS overlay of relative edge conditions in citizens' 'ghost' maps.

which were excluded, map annotations and orientation, the location of their home base, and more particular responses to places like Fort Stanwix. We then began to process our analyses into a large database set within our Rome GIS database.

2.2

The problem with GIS

Existing map or plan representations of the city, while diverse in number and institutional provenance, are singular in aim: the tendency in most modern mapping techniques is to produce a tool for a single end. This is true also for the sophisticated GIS software now commonplace in government service and commercial applications worldwide. GIS involves the spatialization of data, bringing into one digital environment the ability to manipulate, summarize, query, edit and visualize information.

The two tools used most frequently by professional analysts of the environment are statistical modeling of such things as population demography, income, manufactured products, etc., and maps of urban systems such as roadways and land distribution.

"An inherent difficulty in representing and understanding individuals and societies in Geographic Information Systems (GIS) has been the static, land-attribute framework of current GIS. Yet societies are dynamic; composed of disparate and mobile individuals whose interactions lead to emergence of the complex, non-linear phenomena that shape our spaces and societies. The very complexity of social phenomena means that harnessing the power of computers to aid our understanding is far more critical here than it is for the simpler landscape issues traditionally addressed with GIS. Our challenge is not merely to clarify the limitations of current computer representations, but rather to elucidate alternative representations that do facilitate effective representation and integration of the complex relationships between People, Space, and Environment."⁶

The National Center for Geographic Information and Analysis and National Science Foundation's *Initiative 19* recognized that "conventional GIS approaches to resource management reproduce the production and dissemination of environmental knowledge in the image of existing power relations".⁷ NSF Initiative 19 raised two primary questions:

1) the extent to which GIS privileges particular conceptions and forms of knowledge, knowing and language; and

2) the extent to which it is possible in electronic imaging systems to develop the kind of reflexivity that many see as essential to a critical social science.

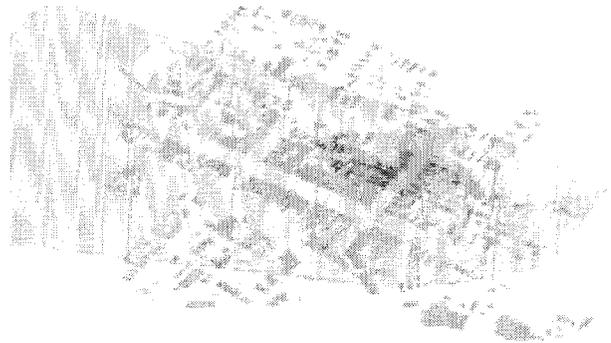
Curry, et al., identified a paradox: "On the one hand, conflicts over the use of space typically involve competing sets of, values assumptions, interests. On the other hand, geographic information systems typically assume a universal set of objectifiable and self-evident components of the processes they model". This misalignment of aims and means, they claimed, leads to a "structural distortion of knowledge".⁸

2.3

Interrupted City: Grafting Rome, New York directly responds to these questions. The very notion of interrupted cities is one of reading the city through the fragment, the trace, the anachronism. In studying the city as a place of interruption, one looks for seams between the aggregate visions embedded in its form. On an excursion in the city one can literally walk the seam, examine its surfaces, its forms. But one also needs to look for deep registrations, to look at the historic context to understand the erasures and telescoping forms, even to be able to see traces of them in the contemporary urban fabric. One needs to listen to the voices of its citizens to be able to map their understanding of the city's spatial identities. We wondered what would be the places of overlap between these personal visions and those of the specific themes/events mapped. Do these places become intensified, as one might expect? Secondly, we questioned the degree a citizen's 'place value' is associated with formal and

institutional hierarchies. We found that

certain areas of the city were frequently mapped as pertinent, while on the other hand there were some very surprising omissions and inclusions. Notably, several sanctioned historic monuments were rarely mentioned or drawn, while some areas of the city which had long since been eradicated found frequent mention. There was a notable 'misalignment' between citizens' sense of 'place value' and the authorized or institutionalized identity of the city.



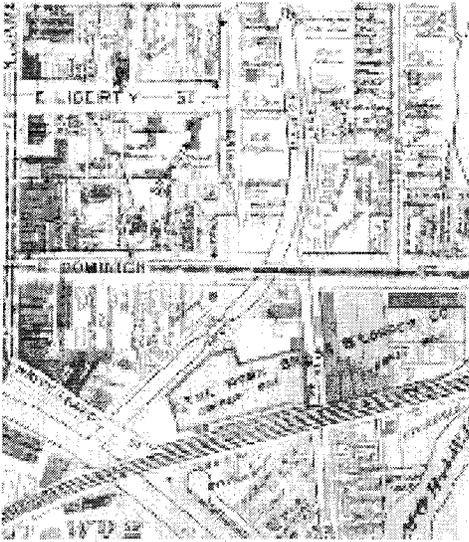
3.0

Development of selected Roman themes

Rome offers an example of Benevolo's description of the specialization and bureaucratization of urban systems. Mostly grown in the 19th c., it is systemic, not organic. It is formally marked by its industrial transportation and manufacturing infrastructures, and newer ones reflecting tourism and economic revitalization, resulting in conflicting values spawning conflicting planning strategies. At the same time, Rome is its own conceptual and physical quarry, grafting and re-grafting onto itself. The myriad of canal systems, constantly reworked, shifted and widened, and the fort, quarried for materials, built over, re-made, are examples of this re-registration of the city.

3.1

Historical sport/urban renewal: the landscape of historic markers and the re-emergence of Fort Stanwix



Founded as Lynchville by an Irishman named Dominick Lynch, the people revolted against this proprietary claiming when incorporating the village in 1819. They re-named their fledgling city of about 3500 "Rome", suggesting wild aspirations for its growth and significance. Known to native Americans as the deo-wain-sta, the carrying place, the need to portage -a key link in a system of westward flow- has marked Rome's location since well before Europeans fought over the area. Rome was founded in the place where a portage between the Mohawk River and Wood Creek became an essential link between the Atlantic and the Great Lakes. Just as Rome, Italy was founded at the isola tiburtina, at a place of easy crossing and a confluence of pathways, so too the geography of Rome, New York exhibits an intensification of the landscape around this point of confluence, as multiple human creations and events were to continue to layer over this spot.

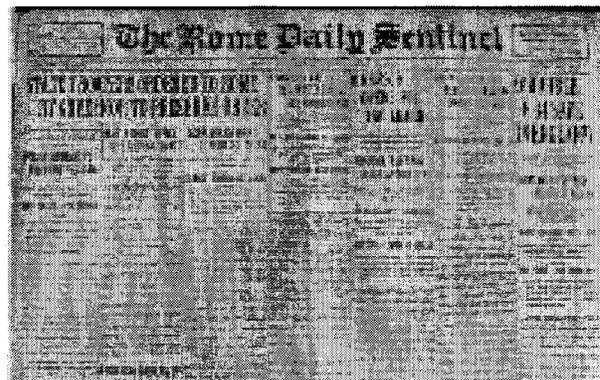
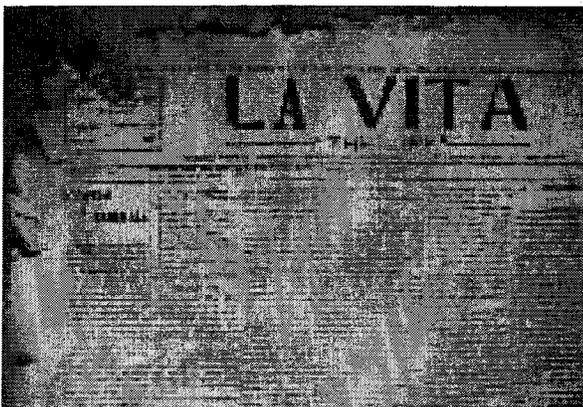


Rome's early beginning as frontier outpost already had the impression of pure form, and a representation of a formal grafting- a piece of English fortification design born out of campaigns in her Irish plantations, deposited into the contested land, claiming territory and commercial rights in an unequivocal way. As a physical thing the fort had an impact, never letting the place become only passage again, but rather surveilled Passage, in the service of political, commercial and later, industrial processes.

3.2

Manufacturing/industry: the landscape of de-industrialization and the 1919 strike

On June 4, 1919 employees of the Rome Manufacturing and Rome Wire companies went on strike. The June 14, 1919 issue of La Vita, the Italian news-



paper printed in the east end of Dominick Street at the heart of the worker's neighborhood across from the mills, declared 'Rome is proletariat' and called for workers to take to the streets. The La Vita article called for an eight hour day and better conditions in the plant. It decried the conditions in the mills.

The manufacturers played hardball. They refused to meet with the workers or their representatives and they attempted to shame the workers back to the mills without meeting their demands. An ad was taken out by Rome Manufacturing Company in the Daily Sentinel allowing the workers to come back to the mills. But by this time workers of most of the major manufacturing plants were on strike, numbering some 4000 men⁹. The strikers occupied East Dominick Street, a tense seam between their neighborhood and the mills, in one direction, and connector to the heart of the city in the other. One mill owner, James Spargo, was pulled from his car and roughed up as he traveled slowly down East Dominick Street amongst the crowds of workers. Newspaper accounts document workers houses being raided for guns and IWW literature suspected of fomenting the strike. Many of these houses were along East Dominick or on one of a series of short streets extending, like teeth in a comb, north from East Dominick. A geo-morphic border - the Mohawk River and bridge - at which East Dominick Street becomes West Dominick, provided a spatial and psychological barrier between the manufacturing areas and the representational and commercial space of the downtown. The workers eventually surpassed this and marched towards the Rome Club, the representational seat of the affluent heads of the manufacturing companies.



By late June, with no resolution in sight, workers who did not strike were being harassed, pickets prevented workers from entering the mills, and acts of violence were on the increase. On July 14th strikers

in large crowds attacked workers with stones, clubs and guns. At the behest of the manufacturers, the mayor called on the governor to send in the state police. Two hundred state troopers were sent and, making cavalry charges down East Dominick Street and onto the porches of adjacent houses, the strike was broken. The state police were withdrawn on the 21st, yet the manufacturers still would not meet with the workers. It was not until August 11th that banner headlines appeared in the Sentinel announcing a settlement, which included consideration of a new pay and hour scale, based on that of their competitors. However, through their business organizations, manufacturers tended to set wage scales and conditions as a group. The loss of workers to the strike, many of whom decided to return to Italy, and the general upheaval caused by the violence and intransigence of the manufacturers, has left its marks on the area.¹⁰



'Constructing division' a photographic narrative and mapping of infrastructure in relation to geomorphology and neighborhoods



4.0

Final thoughts for interruption

Urban maps generally claim a neutral documentation of the city. These maps have a leveling effect through portraying all urban qualities with the same descriptive technique. This tendency produces a jarring incongruity with what the inhabitant actually experiences and remembers, and results in a

portrait of *city* envisioned with virtually no qualifications of difference, thus existing outside human time and space. Officially sanctioned 'important places' are often highlighted at the expense of sites and practices of everyday life. Nevertheless, reductive urban maps do have a reciprocal effect on city inhabitants; several of our informants' describe a frustrated desire to make 'a correct map', with normalized orientation, scale and inclusions. This incongruity may be exposed through a process of *interruption*, opening up an alternative space - a thickened 'space' of intersection, ambiguity, physical heterogeneity and social exchange.

In her introduction to Hans Jost Frey's *Interruptions*, Georgia Albert observes that for Frey "a process of interruption actually looks at the fragment...the fundamental property of the fragment for Frey is the resistance it opposes to the ordering gesture...this...structure of the fragment as inexplicable interruption... inhabits all realms of human experience...The fragment is a problem for any system, for any thinking that has closure as its goal."¹¹

As stated at the beginning of this paper, our map technique brings together practices of field study, archival research, and citizen interviews and cognitive mappings, in order to address how cultural dimensions of physical form may be mapped as a changing landscape. It interprets fragments of the city scene - parade routes, protests, housing genealogy - and through their superimposition, provides a thick description of place. We believe these maps and the protocol we have developed, will be an aid to citizens, planners and policymakers in viewing the future of their city.

Cities can be profitably studied as landscapes of interruption.

FOOTNOTES

1 NCGIA/ NSF Initiative 19 National Center for Geographic Information and Analysis: "The Social Implications of How People, Space, and Environment are Represented in GIS",

Michael Curry (Geography, University of California, Los Angeles) , Trevor Harris (Geology and Geography, West Virginia University) , David Mark (Geography, SUNY Buffalo) , Dan Weiner (Geology and Geography, West Virginia University, "Part One :Conceptual Issues", <http://www.geo.wvu.edu/i19/origins/proposal.htm>

2 Wim Wenders, "An attempted description of an indescribable film, from the first treatment for 'Wings of Desire'", *On Film*, Faber and Faber, 2001, pp 233-244. "*Behind the city of today, in its interstices or above it, as though frozen in time, are the ruins, the mounds of rubble, the burned chimneystacks and facades of the devastated city, only dimly visible sometimes, but always there in the background...This latent past keeps appearing to the angels on their turns through present day Berlin...incorporeal and timeless, this yesterday is still present everywhere, as a 'parallel world'.*"

3 *Aviation Week and Space Technology*, June 3, 2002; http://www.aviationnow.com/content/publication/awst/20020603/avi_stor.htm

4 Gregory L. Ulmer, "The Object of Post-Criticism", pp. 83-110, in Hal Foster, *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Post-Modern Culture*, Bay Press, 1983.

5 Rosalind E. Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-garde and other Modernist Myths*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997.

6 Catherine Dibble, "Representing Individuals and Societies in GIS", Department of Geography, University of California - Santa Barbara <http://www.geo.wvu.edu/i19/papers/dibble.html>

7 NCGIA/NSF Initiative 19, op.cit. , "Natural Resources and Political Ecology"

8 NCGIA/NSF Initiative 19, op.cit., citin ng Sheppard, 1995

9 William M. Forbes, ed., *Annals and Recollections*, vol. IV no.20, October 1998,Rome Historical Society

10 Forbes, *op.cit.*

11 Georgia Albert, introduction to Hans-Jost Frey, *Interruptions*, State University of New York, 1996. She includes a page in which Frey quotes Walter Benjamin: "*in place of a seamless continuity of argument or a chain of evidence, there is a movement of thought that again and again is interrupted and begins anew in order to approach the object again and again from different angles.*"