

10 Variations of an Architectural Design Theme Analogy between Compositional Principle and Musical Theme in the Design of the “Napoleon and the Myth of Rome” Exhibition Project

By Marta Isabel Sena Augusto *

The essay “10 variations of an architectural design theme” use comparative analysis to analogize the morphological development of an architectural compositional principle with the variations of a musical theme. The case study is the design of the temporary exhibition “Napoleon and the myth of Rome”¹ in the archaeological complex of Trajan’s Markets - Museum of the Imperial Fora. This temporary exhibition, with more than 100 works – including sculptures, paintings, prints, medals, gems, etc. - some from the same period as those in the permanent exhibition, has to dialogue with the archaeological complex and the permanent collection from its own identity. The team of architects who designed the installation of the temporary exhibition chose to start from a clear compositional principle that throughout the exhibition path loses, gains, sublimates, or simplifies elements as it adapts to the specifics of the space, program, lighting, and permanent collection pieces location, in order to discern the temporary exhibition from the permanent collection. Through this case study, we can see how each of the variations, in architecture as in music, reinforces and helps to achieve higher comprehensibility of the main theme.

Introduction

Theme and Variations

Any complete musical form is based on variations on a main theme. During the performance, the theme is repeated in altered forms or accompanied in different ways. The musicologist Ottó Károlyi defines the principle of variation as “founded on a series of repetitions in which the contrasting elements are the variations themselves. The ‘known’ part, i.e., the theme, remains more or less unchanged while the ‘unknown’ part corresponds to the ways of varying the theme, usually employing melodic, rhythmic, harmonic and colouristic changes. Usually, the theme is clearly stated at the beginning of the series of variations and

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1. Exhibition timescale: 4 February to 7 November 2021. Location: Mercati di Traiano - Museum of the Imperial Fora, Rome. Promoters: Roma Culture, Sovrintendenza Capitolina ai Beni Culturali. Curators: Claudio Parisi Presicce, Massimiliano Munzi, Simone Pastor, Nicoletta Bernacchio. Organisation: Zètema Progetto Cultura. Graphic concept: Iowa State University. Exhibition project: Wise design - Stefano Balzanetti, Alessandro Di Mario, Eleonora Giuliani together with Simone Bove. Project timeline: September to December 2020. Budget: €70,000.

followed by the ‘elaborations’, precisely the variations; their number is free but rarely exceeds 32”.²

Variations are free within the limits of the rules and elements determined by the compositional principle. Leoncilli Massi again makes it clear: “To vary is to invent the new; it is to give form to the idea of space, to construct spatial harmony without interrupting the circularity of the compositional ‘mimesis’ of variation, without ever leaving the tracks on which the preconceived fields develop, except at the risk of dissolution. To vary is to compose”.³

In music, the variations on the main theme can be: harmonic - changing the concatenation of simultaneous sounds (chords); melodic - the identity of the succession of sounds and silences; contrapuntal - the interplay of melodic lines playing simultaneously; rhythmic - the cadence in the succession of elements; and timbre - change of sound within the same frequency.

According to the architect and composer Giovanni Giannone, the variation of the main theme in music is comparable to the morphological development of the compositional principle in architectural design. In his book *Architecture and Music*, quoting Anton Webern, points out that the word canon - the principle of polyphonic writing - was adopted from Greek sculpture and architecture where it designated the system of “proportioning of the parts. Assuming the ‘fundamental importance of the principle of repetition for the purpose of higher comprehensibility’,⁴ this supreme law, to better understand the canon, necessary and viable through a clear articulation, i.e., distinction between main and secondary parts, and coherence”.⁵

Variations tend to retain the information of the compositional principle. The compositional principle may be considered a morphological hypothesis that configures the spatial structures whereby it is possible, by realising it, to pursue the whole of the intentions of the design.

We can explain the compositional principle in architecture just as Webern explicitly refers to Goethe’s theory of *Urpflanze* to explain the principle of variation in music: “The roots are nothing but the stem, the stem is nothing but the leaf, the leaf is nothing but the flower: variations of the same thought”.⁶⁷

An architectural work is an ensemble of explorations of a compositional principle, which in the field of music would be the variations on a theme. As the architect and composer Leoncilli Massi explained, “each variation or iteration and repetition of concepts corresponds to the conquest of a previously unknown value due to the progressive clarification of the initial idea”.⁸

The development of the compositional principle in architectural design, as the main theme in music, requires the exercise of innumerable possibilities of variation.

2. O. Károlyi and M. Porzio, *La Musica Moderna. Le Forme e i Protagonisti da Debussy al Minimalismo* (Milano: Mondadori, 1998), 124.

3. G. C. L. Massi, *La Leggenda del Comporre* (Firenze: Alinea Editrice, 2002), 214.

4. A. Webern, *Il Cammino Verso la Nuova Música* (Milano: Giampiero Taverna, 1960), 41.

5. *Ibid*, 30.

6. *Ibid*, 90.

7. G. Giannone, *Architettura e Musica Questioni Di Composizione* (Palermo: Caracol, 2010), 25.

8. Massi, *La Leggenda del Comporre*, 2002, 12.

In the phase of producing variations - development of the compositional principle - image production increases. Many hypotheses are tested and abandoned.

The compositional principle in architectural design, as a main theme in music, is also a system of rules whereby a certain degree of control and spontaneity and improvisation is permitted. The rules in architectural design are formal, spatial, and synesthetic and can determine both the genesis of morphology and how spaces are experienced by the user. As English architect and historian Alan Colquhoun points out, “the system of rules can also include the human behaviour of the building’s users, as can be seen in Le Corbusier’s drawings, in which he seems to add to the expectation of architecture something that in earlier times belonged to a system of norms outside it: the rules of social behaviour (...) what was once part of the *langue* became the function of the *parole*”.⁹

Analogous to what happens in musical themes, in architecture, the compositional principle formulates and even formalises the rules of organisation of morphology and also constitutes a memory - storage and classification - of schemes of action that delimit the possibilities of morphological articulation according to the occasion.

In architectural design, the process of developing a compositional principle oscillates between the parts and the whole. Every single variation requires verification of the coherence of the whole. The objective and purpose of the compositional principle are to give coherence to the whole and remain within the same formal family despite the specificity of the individual parts. The compositional principle thus presupposes the idea of a complete and closed totality, designed to function within its own system. In this sense, an element external to the compositional principle will seem dissonant or false. However, a compositional principle with clear rules allows for the existence of exceptions to the rule. Exceptions are not extraneous elements, they are rebellious elements that reaffirm the presence of the rules and help achieve higher comprehensibility of the main theme.

The Museum of the Imperial Fora and Napoleon

To the east of the Trajan’s Forum, at the foot of the Quirinal hill, lies the Trajan’s Market: a complex built at the same time as the Forum, at the beginning of the 2nd century, interpreted as the endpoint of a gigantic Roman system beginning with Trajan’s Port at Fiumicino, used to supply the capital.

The discovery of this important complex is due to Napoleon, who decreed in 1811 - when Rome was annexed to the Napoleonic Empire - the demolition of the Sant’Eufemia block and the excavation of the area south of Trajan’s Column but it was not until 1926-1934 that the Roman complex was freed from subsequent interventions, recognised as a Roman “market” and reconstructed.

Built on six levels the complex of Trajan’s Markets occupied and supported the cut of the Quirinal hill (about 40 metres high) that through a series of successive steps, articulates the curvilinear layout of the exedrae behind the porticoes of Trajan’s Forum, with the rectilinear layout of the surrounding urban fabric.

9. Colquhoun quoted by S. J. Morales, *Arquitectura y Proyecto* (Sevilha: Ed. Kronos, 1991), 95-96.

Since 2007, this complex hosted the Museum of the Imperial Fora, which occupies the buildings of the Great Hall and the Central Body and includes the Great Hemicycle with the section of Trajan's Forum. The permanent collection of the Museum comprises sculptural fragments from the Imperial Fora, which are often reassembled to give the visitor a sense of their original entity.

The Aim of this Paper

It was in this archaeological context, occupied by the permanent collection of the Museum of the Imperial Fora, that the Roman architectural studio Wise Design was commissioned to design the temporary exhibition "Napoleon and the Myth of Rome" for the celebration of the bicentenary of Napoleon's death (May 5, 2021).

This temporary exhibition, with more than 100 works - including sculptures, paintings, prints, medals, gems, etc. - some from the same period as those in the permanent exhibition, should permit an autonomous reading with respect to the permanent collection but also dialogue with it and with the archaeological ensemble on the basis of its identity.

The design of this exhibition is particularly interesting from the point of view of architectural composition because the exhibition project is based on the search for a clear compositional principle, capable of distinguishing the temporary exhibition from the permanent collection and maintaining this identity, even while interrupting and reappearing in the different spaces of the Museum.

In this case study, the analogy between a musical theme and the compositional principle in architecture is quite evident.

Throughout the exhibition, the theme is altered by losing, gaining, sublimating, or simplifying elements as it adapts to the specifics of the space, programme, lighting, and permanent location of the collection pieces.

The aim of this paper was to analogize the morphological development of an architectural compositional principle with the variations of a musical theme, identify the compositional principle of the exhibition project "Napoleon and the Myth of Rome" and describe each of the variations to the compositional principle and the motivations of the changes operated in each of the variations.

The Elements and Guidelines of the Compositional Principle in the "Napoleon and the Myth of Rome" Exhibition Project

The design team encountered two main difficulties: The first is related to the fact that the temporary exhibition would have to coexist within the permanent exhibition and without displacing the works of the permanent collection, the second is that the physical space, i.e., the interior spaces of the market, not having been conceived as an exhibition space, presents a series of very complex problems

such as natural lighting unrelated to the function¹⁰ of the exhibition, the placement of artificial lights on the works of the permanent collection, the impossibility of anchoring to the walls, and low temperature and conditions of humidity in hosting works of art.

The need to have the temporary and the permanent exhibitions coexist led to the wish to make the temporary exhibition identifiable. This recognisability was entrusted to a clear compositional principle: the exhibition carpet. There are three elements of the composition principle:

1. walkable platforms/ramps;
2. vertical surfaces, varying in height by more than 2 metres, where niches and display cases can be opened¹¹;
3. display cases and 75 cm high parallelepiped podiums.

There are three guidelines to the compositional principle:

1. The walkable platforms/ramps are always flanked, at least on one side, by a vertical display surface where showcases can be opened.
2. The walkable platforms, vertical surfaces, and podiums are painted petrol blue. Pre-spaced graphic elements representing swarms of Napoleonic bees are superimposed on the blue vertical surfaces.
3. The chromatic criterion for the interior of the niches and showcases opening in the vertical surfaces is to provide a golden background to the metal pieces, such as sculptures and medals, and a blue background to the stone statues.

The 10 Variations of the Compositional Principle in the “Napoleon and the Myth of Rome” Exhibition Project

The Blue Wall Variation

From Via IV Novembre, we find the monumental arch at the entrance of the Markets of Trajan and we enter directly into the Great Hall, by a methacrylate roof that protects the building from atmospheric agents and contaminators (Figure 1).

10. In some cases, it was necessary to obscure the windows with a black canvas with a hologram of Napoleon’s rostrum which seems to appear and disappear depending on the visitor’s movements.

11. Some of the showcases of the vertical surfaces are air-conditioned, 26 in total. In addition to their function as display niches, these showcases have the function of guaranteeing the necessary temperature and humidity conditions for each individual work. There are also concealed doors in the vertical panels, which allow the maintenance technician to access the technical cavity to control the light and change the salts in the drawers connected by holes to the showcases and to reduce the humidity of the air inside.

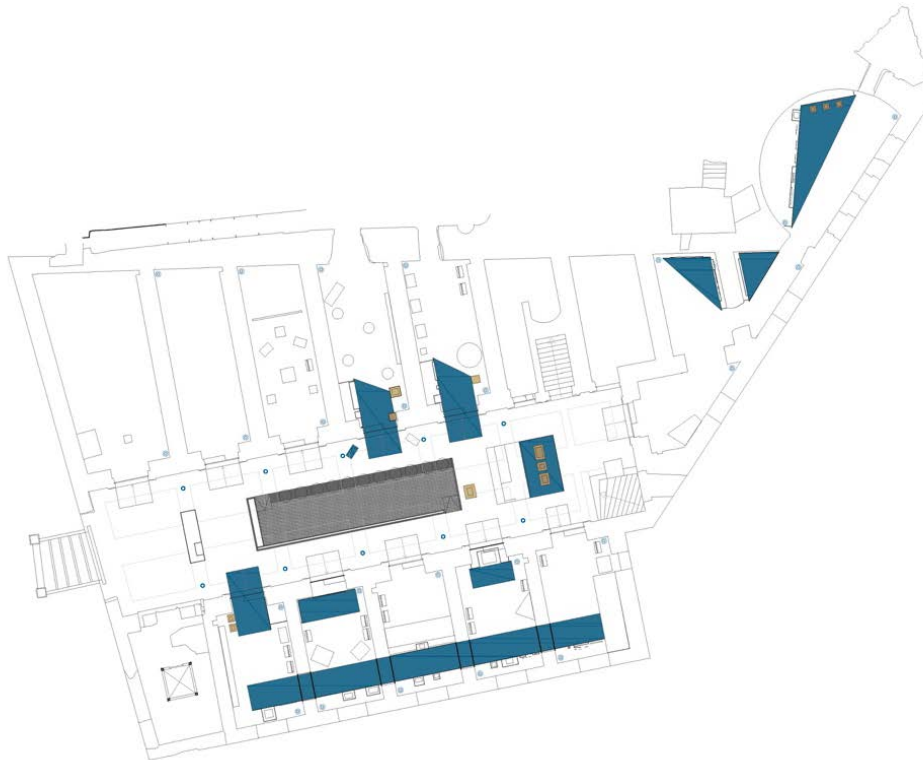


Figure 1. Planimetry of the First Floor of the Museum of the Imperial Fora with the Addition of the Temporary Exhibition “Napoleon and the Myth of Rome” Project
Source: Wise design.

The Great Hall, is a large rectangular plan room (32x8 m) that occupies the height of two floors, covered by a vault composed of six crosses in Roman cimento - *opus caementicium*¹² and flanked on both long sides by five *tabernae*, which face directly onto the hall with doors framed in travertine and surmounted by a window which raises the light from the Great Hall to inside the *tabernae*.

In front of the entrance door, we find the first variation - *The Blue Wall* - a blue wall (300x300x90 cm) with the colophon and an introduction to the exhibition.

Turning the *Blue Wall* we find, on the right, in a gilded niche, the bust of Johann Joachim Winckelmann next to his famous phrase: “The only way for us to become great and, if possible unsurpassable, is to imitate the ancients”. This phrase serves to introduce the second part of the exhibition - *The Blue Ribbon*.

In this first variation, the design compositional principle of the exhibition project, does not have a walkable surface or podiums. Of the three elements that make up the main theme - walking platforms, vertical surfaces, and podiums - it presents only the blue vertical surface that gains in thickness, becoming a thick wall that divides the Great Hall from the space immediately adjacent to the museum’s entrance door.

12. The complex was built using the construction technique of *opus latericium* (Roman concrete covered with a brick veneer). The pavements make extensive use of *opus spicatum* (cut bricks arranged in a herringbone pattern).

The Blue Ribbon Variation

At this point, at the back of the *Blue Wall variation*, we see a ramp of the same blue colour that invites us to enter a lateral *taberna* (Figure 2).



Figure 2. View from the Great Hall with the Back of the First Variation of the Temporary Exhibition Project - The Blue Wall

Note: In front of us, we can see the entrance to the blue ribbon variation.

Source: Marcela Grassi.

On this side of the Great Hall, all five taverns are joined by aligned doors that form a corridor running through all the taverns by the back wall.

The project of the temporary exhibition uses this connection to roll out a 23 metres long blue carpet along the five *tabernae*, as well as a vertical display surface flanking it on the right, covering the rear wall.

The *Blue Ribbon* variation is a part of the exhibition dedicated to the timeline of Napoleon's life and his Roman role models (Figure 3). Along the vertical surface, niches are carved in which images of Napoleon and his idols can be seen in chronological sequence: in the first of these niches we see Louis Rochet's

plaster cast for the statue of *Napoleon cadet at Brienne-le-Château carrying De viris illustribus* by Cornelius Nepote - the book with which Napoleon deepened his passion for the great heroes of the age, such as Alexander the Great, Hannibal and Giulio Caesar, his great role models.



Figure 3. View of the Interior of the Blue Ribbon, from the Last Taberna towards the First One

Source: Marcela Grassi.

In the second and fourth *tabernae*, the large ribbon is echoed on the left by isolated vertical surfaces - leaning against the opposite wall and closing off the *tabernae*'s access to the Great Hall. On these islands, which are away from the carpet, are exhibited large works which benefit from the distance to the carpet for better viewing. In the second tavern, for example, there is a reproduction of the great equestrian portrait of Napoleon *Bonaparte Crosses the Alps* painted by Jacques-Louis David, between 1800 and 1803, which faces Alexander the Great on horseback (from the National Archaeological Museum of Naples) that is in a niche in the blue surface, while two statues by *Dacci* from the permanent collection face the great equestrian portrait of Napoleon and turn their backs to the *Blue Ribbon* (Figure 4). All through the exhibition we find this type of situation in which works from the permanent collection share space with those from the temporary exhibition, and given their figurative affinity, sometimes they seem to belong to the temporary exhibition, but in other places they seem to overlap with it.



Figure 4. View of the Interior of the Second Tabernae, with the Acéphalous Loricated Statue, Trajan's Age, 112 A.D., from the Permanent Collection that Faced the Large Equestrian Portrait of Napoleon and Turn its Back to the Blue Ribbon
Source: Author.

A 9 hour film from 1929 about a young Napoleon is shown on the screens. On the island of the fourth *tabernae* there is the large bronze bust *Napoleon I Emperor with the laurel wreath*, by Lorenzo Bartolini, from the Louvre museum.

In the last *taberna* we find the end of the Blue Ribbon, the exit to the Great Hall, and a window onto the Forum. The section of the Blue Ribbon ends with a reproduction of Horace Vernet's painting *Napoleon Awakening to Immortality*, which represents Napoleon rising from a grave.

In this variation, we find all the elements of the compositional principle - walking platforms, vertical surfaces, and podiums.

The Map Variation

Historical background: The Napoleonic Kingdom was founded by Napoleon Bonaparte, when the French general crowned himself sovereign of the former Italian Republic.

Napoleon decided not to annex the conquered Italian territories to the French Empire and, in 1805, he founded the Kingdom of Italy - which included central and eastern Italy and much of the north with Milan as its capital - and proclaimed himself King of Italy and, at the same time, became Emperor and king of two

different administrative entities. The Kingdom of Italy did not survive the fall of its monarch and was dissolved in 1814.

The exhibition design: At the exit of the last tavern we find a blue platform with three podiums surmounted by plexiglass showcases holding Pacetti's sculpture group *Napoleon inspires Italy and makes it rise to greater destinies*, from the Castle of Fontainebleau, and two busts of Napoleon crowned in Carrara marble (Figure 5). These three statues face the map of the kingdom of Italy administered by Napoleon and the French empire that occupied a large part of the peninsula at the time.



Figure 5. View of the Map and the Three Podiums in the Great Hall

Source: Marcela Grassi.

The map is displayed on a blue wall - similar to the first variation-. In this case, the vertical blue surface involves the reconstruction of the attic from one of the porticoes in the Forum of Augustus.

As in the previous variation, in the *Map* we find all the elements of the compositional principle - walking platforms, vertical surface, and podiums - that demarcate the space of the temporary exhibition inside the museum.

The Tree-lined Boulevard Variation

Historical background: for Napoleon, the conquest of Rome in 1809 represented the concrete possibility of making Rome the second city of the Empire, as established by the senate-consultation of 17 February 1810 with the aim of

applying the urban planning criteria to Rome that would transform it into a second Paris.

One of the most emblematic architectural elements of the Napoleonic government's urban planning policy was the tree-lined promenade, the public use of which elicits the dynamics of socialisation and acculturation. From the gardens of aristocratic villas, inaccessible to common people, they continue to the open spaces of promenades.

Tree plantations were only established and extended to suburban streets at the beginning of the 19th century on the initiative of the Napoleonic regime. The straight tree-lined streets became one of the programmatic forms in which the Napoleonic state accentuated its presence on the territory, showing its ability to implement a global project and became the icon of Napoleon's complex urban planning policy.

The exhibition design: for the Great Hall, the curators had asked the design team to design a seating area with plant elements - a kind of Napoleonic garden. The design team, instead, decided to occupy the centre of the Great Hall with a seating area representing the Napoleonic tree-lined boulevard.

Behind the Map, is a podium displaying the bust of Antonio Canova, a leading figure on the Roman artistic scene at the time.

For the Great Hall, the curators had asked the design team of a rest area with plant elements - a kind of Napoleonic garden. The design team decided instead to occupy the centre of the Great Hall with an installation representing the Napoleonic tree-lined boulevard.

Economic constraints also determined this variation: since the budget was only enough to build half of the tree-lined boulevard, the Wise Design team decided to make a single tree line out of the nine cypresses and cover the vertical surfaces with Dibond composite panels with a mirror effect. On the long side, this mirror effect served to restore the symmetry of the tree-lined avenue, and on the short sides, it served to remove any dimensional reference to the tree-lined avenue segment, stretching it to infinity.

For the flooring, the team of architects opted for a grey laminate flooring evoking a paving stone from an avenue.

The installation is in the shape of a 3 metre high parallelepiped, defined with a 13 metre long left side and two short ends about 3 metres long. The right side, on the other hand, is 70 cm high and 70 cm wide, and punctuated by nine circular holes from which nine live cypress trees, some 5 metres high, sprout (Figure 6).

According to the Wise team, the materialisation of this tree-lined boulevard, with its successful completion through a play of mirrors also represents Napoleon's presence and absence in Rome. The fact that Napoleon was never in Rome, never saw Rome with his own eyes,¹³ and also the fact that the vast programme of urban

13. Despite Napoleon's fascination with Rome to the point of drawing inspiration from Imperial Rome and its art and culture as a propaganda language to illustrate his power and greatness, and the fact that his mother, sister Pauline and brother Lucien had lived in Rome, Napoleon did not go there during the first Italian Campaign, stopping in 1797 at Tolentino where the treaty with the Papal States was concluded; in 1812, he opted to travel to Moscow, the "third Rome", a journey that would mark the decline of his dominion over Europe and his eternal absence from Rome, and

transformation that the Napoleonic government wanted to apply to Rome was never fully realised.

This variation would differ radically from the others in terms of the material and chromaticism of the elements of the compositional principle, but on a compositional level, it resulted as a sublimation of the constructive principle, which is materially and semantically ennobled at this point. The elements of the compositional principle - vertical surface, the walkable platform, and the podium - are brought together in a purer, more finished form. The blue colour has given way to a mirror-like surface that operates the evanescence of the materiality of the elements.

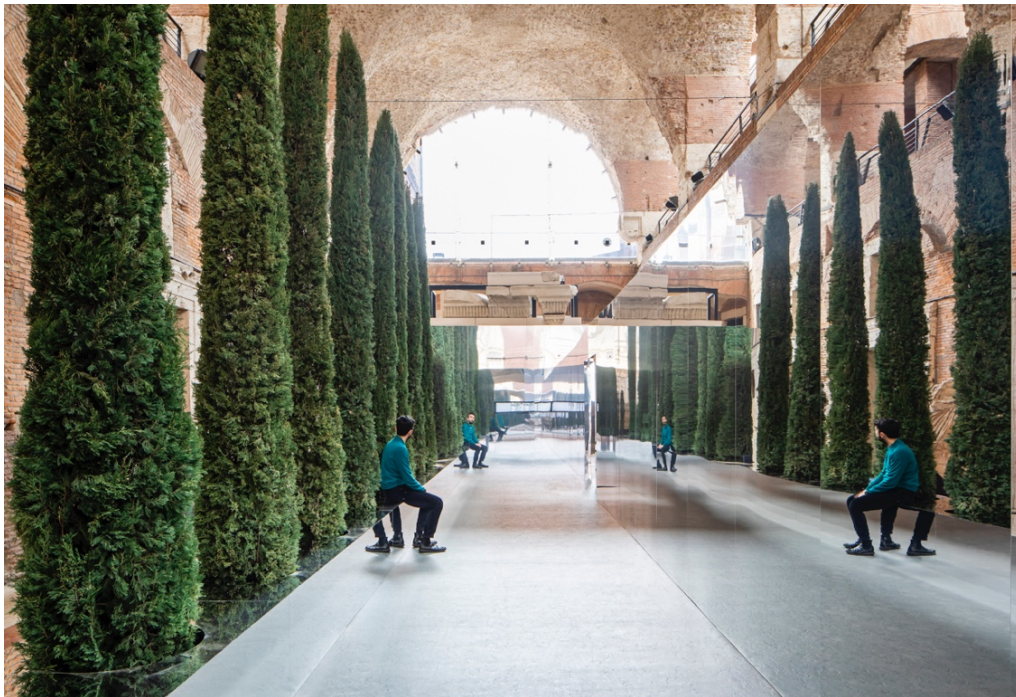


Figure 6. *View Inside the Tree-lined Boulevard Variation*

Source: Marcela Grassi.

The Two Tongues Variation

Historical background: Napoleon's relations with the Papacy were extremely complicated. This hostility led Napoleon to invade the northern regions of the Papal States in 1796. In 1797 Pius VI was forced to sign the Treaty of Tolentino, which provided for the cession of occupied territories to France and the handing over of countless works of art. In 1798, Napoleon's army invaded Rome and proclaimed the Roman Republic, declaring the end of the temporal power of the popes. Pius VI was taken prisoner first in Tuscany and then in Valence, France, where he died.

although Rome had embellished itself by preparing for his arrival, the relationship between Napoleon and Rome was one of absence.

With his successor, Pius VII, Napoleon had a more conciliatory attitude at first. In 1801 the Concordat was signed and in 1804 Pius VII was invited to Paris to attend the coronation at Notre Dame but this apparent entente did not last and led to Napoleon's occupation of Rome from 1809 to 1814. Pope Pius VII was first exiled to Savona and then to Fontainebleau.

During the occupation, the Napoleonic Government of Rome, with the intention of enhancing Trajan's Column, promoted the destruction of the southern block to create a large elliptical square. During the works, the ruins of the Basilica Ulpia were discovered. The findings, including some ancient Dacian statues, are now part of the Museum's permanent collection.

On his return to Rome in 1814, Pius VII completed several urban projects initiated by the French government, such as the excavated area of the Basilica of Ulpia - which in fact took the name "Recinto di Pio VII" - and commissioned the sculptor Antonio Canova to bring back to Rome the artistic heritage looted by the French.

The exhibition design: crossing the cypress-lined boulevard we are guided to the *tabernae* on the other side of the Great Hall. As in the *Blue Ribbon* variation, a blue ramp indicates the entrance to the *taberna* where the temporary exhibition continues. This section occupies two *tabernae* which are interconnected at the back, forming an exit and return circuit to the Great Hall.

The temporary exhibition occupies a small part of the *tabernae* adjacent to the Great Hall. In this variation, we find all the elements of the compositional principle: the blue floor, a vertical blue surface with showcases and the podiums of the same colour.

In the first of these taverns, the temporary exhibition and the pieces of the collection are displayed in an exemplary manner: the statues of four Dacians - part of the permanent collection - found during the Napoleonic excavations of the Ulpia Basilica, complete this section of the temporary exhibition dedicated to the excavations of the Ulpia Basilica with plants of the area and two engravings, from the period, by A. Uggeri.

The second tavern is dedicated to the complex relationship Napoleon had with the Papacy and religion. The exhibition design is very similar to the previous tavern. Here too, we find the three elements of the compositional principle: the blue floor, the vertical blue surface where the bust of Napoleon crowned with laurel by A. L. Boyle faces the bust of Pius VII, installed on a podium in front of it (Figure 7).



Figure 7. View of the End of the “Two Tongues Variation” with the Blue Walkable Platform that Protrudes into the Great Hall, like a Tongue

Note: In front of us we see two cypresses and their reflection of the “the tree-lined boulevard” variation.

Source: Marcela Grassi.

The system of the *Two Tongues variation* ends with the blue walkable platform which, freed from the vertical surface becomes a ramp that protrudes into the Great Hall, like a tongue.

The Three Triangles Variation

Historical background: Intended to modernize Rome and turn it into a second Paris, in 1810 the Napoleonic government created a commission for public works and charity. Giuseppe Valadier, Giuseppe Camporese, and Carlo Fea were appointed directors and drew up various projects for the urban renewal of large areas of the city, such as the one for Piazza del Popolo by Valadier; the transformation of Palazzo del Quirinale into Palazzo Imperiale, for Napoleon's lodgings (who would never visit), by Raffaele Stern or the tree-lined avenues to connect some monuments or existing buildings in the Pincio orchards.

Among these projects it was the arrangement of the archaeological area of the Imperial Fora and a square south of the Column of Trajan, which until 1811 was mainly occupied by two religious complexes for women: the Monastery of the Holy Spirit and the Conservatory of St Euphemia.

In the years 1812 and 1813, various projects were drawn up for this area and, finally, in December of 1813, the Commission of Embellishments surprisingly approved the project by the young Ticino architect, Pietro Bianchi, who went in the opposite direction to that of Valadier and Camporese: no longer a square inserted in the surrounding urban fabric, but a "Museum of Ruins": an enclosed archaeological area to be visited only to admire ancient finds up close.

The French occupation ended in January 1814, but work on the Trajan's Column area was resumed in May 1814 by Pope Pius VII.

The exhibition design: At the end of the great hall, we enter the Central body of Trajan's Markets where the three rooms of the old warehouses were originally located and today house no pieces from the permanent collection.

In this variation, the guiding lines of the relationship between the elements of the compositional principle undergo some changes: the walkable platform becomes triangular and the vertical surface unfolds at a right angle to form an L.

In the first room (Figure 8) we find, in front of us, a large painting depicting *St Euphemia and the Poor Clares*, originally located in the Church of St Urban. The adjacent vertical surface displays medals from the Church of St Euphemia and drawings of the area before the demolition. The triangular floor cuts the room with a diagonal line that ends at the doorway to the central room.

In the central room, dedicated to the projects for the reconstruction of the south area of the Column of Trajan after the demolition and excavation, are placed the three projects, drawn up in 1812 by Giuseppe Valadier and Giuseppe Camporese, for the arrangement of the Piazza della Colona Traiana, now kept in the Accademia di San Luca.

Here, the triangular treading surface fits perfectly with the original triangular shape of the room. The vertical exhibition surfaces occupy two of the perimeter walls and the platform adjacent to both of them leaves a passageway between the rooms.



Figure 8. View of the First with the Large Painting Depicting St. Euphemia and the Poor Clares

Note: The adjacent vertical surface displays medals from the Church of St Euphemia and drawings of the area before the demolition. The triangular floor cuts the room diagonally, ending at the doorway to the second room, on the right.

Source: Marcela Grassi.

The third and final room is a large vaulted hall. To break the vault, the vertical display surface starts at the entrance door and proceeds perpendicularly to the opposite wall - leaving, behind, space from the semi-circle of the vault to the technical gap -.

On the first vertical surface, we find paintings and drawings of the Imperial Forums and the area of Trajan's Column. The second vertical surface is a thin panel that serves as a backdrop to the three podiums with marble statues of Eros, Hescholapius, and Hercules child from Bevagna returned to the Capitoline Museum by the Napoleonic government in 1813.

The Z Variation

Turning back and returning to the Great Hall, we find, on the right, the 16th century staircase leading to the first floor (Figure 9) and second floor (now closed). The temporary exhibition continues in the Central Body, in the spaces where, probably, the seat of the procurator Fori Divi Traiani was originally located.

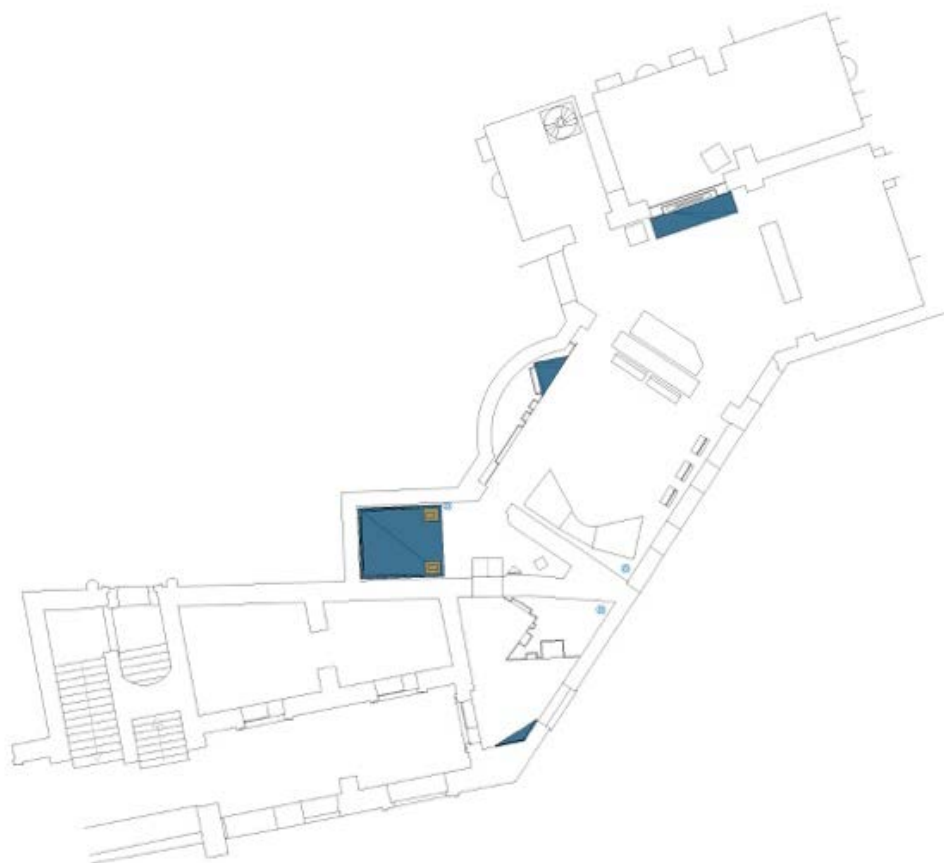


Figure 9. *Planimetry of the Second Floor of the Exhibition.*

Note: Central body of Trajan's markets with the addition of the temporary exhibition project.

Source: Wise design.

In this room (Figure 10), the great Napoleonic battles are represented in the exhibition by the Egyptian Campaign with the set of military operations conducted in Egypt and Syria in the period 1798-1801 that began with Napoleon's landing in Alexandria leading the French Armée d'Orient. After conquering Egypt Napoleon relinquished his command to General Jean-Baptiste Kléber to return to France, where the war of the Second Coalition was underway.

In the right of the entrance, we find an extraneous element (or exception) to the compositional principle: a vertical surface of about 3 meters where two insignias rest, superimposed by eagles with spread wings¹⁴ - a symbol of Napoleonic empire - at the time they were carried by soldiers on horseback.

14. The symbol of Napoleon's army - a golden eagle with spread wings - was chosen by Napoleon when he was proclaimed Emperor of the French in 1804. Napoleon replaced the previous symbol of the monarchy, the fleur-de-lis, for the eagle - the symbol of Imperial Rome.



Figure 10. View of the “Zeta Variation” Room from the Entrance to the Exit

Note: Through the exit doorway we can see part of the “zeta variation”.

Source: Marcela Grassi.

In front of the entrance, we find a vertical exhibition surface, 2 meters high, which folds horizontally in two to form a Z shape in planimetry.

In the niches of the vertical blue surface, we can see works such as the engraving depicting General Napoleon Bonaparte in the Pyramids by Girardet, and the bronze statuette Bonaparte on a dromedary by C. J. Meurant.

In this variation of the temporary exhibition, the walkable platform is missing. This change is due to the small size of the room and the Z configuration of the display vertical surface: the platform would be so small that it would not be walkable, so the team of architects decided to do without.

The Blue Room Variation

Historical background: In 1809, when Napoleon announced his intention to travel to Rome, for a second coronation at St Peter's, the sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen received the commission¹⁵ to carve a frieze to decorate the Salone d'Onore of the Quirinal as part of the overall renovation of the palace chosen for Imperial seat.

Bertel Thorvaldsen's *Triumph of Alexander the Great in Babylon* frieze, which first version was made in stucco for the Quirinal Palace in Rome as part of the decoration of the imperial flats for Napoleon and his family, is one of the greatest masterpieces of 19th-century European sculpture.

This first frieze, representing Napoleon as the new Alexander the Great and heir to the Roman emperors, was so successful that Napoleon himself commissioned a new version, in marble, for the Temple of Glory in Paris. Left half-paid and unfinished due to Napoleon's fall, the commission for the high relief was then taken over by Gian Battista Sommariva, who paid the remaining fee and bought the work for his Villa Carlotta. This frieze is made up of thirty-three slabs depicting two processions, the Macedonian and the Babylonian, which converge in the central figure of Alexander the Great on a quadriga led by a winged victory. This frieze was placed in its final position in 1829 by Sommariva's son.

Bertel Thorvaldsen still makes several replicas of the Alexander the Great frieze, including one in marble for the Christiansborg Royal Palace in Copenhagen.

The exhibition design: The *Blue Room* variation is a square room dedicated to the display of five slabs of one of the plaster replicas of the frieze *The Triumph of Alexander the Great in Babylon* by Bertel Thorvaldsen, in the version preserved in the Musei Civici di Pavia (Figure 11).

The *Blue Room* was conceived with a rather canonical display mode, where a stand, placed halfway up the vertical surfaces, was to hold 17 pieces of a replica frieze. In the end, although the room was designed to hold all the 17 friezes, only 5 were exhibited.¹⁶

Two podiums with busts of the sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen and the architect Raffaele Stern were placed at each side of the entrance to the room.

In this variation, the guidelines of the relationship between the elements of the compositional principle undergo the following changes: the walking platform becomes a square and the vertical surface embraces three of the sides of the square resting on the three walls of the room.

15. Thorvaldsen has been recommended by the architect Raffaele Stern, who had been commissioned to renovate the Quirinal Palace to transform it into Napoleon's Italian palace.

16. Last June 11, the 5 frieze plates on display returned to the Musei Civici in Pavia and were replaced by a video showing the history of the frieze *The Triumph of Alexander the Great in Babylon* by Bertel Thorvaldse.



Figure 11. View of the Blue Room Variation

Source: Marcela Grassi.

The Fold Variation

Historical background: Trajan's Column is a monument erected in the Trajan's Forum that celebrated the conquest of Dacia (present-day Romania) by Emperor Trajan. It was the first cochlear column to be erected. Its reliefs depict the salient moments of that territorial expansion.

The Trajan's Column - 39.86 metres high, made up of 18 blocks of Carrara marble, each with a diameter of 3.83 metres - was originally surmounted by a bronze statue of Trajan.

In 1806, Napoleon Bonaparte, after his great victory at the Battle of Austerlitz, decided to melt down the bronze of 1,200 cannons captured from the Austrians and Russians and make a column in honour of his army inspired by Trajan's Column - the Vendôme Column.

The construction of the Vendôme Column, erected in Paris, was completed in 1810. The Column, is 44 metres high, has an average diameter of about 3.60 metres, rests on a plinth. The bas-relief depicts scenes from the period between the creation of the *Grande Armée* and was topped by a statue of Napoleon.

After the Battle of Paris in 1814, soldiers of the occupying Russian army tried to overthrow the Vendôme Column without success. In 1831, after the abdication of the last Bourbon king, Charles X, a statue of Napoleon dressed as a lance corporal, by M. Seurre, was reinstated on the Column. Later, Napoleon III had the statue dressed as a corporal replaced by another in imperial costume by the sculptor Dumont.

In April 1871, the Vendôme Column was destroyed at the behest of Gustave Courbet as a monument to chauvinism. Courbet was later ordered to pay the costs of reconstruction. The Vendôme Column was rebuilt as we see it today, but Gustave Courbet died before the payment of the first tranche.

The design of the exhibition: the room that follows, as in the corresponding room on the lower floor, is a large room with a semi-circular vault and, to break up the vault, the vertical exhibition surface, with a height of 2.50 metres, starts at the entrance door and continues until it touches the vault at the exit door on the opposite side (Figure 12), leaving a large space for the technical gap.



Figure 12. View of the Large Vaulted Hall with the Fold Variation Display

Note: In order to break up the vault, the vertical exhibition surface starts at the entrance door and advances until it touches the vault at the exit door on the opposite side, leaving a large space for the technical gap. The blue pavement surface shrinks to the small triangular area, left free by the fold, not to be walked on but rather to complete the straight line that would have been defined by the vertical surface - door to door.

Source: Marcela Grassi.

In this section, the curators had asked the team of architects that the *Winged Victory* - a cast of the decoration of *Trajan's Column* - and a painting of Napoleon with the Winged Victory, face each other. The Wise Design team thought the best

way to do this, following the composite principle, was to bend the vertical surface in the middle of the two pieces to allow them to face each other.

In this variation, the blue pavement surface shrinks to the small triangular area, left free by the fold, not to be walked on but rather to complete the straight line that would have been defined by the vertical surface - door to door.

The Epilogue Variation

Historical background: On 2 December 1804, the coronation ceremony of Napoleon as Emperor of the French was held in Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris.

Contrary to what is usually claimed, Napoleon did not want to take the crown from the hands of Pope Pius VII, who had traveled to Paris to attend the ceremony. A year later, Napoleon transformed the Italian Republic into the Kingdom of Italy and proclaimed himself King of Italy. The coronation took place in Milan Cathedral on 26 May 1805. Napoleon Bonaparte was dressed in the great costume of a King, with the royal mantle of green velvet, holding in his hand the sceptre and the hand of justice, and on his head the imperial crown on which Napoleon placed the iron crown. At that moment he uttered the famous words: "God gave it to me, woe to him who touches it".

Napoleon Bonaparte would be the last of the Italian sovereigns to wear the Iron Crown.

The exhibition design: The last piece of the temporary exhibition is a painting by François Gérard, dated 1805, *Napoleon in his coronation robes*, kept in Ajaccio, in the Palais Fesch-Musée des Beaux-Arts (Figure 13). This painting was initially planned to occupy one of the *tabernae* in the ground floor but, due to its condition, the Wise Design team proposed to place it on the first floor.

The vertical surface where it rests and which blocks the arched door is actually the size of the *taberna*. Due to the large size of the painting and the small size of the walking platform, 1 metre wide, it invites us to observe the painting either from very close or from very far.

At the end of the exhibition, a door permits us to go out, to the back of the Main Building, where we access a belvedere that gives us a unique perspective on the Roman Forum and *Trajan's Column* crowned by the skyline of contemporary Rome (Figure 14).



Figure 13. *View of the Last Piece of the Installation: The Painting Napoleon in his Coronation Robes, Painting by François Gérard, Dated 1805*
Source: Marcela Grassi.



Figure 14. View from the Belvedere towards Roman Forum and Trajan's Column Crowned by the Skyline of Contemporary Rome
Source: Author.

Conclusions

In the current panorama, temporary exhibitions are one of the most fertile channels of transmission in terms of the involvement of visual arts, graphics, and architecture. This, in particular, operates, as Pier Federico Caliarì argues, the transformation of the classic model of the museum into a palimpsest – “like a coexistence of codes and overlapping of textures, as blurring and overlaying, as a trace and ruin together: in essence just like a palimpsest, that is, like an ancient parchment code scraped with pumice in order to be able to write on it again”.¹⁷

The installation accomplishes a dilation of perception and an intensification of observation, moving between the poles of “density” and “intensity” and forcing the works, coming from different worlds, into a critical relationship that renews it. Taking up the Francesco dal Co’s words “showing can coincide with the preparation of an ‘opening’, of a ‘void’”.¹⁸ The exhibition design has the vitality inherent in its ephemeral components, which shrugs off the static nature of museographic design to speed up communication.

17. P. F. M. Caliarì, *La Forma dell'effimero. Tra Allestimento e Architettura: Compresenza di Codici e Sovrapposizione di Tessiture* (Milano: Lybra, 2000), 8-9.

18. F. Dal Co, “Mostrare, Allestire, Esporre,” in *Mostrare. L'allestimento in Italia dagli anni Ventiagli anni Ottanta* (ed.) S. Polano (Milano: Lybra Immagine, 1988), 13.

The interaction between the archaeological complex, the permanent collection and the temporary exhibition, while, on the one hand, may have the ability to broaden the meaning of the objects shown, on the other hand - as its legibility is not automatic and is in direct dialogue with other possible readings - produces unconventional communicability.

Similarly to what happens in music between variations and the main theme, the architectural conception of the exhibition project oscillated between each of the variations and the whole exhibition. The aim and purpose of the compositional principle were to give coherence to the whole and to remain within the same formal family, despite the specificity of each of the variations.

In the sequence of the 10 variations, we see how each of them, oscillating between control, spontaneity and improvisation, corresponds to the conquest of a new, previously unknown value and the progressive clarification of the compositional principle. Using this case study to compare the variation of the main theme, in music, to the morphological development of the compositional principle, in architectural design, we assume the fundamental importance of variation for greater comprehensibility in reading the compositional principle.

We also verified how a compositional principle with clear rules allows the existence of exceptions to the rule, as it adapts to the specifics of the space, program, lighting, and location of permanent collection pieces, to distinguish the temporary exhibition from the permanent collection. In some variations the compositional principle loses elements, in others, it gains (as in *The Z* variation). In the *Three-lined Boulevard*, the variation gain cypresses and the compositional principle is sublimated, instead, in the *Wall* variation, it is simplified.

The compositional principle also constituted the formation of a layer in the memory with the possibility of being erased or turned on, allowing a new focus on the articulated narrative of the museum and the permanent collection. Through the overexposure of the layout of the temporary exhibition, the visitor experiences a kind of loss and rediscovery of a new identity of the complex and the works in the permanent and temporary exhibitions.

In the development of this compositional principle for the temporary exhibition, the question of temporality was decisive in an epistemological sense. In all 10 variations of the compositional principle, the exhibition design succeeded in anchoring the visitor to the contemporary and, from here, looking to the past. In this sense we find three distinct temporalities in the exhibition: the archaeological complex and the permanent collection represent a temporality frozen in the past, ecstatic, unchanging; In the blue installations everything is instantaneous: the lightness of the juxtaposition of the building's walls and floor, folded like sheets of paper; even the tree-lined avenue - which memory is present in its illusory symmetry, in its formal rationality, in the emptying out of the excesses of the contours and in the instantaneousness of the play of reflections - seems to have always been there, opening up a temporal vortex between the building's antiquity and the visitor's present day. As Gillo Dorfles argued, "sometimes it is the 'consciousness of the ephemeral' - the awareness on the part of the creator that he

is not creating a lasting work - that allows the architect to conceive structures that he would never have created".¹⁹

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