



ROMA CANCELLATA

PUBLIC AREAS INACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC

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INTRODUCTION

CANCELLO: *noun, masculine.* Railing; barred gate, gate.

CANCELLATA: *noun, feminine.* Railing (iron or wood).

CANCELLARE: *verb, transitive.* To cancel, to cross out, to strike out, to delete, to erase.

[*past part.:* cancellato/**cancellata**]

There has always been a tendency in large cities toward the erosion of public space. Rome is no exception. In medieval times the lack of a strong city government and of urban statutes enabled the powerful nobility to build over streets, absorb parts of open spaces into their defensive perimeters and otherwise to make free with public space. One example among many will suffice to illustrate this: in the late Middle Ages the Capranica family extended its family holding across a section of a major street, the Via Recta (Via del Collegio Capranica). Pilgrims moving from the via Lata (Via del Corso) toward the Borgo then had to detour around this obstruction at Piazza Capranica.

The phenomenon of blocking streets is not limited to the Middle Ages. In 1988 the city closed the passage that had been in uninterrupted use for thousands of years: the connection between the Porticus of Octavia and Via Teatro Marcello (ex-Via de' Sugherari), which, even when Mussolini demolished the whole area around Piazza Montanara in the 1930s, had been left in place for the pedestrian passing from the Ghetto area to the Capitoline hill area. Last year that pedestrian link was finally reopened on a much reduced scale with passage now limited to the hours between 9 am and 6 pm.

But in the past twenty years, fences and gates have sprung up at a relentless pace in a variety of places around the city. Large parts of the Capitoline hill have been fenced off, and though access through gates is permitted in daylight hours, the presence of this enclosure is a threat to public use because at the whim of a city official, the gates can be closed on a more permanent basis. The free access to the Roman Forum starting with the Jubilee year of 2000 was hailed as a great step forward, but not many are aware that when one had to pay an entrance fee, 30% more of the Forum was visitable than after that time, thanks to the low railings now enclosing much of the Forum area which was formerly open to the public. Only 25% of the Forum area is now visitable. On the Palatine hill where an entrance fee is still in place, the percentage of *accessible* area is about 38%, a reduction of about 20% since the 1970s.

While reasons of safety and protection of archaeological sites may be adduced (perhaps somewhat hypocritically: why did the Basilica Julia need to be closed off while the Basilica of Maxentius was left open?) for fencing in the Forum and Palatine areas, the same cannot be used

for such areas as the gardens of the Pincio. There a large area has been fenced off this year around the recently restored Casino Valadier. This enclosure constitutes 18% of the total public area of the Pincio, and includes two tree-lined avenues once available to strollers in that park. It also isolates from view 24 of the busts of famous men, one of the park's principal features. At the diagonally opposite corner of the park, the service enclosure for park maintenance was doubled in area some years ago at the expense of public space. Its position at the corner of the park, directly overlooking the Roman remains long known as the Muro Torto, make this a particularly unfortunate obstruction of a major site.

At the level of what may be defined as semi-public space, the courtyards of palazzi, which, until the mid-1970s were open to the public, have for reasons of "security" been gradually gated and closed off to all but the select few who possess a key or can talk their way past the guard or *portiere*. Thus the white areas on the Nolli map of Rome (dating from 1748), which denoted indifferently streets, courtyards and church interiors, and which were consequently public are at least semi-public, have now been drastically reduced. Citizens are made to feel thankful for the one day a year that the courtyards are opened to the public, and have little or no memory of the time when this "privilege" was taken as a matter of course, year round. This writer recalls with nostalgia the numerous short-cuts through the courtyards available to him in his wanderings around Rome thirty years ago.

In Rome it is a rare fence that is built to keep out cars. More often it is built to keep out pedestrians. Some fences are meant to keep out both. These could easily be modified to allow pedestrians to filter through while keeping out cars. The exclusion of cars but not walkers seem to the intention of the barriers (*dissuasori cilindrici*) built in the late 1990s around the Camera dei Deputati at Piazza Montecitorio, and currently being placed around the Senato (Palazzo Madama) on Via della Dogana Vecchia and Via dei Staderari. There the situation is further complicated by the fact that within the last six months moveable barriers, operated by Carrabinieri, have been set up near both houses of Parliament.

In Rome the pedestrian is overwhelmed more and more by the invasive presence of motor vehicles, both moving and parked. This tendency has increased continuously from the 1950s to the present. Pedestrian "islands" set up by the city in the recent past are constantly invaded either unlawfully by ordinary drivers, or officially by privileged permit-holders. The removal of the curb at Campo de' Fiori in 1999 has meant that vehicles now traverse an area once reserved for pedestrians. The city is currently contemplating a similar removal of the curb at Piazza Navona.

Of the vast sums spent by the city for the Jubilee of the year 2000, a tiny fraction was used to improve pedestrian circulation. Only the technical failure of a scheme to facilitate traffic on the Lungotevere in front of Castel S. Angelo caused that area to be turned over to pedestrians. The burying of the Lungotevere at Piazza della Rovere raised hopes of facilitating pedestrian circulation at that complex intersection. On the contrary, the solution, which allows automobile traffic both underground and at surface levels, introduced a new surface traffic lane, thus making worse what was already a pedestrian nightmare.

The urban arrogance of Medieval nobles has been replaced by the bland invasiveness of modern government agencies and the rapaciousness of bars and restaurants. The latter, apparently encouraged by a city government which collects payments for the area occupied, are

constantly invading more and more public space in both piazza and street. The pedestrian's space is therefore being squeezed by three forces: traffic, commercialism and "security" fencing. In terms of area, the last is perhaps the least of the three, but it is nonetheless indicative of the general negative attitude toward both city dweller and visitor. It is perhaps time for Roma Cancellata to become Roma Riaperta.

CATALOG OF SITES

Cat. 1	Via degli Artisti	Cat. 11	Galleria Sciarra
Cat. 2	Vicolo del Borghetto	Cat. 12	Teatro Marcello
Cat. 3	Vicolo Capizucchi	Cat. 13	Via Alessandrina
Cat. 4	Piazza Farnese	Cat. 14	Scale dell' Aventino
Cat. 5	Via Garibaldi	Cat. 15	Clivo di Rocca Savelli
Cat. 6	Vicolo dei Polacchi	Cat. 16	Circo Massimo
Cat. 7	Piazza S. Maria Maggiore	Cat. 17	Septizodium
Cat. 8	Piazza della Trinità dei Monti	Cat. 18	Via della Vetrina
Cat. 9	Via di Tor di Nona	Cat. 19	Arco di Constantino
Cat. 10	Arco di Giano	Cat. 20	Arco di "Gallieno"