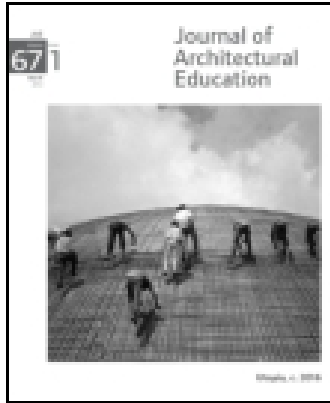


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Time Matter(s): Invention and Re-Imagination in Built Conservation: The Unfinished Drawing and Building of St. Peter's, the Vatican: Federica Goffi Ashgate, 2013 286 pages, 98 illustrations (11 color and 87 black and white) \$109.95 (hardcover)

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order to assert the distinctiveness of its proposition for an urban architecture.

This argument is set forth with considerable comprehensiveness—the author cites extensively from correspondence between Corbusier, his assistants, and Venetian authorities and architects; it includes numerous diagrams, especially in the sections on urban morphology; and the author quotes protagonists like Guillaume Jullian de la Fuente (who assisted Le Corbusier with the design and took over the project after his death) as well as critics and historians whom Shah has interviewed. This material is certainly valuable and supplements earlier studies on the Venice hospital project. But the argument also depends upon some very deliberate exclusions. As Shah notes, the study concerns the designs overseen by Le Corbusier in his atelier and does not address the later revisions developed by Jullian de la Fuente. The analysis also largely disregards the programmatic dimensions of the project, doing so with the justification used by the architects themselves that these aspects were dealt with in the technical report developed by consultants so that the architects were free to focus on the architecture. The social context of postwar Italy, in its official and quotidian forms, is likewise set outside the scope of investigation.

Each of these exclusions may well be justifiable in itself, but cumulatively they amount to a very significant apparatus of influence. The methodological approach of the book becomes at this point a weakness, because the narrowing of focus leads to a conclusion that can only verify identity—that the architecture looks and acts like city—and is not sufficiently able to discuss contradictions or difference. The conclusion of the book, in other words, is sustained by the evidence, but the evidence itself is so circumscribed that the

disciplinary value of that conclusion is somewhat limited.

This self-reflexive aspect of the book is exacerbated by the form of argument employed, which largely eschews narrative exposition and favors reportage. Unremarkable facts such as travel plans are, for example, allowed the evidence of full quotations from correspondence, irrelevant postscripts often included, instead of being cited or relegated to notes. The main points of argument regarding pinwheel plan organization and its correspondence to Venice's urban arrangements are repetitively made. But because the research presented is substantive and sound, it is perhaps the publisher and the editors who should be taken to task for they seem to have abdicated their roles. The book in fact seems largely unedited, insofar as little attempt is made to address a reader through persuasion rather than repetitive declaration, and little concern is given for situating the argument within the present historiographical and methodological contours of the discipline of architectural history.

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Note

- ¹ On the concept of the unbuilt, see Daniel M. Abramson, "Stakes of the Unbuilt," *The Aggregate Website* (Transparent Peer Reviewed), <http://we-aggregate.org/piece/stakes-of-the-unbuilt> (accessed March 28, 2014).



Time Matter(s): Invention and Re-Imagination in Built Conservation: The Unfinished Drawing and Building of St. Peter's, the Vatican

Federica Goffi

Ashgate, 2013

286 pages, 98 illustrations (11 color and 87 black and white)

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Between 1505 and 1626, the Constantinian Basilica of St. Peter was gradually renovated to become (more or less) the edifice we see today in Rome. Although this transformation involved a great diversity of agents and agendas, and many partial and divergent designs over a long period of time, the proliferation of conjectural reconstruction drawings produced in the nineteenth century popularized a false impression that there had once existed a single unified design intended to completely replace “Old” St. Peters with a “New” St. Peters. Federica Goffi’s book, *Time Matter(s): Invention and Re-Imagination in Built Conservation: The Unfinished Drawing and Building of St. Peter's, the Vatican*, joins other scholarship in demonstrating that no such predetermined design ever existed. More specifically—and originally—Goffi argues that New St. Peter’s was intended not to replace the Old but rather to conserve it through reimagination. Far from being a unified work of a single author and epoch, Goffi presents

the new basilica as an unfinished exquisite corpse: a multiauthored, hybrid assembly of additions, subtractions, and alterations, which gradually enveloped the body of the Constantinian Basilica as a second skin. Reimagined in this way, one is invited to see that “Old St. Peter’s did not perish with the erection of the new temple, but rather was still present and living within it” (p. 28).

This argument, supported by Goffi’s interpretation of the drawing of Tiberio Alfarano (a cleric at St. Peter’s from 1544 to 1596), is enough to merit the reading of *Time Matter(s)* for most students and teachers of architectural history. But it is also Goffi’s observations concerning the present-day relevance of such an open-ended and layered approach to conservation, as well as her fine-grained exegesis of Alfarano’s palimpsestic drawing, that make this book pertinent to any architect working in dialogue with historic fabrics.

As its title suggests, *Time Matter(s)* sketches a theory of temporality in architecture. Against modern tendencies either to preserve a historic structure *as is* (freezing time) or to restore it *as was* (returning to a past style-bound image), Goffi promotes “built conservation” as a combinatory mode of remaking that embraces change while enabling continuity, “allowing different times to be simultaneously present” (p. 11). Within this framework of “blended temporalities,” the past lingers in the present, while imagined futures advance with memory.

Goffi’s theorization is supplemented by numerous well-chosen examples, each exhibiting “sedimentation of multiple time layers” (p. 9). These examples are as illuminating as they are diverse: ranging from buildings conserved by being wrapped with modern skins (such as Alberti’s revetment of a Franciscan Church, the Tempio Malatestiano, and John Russell Pope’s encasement of Abraham Lincoln’s birth cabin in

neoclassical garb); to buildings incorporating architectural fragments, or spoils (like Michelangelo’s Santa Maria degli Angeli e dei Martiri, which appropriates a ruin of the Baths of Diocletian for its apse); to aged and ruinous shells reinhabited as museums (Scarpa’s Castelvecchio in Verona, and Meyer Scherer & Rockcastle’s Mill-City Museum in Minneapolis). But, for *Time Matter(s)*, the paradigmatic example of what Goffi calls a “mnemonic building” is St. Peter’s. The author accesses this venerable edifice through the special “door,” or Janus-like “gateway,” of an anomalous drawing produced by an otherwise little-known cleric with architectural proclivity.

Tiberio Alfarano is best known for a 1590 print, which superimposed the entire plan of the Constantinian Basilica with a partial plan of Michelangelo’s design. This annotated double plan, appended to a related manuscript, provided an exhaustive inventory and precise location for each of the many altars, tombs, chapels, and reliquaries that had accumulated in the basilica since its founding in 326 and were gradually being reaccommodated in the Renaissance structure. Scholars have long valued this print for its straightforward documentary evidence. However, the print, Goffi contends, fails to communicate the full ontological and multitemporal significance of Alfarano’s original drawing, which he worked and reworked from 1569 to 1576 while the basilica was undergoing extensive renovation. With its many layers and reworkings, Goffi sees Alfarano’s original drawing as a graphic narration of St. Peter’s transformation—“making time visible” (p. 56).

Especially significant, Goffi argues, is Alfarano’s allusive use of color, decoupage, and iconography. Indiscernible on the black-and-white print but manifest in the original is the drawing’s polychromic materiality. The old walls are outlined with graphite, rendered with a base layer of clay, and illuminated with gold paint, thereby representing the basilica’s

earthy substance and numinous quality. Conversely, the dark hatchings of the new walls are lightened with white wash and tinted with azure tempera, thus transforming the heavy Renaissance footprint into a translucent veil with a pale blue hue, evoking the Virgin Mother (*mater*). Rendered in this way, the double plan reveals not simply the physical relation of two structures (one within the other) but their ontological interdependency: the body of the old basilica appears embraced, protected, even mothered by the new. When Alfarano prepared this drawing, the Constantinian Basilica was partially destroyed, while new interventions (by Bramante, Sangallo, Michelangelo, and others) were partially complete. Thus, Goffi argues, the simultaneous showing of two temporalities (and materialities) makes visible their invisible interrelation, revealing “continuity within change” (p. 75) and integrity within hybridity.

Similarly significant, Goffi shows, are the applied print clippings, incorporated into the drawing like spolia into a church. Five such clippings crown the drawing’s top: Veronica’s veil (bearing an impression of Christ’s face), flanked by depictions of the basilica’s founding saints, bracketed by insignia of its contemporaneous pope and cardinal. These images, Goffi contends, mark the architectural drawing as an icon, inviting present contemplation of St. Peter’s past and “sempiternity.” The intentionally unfinished quality of the drawing spurs further imagination of the basilica’s ongoing and “future transformations” (p. 27).

As for structure, *Time Matter(s)* has a prologue and conclusion, treating architectural representation and temporality as transhistorical topics. Within this frame there are seven chapters promisingly called “days,” although the creative and argumentative achievement of each is largely left for the reader to crystallize. Each “day” typically begins by critiquing

aspects of current architectural practice and ends by offering positive examples of built conservation, while its middle unveils “embedded significance” of the primary artifacts under study. Day 1 provides a “micro-history” of St. Peter’s centuries-long transformation by introducing richly associative details of Alfarano’s drawing, while contextualizing this drawing in relation to other sixteenth-century representations. Day 2 speaks to the basilica’s “twinned body,” superimposing past and future, memory and invention, mortality and sempiternity. Expanding on Alfarano’s iconography, day 3 highlights the “hallowed” significance of his drawing and architectural representation in general. Returning to the body schema, day 4 presents St. Peter’s as an “exquisite corpse,” with comparative examples from twentieth-century surrealism. Day 5 extends to the basilica’s “corporate body,” discussing its continuity with past members by assimilating into its fabric architectural spoils, each linked to a saint, martyr, or pope. Day 6 compares reliquaries and churches, reconceptualizing the old basilica as a “framed icon.” Day 7 invites readers to consider drawings and buildings as “unfinished,” inviting continual reimagination. Here, Goffi introduces her own “intercollage,” providing a graphic demonstration of her arguments by adding a new interpretive layer to Alfarano’s already hybrid drawing.

Like the drawings and buildings it discusses, Goffi’s book demands time. Interweaving erudition and speculation with myriad architectural and artistic examples (from Zumthor to Zeuxis), the copiously illustrated text effectively emulates the drawing under study. Such proximity brings risk. Though intended for wide dissemination, Alfarano’s drawing, we learn, never left the basilica, being withheld (even now) as a private work of devotion “for the eyes of the faithful” (pp. 45, 204). To be fair, Alfarano worked

during the Counter Reformation, when the potency of images was under ideological attack, and Goffi writes in a disciplinary situation, when architectural representation remains caught in a schism. And so, opposing present-day enthusiasm for “instant making,” Goffi calls for “slow drawing”; against the voracious “consumption” of architectural imagery, Goffi promotes its “contemplation”; and eschewing photorealistic (time-frozen) renderings and dematerialized (timeless) drawings, Goffi—following her doctoral advisor, the late Marco Frascari—advocates representational practices that are haptic and hybrid, polysensorial and multitemporal, intimately corporeal and cosmopoetic.

Time Matter(s) was likely on its way to the publisher when Marvin Trachtenberg’s *Building in Time* became available.¹ Though vastly different in scope and methodology, a cursory comparison of the two authors’ intentions is telling. Whereas Trachtenberg offers an overarching framework recasting large chunks of Western architectural history as building either *in* time or *outside* and *against* time, Goffi demonstrates how the minutiae of a single drawing might yield transformative insights for the world of the work and the worlds we all (to some extent) share. Though both authors aim to remediate modern oblivion, Goffi tempers Trachtenberg’s rivaling “regimes of time” with more inclusively nested notions of “multi-temporality.”

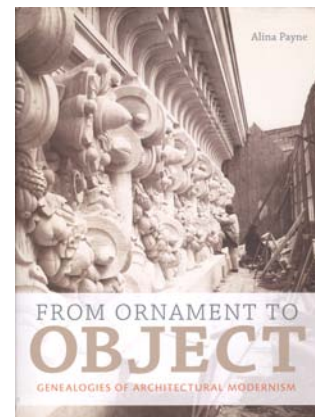
Time Matter(s) will sit well on many shelves: among histories of Renaissance architecture, studies of architectural representation, and theories of conservation. But it may stand most enduringly with (and against) books treating an even more fundamental if implicit architectural matter—the multivalent substance, subject and agency of time.

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Note

- ¹ Marvin Trachtenberg, *Building in Time: From Giotto to Alberti and Modern Oblivion* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010).



From Ornament to Object: Genealogies of Architectural Modernism

Alina Payne
Yale University Press, 2012
360 pages, 62 color and 108 black-and-white illustrations
\$65.00 (hardcover)

More than a century after Adolf Loos’s invective against ornament, there have been several polemical revivals and periodic eclipses of architectural ornamentation. Such returns suggest not only that ornament survives by being periodically buried and censored from use but also that its contested “function” (to invoke a term by Louis Sullivan) is not simply to create florid patterns