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Trachtenberg, Marvin.

Building-in-Time: From Giotto to Alberti and Modern Oblivion.

New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010. Pp. xxv, 490. ISBN 978-0-300-16592-0 (hardcover) \$65.

Marvin Trachtenberg's ambitious and superbly insightful volume, *Building-in-Time: From Giotto to Alberti and Modern Oblivion*, focuses predominantly on the monuments constructed in major urban centres of central Italy—especially Florence—from the end of the thirteenth to the fifteenth century. In the first four chapters the author presents in-depth analyses of the concept of time per se, and time in relation to architecture. In the following five chapters he examines specific structures and monuments through the lens of, in his own terminology, Building-in-Time. Here, “time” is the mortar, a crucial factor in erecting large civil and religious buildings. Trachtenberg not only discusses the architecture of trecento and quattrocento Italy but also demonstrates that while architectural practices of the distant past can be crucial in helping us understand contemporary architectural culture, temporality is a condition that affects all production.

Time in the architectural field has been studied only rarely, and Trachtenberg is the first scholar to dedicate a substantial volume to the analysis of the relationship between time and the process of building. His overall argument starts from the simple fact that in the Middle Ages the time span required for the construction of major buildings almost inevitably exceeded the life span of the people who originally conceived them. Stating that a building cannot exist outside of time, that is to say, in its own time bubble, the author proposes the concept of duration as a function of the process of building, where “time” is a positive, creative force.

Trachtenberg precedes his formal analysis of Italian monuments with a long treatise on the cultural, theoretical, and philosophical aspects of time, and the attitudes to time that people have had, from antiquity to the present. This revealing introduction helps to redirect the mind to think like medieval or early Renaissance builders who followed a Building-in-Time regime. In order to help the reader comprehend the notion of Building-in-Time, Trachtenberg juxtaposes it with the concept of building outside and against time, a concept developed by Leon Battista Alberti in his magnum opus on architecture, *De*

re aedificatoria. Alberti is one of the central figures of this book (the other is Filippo Brunelleschi).

According to Alberti, time would ideally be excluded from the making of architecture. Designing and constructing, which in pre-modern times represented a single long process, were to be sharply divided. Indeed, time itself was to be excluded from architectural making. It would only be allowed in the creating of the perfect design; any other aspect of the process of building would be spoiled by it. Trachtenberg proposes that Alberti was simply responding to ideas already being formulated in the literary world, where the author had a supreme status, and the literary work needed to be kept safe from copyist and second-rate imitators. Trachtenberg maintains that Alberti transferred the concept of authorship from literature to architecture, assigning the architect the role of sole author who needed to be protected against the architectural equivalent of the bad copyist—successive architects. This meant that the “hero architect” had to solve all the problems before construction and that during the process of building nothing could be added or taken away. Trachtenberg notes that Alberti’s model was highly theoretical and incapable of responding to socio-economic and cultural factors over the lifetime of the building, as opposed to his, Trachtenberg’s, own proposed Building-in-Time framework which was extremely responsive to such factors. He carefully examines Alberti’s own architectural practice which he finds even more problematic than the theory. He proves that Alberti’s practical expertise in building was almost non-existent at the time of writing the treatise, and further, that his work in fact appears to have closely followed the Building-in-Time principle.

Trachtenberg then reconsiders our perception of the place of Brunelleschi. Although Alberti seems to imply that he was the only author of his projects, a careful examination of Brunelleschi’s works reveals that he had in fact used the strategies of Building-in-Time to construct all his works—and not only his works but also his whole career. These two concepts, Building-in-Time and Building-outside-Time, coordinate Trachtenberg’s entire text and provide the framework for his analysis of architectural monuments not as products but as production.

Using such structures as Giotto’s tower, the Palazzo Vecchio, Brunelleschi’s cupola, and the nave of Santa Maria Novella as primary examples, Trachtenberg explains with great insight four aspects of his concept of Building-in-Time: continuous redesign, myopic progression, concatenation, and retrosynthesis.

Succinctly stated, “Continuous redesign” entails the possibility for the builders to adapt designs according to changing needs during the long period of construction (incessant revisions); “myopic progression” signifies that the project remains incomplete and the architects (or *capomaestri*) provide detailed portions of the project in stages, delivering only as much as is needed at any particular moment of construction; “concatenation” describes linking and integrating each successive stage of construction to a preceding one; and “retrosynthesis” involves harmonizing previous stages of the project in a coherent whole.

This illuminating book, full of insightful interpretations, extensive new documentation, and rich examples, focuses the reader’s attention on the relationship between architecture and time. Trachtenberg puts emphasis on the understanding of Building-in-Time, and seeks to provide an answer as to why Alberti’s radical idea, which has dominated architecture from the sixteenth century, still appeals to us as a natural way to build, while Building-in-Time has been perceived as something irrational. It is in fact a deeply rational, ordered, and efficient way of building. This book is a good point of departure for rethinking the pre-modern European world of architecture, as well as a starting point to see present architectural culture in a new way. It is dense and challenging reading, intended for scholars and graduate-level students familiar with architecture, history, and philosophy.

The text is accompanied by superb photographs, most of them by the author himself, which perfectly illustrate the points discussed and greatly enhance the flow.

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Wallace, William E.

Michelangelo: The Artist, the Man, and His Times.

New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009. Pp. xvi, 401. ISBN 978-0-521-11199-7 (hardcover) \$30.

William E. Wallace’s biography of Michelangelo is firmly based on the extensive collection of letters by or to Michelangelo and on a rich variety of primary