studying the ways it engaged the campus context. Walking each morning through the quadrangles and passages of Princeton’s Tudor Revival dormitories on my way to the dishwashing station, I passed ogival doors, bay windows, and pedimented archways similar to those depicted in Complexity and Contradiction. In Wu Hall, as well as in halls paneled and trimmed with Gothic Revival motifs designed by architects working for Ralph Adams Cram and Cope & Stewardson, I ate and studied on VRSB furniture that abstracted and stylized those motifs.

Knowing that Complexity and Contradiction had originated in the thesis Venturi completed while himself a student at Princeton, I felt myself interpellated into a genealogy of architect-scholars who absorbed the heritage of European architecture by living amid its epigones, and I recognized the campus as a habitus rich in what I was learning to call cultural capital. A key dimension of that habitus was a nonchalance—a disdain, even—toward the university’s earnest Tudor Revival buildings. Among architecture students, at least, a casual disregard for this architecture of privilege was tacitly communicated as part of the Princeton sensibility.

In subsequent studio courses I caught only the tail end of postmodernist design practice and soon was steeped in deconstructivism, a different kind of language game. But from the lightly worn erudition of people who knew the language only from the treatise the building elaborated, came back to me at the 2016 SAH annual meeting during a session on mannerism in twentieth-century architecture. Listening to presentations about Le Corbusier’s Villa Schwob, Colin Rowe’s essay on mannerism and modern architecture, and buildings by VRSB, Michael Graves, John Hejduk, and Peter Eisenman—as long with more than one exegesis of a brief exchange among Anthony Blunt, Rudolf Wittkower, Sir John Summerson, and other historians after a lecture at the Royal Institute of British Architects in February 1949—I found myself extrapolating from Wu Hall a general theory: mannerism is the reinscription of privilege, a strategy through which elites renew the devalued currency of their cultural capital. Twentieth-century mannerism started to seem like a way to preserve the intellectual and cultural authority of the field’s most privileged practitioners in the face of competing conversations, practices, and agendas.

Sitting in the Pasadena Convention Center as colleagues revisited the RIBA conversation, I thought about the scope and subject of other conference sessions. One explored the capacity of oral history to diversify the range of voices represented in our historiography. Another considered the achievement of women builders beyond the Western world. In a discussion about globalizing the architectural history survey, a colleague asked if it made sense for such courses still to teach Chartres Cathedral—or any of the great Gothic cathedrals—given the expanding scholarship on a multitude of Christian architectures.

With this context of disciplinary restructuring in mind, what is at stake when we focus our attention on a lineage that links Michelangelo and Le Corbusier to VRSB, Eisenman, and the emerging practitioners currently engaging with mannerism in their academic design practices? What does it mean for us to affiliate ourselves with scholars and critics such as Blunt, Wittkower, Summerson, and Rowe? Certainly, historiographic investigation of an art historical category is a worthy objective for an SAH conference session. But in this case, though, the narrowness of the frame and the fidelity of the contemporary research to the terms set by midcentury leaders from the London establishment stood out. I came to the dispiriting conclusion that the panel, like twentieth-century mannerism itself, was—perhaps inadvertently—shoring up the value of a particular Anglo-American lineage of architectural academicism in order to protect its contemporary legatees as other scholars claimed space in the discipline for topics that have so far received scant study.

Similarly, what does it mean to dedicate our attention, and the limited pages of this journal, to revisiting Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture? How do these essays augment the stock of capital vested in ideas and materials associated with some of the discipline’s most privileged people, institutions, and canons? (I recognize that this includes me, invited to contribute at least in part based on my intimacy with the Venturian surround.) How can we cross-pollinate conversations about mannerism and U.S. postmodernism with those about globalization, gender, and multiculturalism—and so open our accounts of the 1960s, and of the twentieth century more broadly, to figures, traditions, and contexts hitherto marginalized in U.S. historiography? Complexity and Contradiction is a great book that models a nuanced and rich way of seeing buildings. But how much attention does it merit given the sense many of us have that we are just arriving at a basic understanding of vast areas of the world’s architectural production and theory? How can we intersect Venturi’s compositional and stylistic approach with analytics that reveal other kinds of architectural complexities and contractions, such as those relating to architecture’s imbrication with systems of class and labor, gender and sexuality, ethnicity and race? To the extent that we do keep rereading Complexity and Contradiction, we should situate the book within a history of privilege that skews architectural knowledge, excludes a wide range of perspectives, and alienates people who might otherwise engage with our discipline. Interdisciplinary analysis can help us not only to better understand books like Complexity and Contradiction and buildings like Wu Hall (the kitchen and scullery as much as the entry and dining halls) but also to challenge the reproduction of power and privilege.

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Franklin Toker
Archaeological Campaigns below the Florence Duomo and Baptistry, 1895–1980
Tournhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2013, 536 pp., 124 color and 591 b/w illus. €175, ISBN 9781906375523
This long-awaited monograph by the former field director of the investigations at Florence Cathedral arrives nearly forty years after both the major excavations beneath the cathedral and Franklin Toker’s extensive and brilliant excavation report published in 1975. It is part of the Florence Dome Project, which envisages the appearance of four volumes related to the diachronic history and the longue durée of this important monument. Known as Santa Maria del Fiore, the cathedral is the result of a series of building campaigns carried out from the end of the thirteenth century to the late fifteenth century under the guidance of celebrated architects and artists such as Arnolfo di Cambio, Francesco Talenti, Filippo Brunelleschi, and Giotto. The Baptistry of San Giovanni corresponds more or less to the same chronological span, since its main building and decorative components date back to the period between the second half of the eleventh century and the beginning of the sixteenth. The history of the complex, however, is rooted in deeper history: corresponding to the western part of Santa Maria del Fiore, in Late Antiquity there stood the first Florentine ecclesia episcopalis. A first phase of the baptistery is likely to belong to this church, although our understanding of its chronology remains problematic. The earliest ecclesia underwent major structural changes in the course of the ninth century. In 852, it appears in written sources as domus sancti Iohanni, while a document from 987 mentions its dedication to Santa Reparata. The church of Santa Maria del Fiore that was built over this earlier structure became one of the most important architectural monuments of medieval Europe.

The excavations, conducted from 1969 to 1974, reach their final conclusion in this volume. In addition to the excavations that he oversaw himself, Toker examines earlier archaeological investigations that were conducted at the site starting in the late nineteenth century. He also includes the “informal excavations,” which began in 1331 on the initiative of the Bishop Francesco Salvestri, and in which were found (according to their medieval chronicler Giovanni Villani) the remains of Saint Zenobius, an important bishop of the church of Florence in the late fourth and early fifth centuries.

The book is divided into three main parts, each organized into multiple chapters. The first part of the book, “Excavated Structures,” includes a helpful timeline and an extensive section documenting the cathedral and its baptistery in color photography. Here, Toker rightly describes the Baptistry of San Giovanni as “among the most enigmatic buildings in Europe” in terms of its original form and building chronology. He provides a very useful and substantial review of all previous investigations of the monument and attributes its original construction to the early Middle Ages. Toker’s proposal that the baptistery was an auxiliary to Santa Reparata rather than to Santa Maria del Fiore is a very important point, since the presence of a baptistery in close relation to the first church, likely in the sixth century, seems to confirm that this complex as a whole must have been the insula episcopalis, the main episcopal church of the city.

Part I ends with an extensive, detailed analysis of Santa Maria del Fiore and Santa Reparata, moving backward from the most recent material to Roman times. This analysis is the largest and most important part of the book, providing a new understanding of the building’s formal evolution and historical context. The discussion is enriched by ground plans, elevation drawings, and other helpful illustrations, many of which originated in connection with the site’s excavations in the 1970s. Toker carefully examines the Late Antique building fabric, emphasizing the uncertainty of its dedication date while at the same time upholding the plausibility of its dedication to Santa Reparata. A central find from the original building is one of the biggest and most significant mosaic floors in all of Italy, located in an apsidal interior divided into three aisles by two rows of columns, an arrangement common to Late Antique episcopal complexes. Based on the correspondence of the results from radiocarbon dating to epigraphic considerations of the donor inscriptions in the mosaic floor, Toker proposes a sixth-century date for the original church building. The subsequent early medieval phase involved major structural and planimetric changes, wherein the building was expanded with side chapels and a crypt. This expansion likely reflects significant investments on the part of Carolingian elites, whose intention could be described as the renewal of the postclassical city. Such investment would have occurred in spite of socioeconomic policies that, at least in Tuscany, had by the ninth century onward diverted spending to rural areas.

The smaller second and third parts of the book may be of less direct interest to architectural historians, but they offer useful considerations for the chronology and use of the buildings and their phases. The second section, “Excavated Artefacts,” is a collaboration among several medieval archaeologists and art historians, who examine all of the finds from the excavations. The section begins with a methodological introduction by Toker, which is followed by specialized discussions focusing on the ceramic and numismatic finds as well as art historical analyses of paintings and sculptures from various eras spanning Roman through early medieval contexts. The final part of the book, “Application of Archaeological Science,” presents a very useful study of issues related to archaeometrical analysis. The first two chapters of this part, which are coauthored by several scholars, follow a diachronic and archaeological approach to provide a detailed overview of the absolute chronologies inferred from the stratigraphic analyses of the various phases of Santa Reparata. The authors support a dating of the earliest construction of the church building to the sixth century, and indeed samples from the mosaic floor may conclusively exclude an alternative dating to the second half of the fourth century. In addition, anthropological studies of the remains found in the graveyard (most notably those of Filippo Brunelleschi) provide interesting insight into the daily life of medieval Florence and its inhabitants. The book ends with a concise but exhaustive summary of the technological applications employed in the study, including dendrochronology, thermoluminescence, archaeomagnetism, and metallurgy.

To sum up, Toker and the numerous other scholars who have contributed to this volume provide an authoritative overview of, and compelling conclusion to, centuries of archaeological campaigns. This book will be a fundamental point of reference for researchers interested in the Florence Cathedral and, more generally, Roman to Renaissance Florence. Moreover, it sets a brilliant example for archaeologists and
Matthew A. Cohen

Beyond Beauty: Reexamining Architectural Proportion through the Basilicas of San Lorenzo and Santo Spirito in Florence

Venice: Marsilio, 2013. 304 pp., 130 illus. $45/€70, ISBN 9788831716437

Existing scholarship on the fifteenth-century Florentine church of San Lorenzo celebrates the church’s visual clarity and grounds that aesthetic assessment in proportions, drawing on the prevailing interpretive model that Rudolf Wittkower established in formative writings of the 1940s and 1950s. Setting out to understand these proportions through measured surveys of both San Lorenzo and Filippo Brunelleschi’s subsequent design of Santo Spirito, Matthew A. Cohen discovered a proportional system different from the one Wittkower had suggested. In this carefully argued study, Cohen sets forth intriguing new proposals regarding the chronology of San Lorenzo’s construction, its design attribution, and, more broadly, the period’s mathematical culture and the place of proportion in early fifteenth-century design.

By studying proportions, Cohen seeks to understand the intentions of the building’s designer. His proposal that these intentions might be found in the built fabric is particularly intriguing, given the scarcity of authors’ statements or autograph drawings for the period as alternative sources. Cohen’s methodological approach combines exacting examination of the building’s dimensions with consideration of contemporary written documentation, always with attention to the mathematical aspects of the architectural proportions. The jury for the James Ackerman Award for the History of Architecture signaled its approval of this methodology in awarding Cohen’s book the prize in 2012. A quest for rigorous analysis propels the study, and in the first of six chapters Cohen carefully defines his terms. He identifies an ambiguity in the modern use of the word proportio that conflates qualitative aspects associated with beauty with aspects that are quantitative and associated with mathematical ratio. This differentiation is critical, since Cohen wants to situate proportion as an objective problem rather than an inherently subjective, aesthetic one resistant to logical assessment. While acknowledging that medieval and Renaissance architects associated certain positive qualities with proportions, Cohen urges the modern reader not to confuse those historical beliefs with our own, and he critiques Wittkower for insufficiently differentiating between the qualitative and quantitative aspects of proportion.

The next two chapters present the core dimensional analysis of San Lorenzo. Survey data from Santo Spirito provide points of comparison. Cohen begins his analysis in chapter 2 with the repeated unit of the nave arcade bay, the source of the interior’s orderly and rhythmic appearance. Following a careful delineation and justification of his method—from deciding where to measure to establishing criteria for assessing the dimensional data—he identifies a root-2 rectangle (with a width-to-height ratio of 1 to \(\sqrt{2}\)) as the basis for the building’s proportional system. Cohen’s effort to distinguish intentional from unintentional proportions leads to extensive expositions of geometry, number, and arithmetic. He discusses the trattati dell’abbaco (arithmetic schoolbooks) that were introduced to Florence in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries as the vehicles by which medieval mathematical theories found a broader audience. Noting significant variations in the dimensions and the sculptural quality of the column capitals and entablature blocks in the nave, Cohen proposes two phases for construction of the nave arcades beginning midcentury, after Brunelleschi’s involvement.

Chapter 3 turns to the overall design of the basilica. A guiding order is much less readily apparent in plan, yet here, too, a root-2 rectangle proves a useful tool for analysis. Cohen finds that even in the absence of a regular grid organization, a conceptual modularity governs the whole. The bulk of the chapter painstakingly reconstructs possible scenarios for the design process on the basis of the dimensions found in the plan and applies the analytical method to the cross section of the nave. In appealing for “patience with fractions” (127), Cohen concedes a challenge that his text poses for the reader. He finds a unified proportional system and common dimensions that link the Old Sacristy and the basilica, suggesting they were conceived together as an integrated design, and thereby proposing a resolution to a long-standing scholarly conundrum. Acknowledging that the dimensional relationships his measurements reveal have been hidden from most observers, Cohen shifts to discussing the number symbolism of more readily discernible elements, such as the reliefs on the nave entablature blocks depicting the book of the Apocalypse (Revelation). While authorship is not his main concern, he suggests that these are not likely to have been part of Brunelleschi’s initial design.

In chapter 4, Cohen employs his metrical analysis to cast new light on unanswered questions regarding the relationship of the fifteenth-century church to its Romanesque precursor and Brunelleschi’s role as designer of San Lorenzo. A 1418 request for land to enlarge the old basilica, made by the church’s prior, Matteo Dolfini, proves a key document as it references specific dimensions for the new construction. While earlier scholars have considered this, Cohen’s survey dimensions provide the basis for a new reconstruction of the old basilica. Cohen invokes an important argument, first proposed by Howard Burns and more recently developed by Marvin Trachtenberg, that initial design decisions may restrict the choices of a project’s subsequent designers. Countering the claim made by late fifteenth-century biographer Antonio Manetti that upon inheriting the project Brunelleschi abandoned all previous work, Cohen credits Dolfini with establishing the proportional systems for the basilica and the Old Sacristy. He restricts Brunelleschi’s design role to updating the visual language of the building through his use of materials and classicizing forms, and thereby establishing the building’s distinctive style.

Chapter 5 explores the influence of medieval models on San Lorenzo and Santo Spirito. Reflecting his own architectural training, Cohen characterizes design as a process of reworking precedents, and he...