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Time, Space, Memory: Chronotopic Views of Architectural Restorations in the Late Roman Empire

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This empirical investigation seeks to understand formally, experientially, and graphically the processes of late Roman restoration, its influences, its meanings, and its effects. As spatial conditions of these restorations exist solely in a realm of experience, my research attempts to convey the formal narrative of these monuments and express the original intention of subsequent restoration efforts. Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the chronotope serves as the basis of my spatial and temporal analysis, although I have taken the liberty to extrapolate the idea of the chronotope from a static intersection in space-time to a truly dynamic relationship between the diverse existences of a single act of architecture within its historical context. The ruin, the restoration, and the destruction of these architectural monuments all hold implications about the social, political, and aesthetic hierarchies of fourth and fifth century Rome, as well as inferring a discourse of architecture as a critical component of the political spectrum.

> *Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history.*[1]

This quote resonates as a poetically brilliant explanation of the dynamic relationship between space and time in architecture. As it were, this is an excerpt from the essay "*Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel*" by Mikhail Bakhtin, a Russian author, theorist, and philosopher of the early twentieth century. In context, this passage from Bakhtin's work frames his argument concerning the literary theory of the chronotope,[2] which he defined as the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships. He initially intended his theory to define a narrative. Yet I found that Bakhtin's insights extend beyond the concerns of a literary scholar in post WWI Russia, addressing the roles of time, space, and memory within the built environment.

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Bakhtin observes that time, acting beyond its traditional capacity as a linear measurement, has the ability to assert itself as a medium by which to create a physical reality. He proceeds by defining space as an element separate from but linked to time; space does not exist as a static entity but as a dynamic form that continually evolves. His thoughts about space and time reveal specific architectural connotations, as architects must take into consideration the trajectories of time and their collisions with a constructed space in order to create architecture that is timeless and lasting. This quality of design and consideration of the chronotopic existence of architecture has manifested itself in a relatively unappreciated monument within the Roman Forum: the *Porticus Deorum Consentium*, or the Portico of the Harmonized Gods.

Approximately two millennia have passed since the original conception of this monument and its unique dynamic architectural trajectory has penetrated and responded to the strata of social and political history. The condition of the Portico serves as testament to the nonlinear evolutions of the structure, as subsequent generations—particularly the late antique reconstructions that shaped this building fundamentally in the fourth century CE – transformed and restored it to serve numerous agendas.

In order to fully comprehend the intentions of the architectural restorations that occurred in the Roman Forum during the fourth century CE, the culture of late Roman design must be considered. To do so, I will first examine two archetypal constructions that greatly influenced ancient Roman standards of construction and restoration. First, The Temple of Saturn, a preeminent example of an idealized Roman architecture, which stands as the one of most ancient sacred spaces within the Roman Forum, and together with the Vesta and the Temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus on the Capitoline Hill, one of the oldest buildings devoted to a divinity in all of Rome.[3] Second, the Senate House, the embodiment of the Roman senatorial government in late antique Rome, which exists as a vivid caricature of the policies and attitudes of a volatile and powerful Roman Republic.

The Romans dedicated the Temple of Saturn to the god of agriculture, whose name, drawn from the Latin *satus,* refers to the act of sowing seed.[4] The construction of the temple was originally attributed to the last Etruscan king Tarquinius Superbus in approximately 570 BCE. However, upon its completion in the fifth century BCE, Titus Larcius, the dictator of the Republic in 497 BCE, transformed the temple into a symbol for the early Roman Republic upon its formal dedication by inscribing his own name upon one of the holiest sites in the city.[5] This stands as the first instance in the building's history of the intentional manipulation of memory: the young Roman Republic taking credit for the efforts of the Etruscans and altering the perception of the chronological evolution of this important site.

This act is especially ironic in that Saturn himself, associated with the naturally continuing cycles of crop production, embodied a means by which to gauge and understand the progression of time, affirming Bakhtin's proposal that space responds to the movements of time. According to Macrobrius' *Saturnalia*, it was Saturn himself who, "having cut off the privy parts of his father, Heaven, threw them into the sea…while chaos lasted, times and seasons did not exist, since time has fixed measurements and those are determined by the revolution of the heavens."[6] By decoupling the notion of the Temple's own history from the natural progression of the seasons, the Roman Republic not only instigated control over the timeline of history, but honored Saturn's legacy as a deity who controlled the temporal sequence of the universe.

In the fourth century CE, after a fire destroyed the Temple of Saturn, the Roman Senate took responsibility for restoring the Temple, as evidenced by the inscription on the frieze:

> Senatus populusque romanus incendio consumptum restituit
> The Roman Senate and People restored what fire had consumed[7]

This physical record of the restoration effort, seemingly innocuous in its brevity and ambiguity, belies the intention of the Senate to manipulate the temporal connotations of the Temple's architecture. While the Senate does not claim responsibility for the original construction of the Temple, the inscription, evaluated with respect to the dramatic departure from the hypothesized original Etruscan scheme, served as a means of legitimizing the restoration effort itself. The use of the word *restituit*, or "restored," allowed the Senate to take significant license with their intervention into the Temple of Saturn's chonrotopic history.

The granite portico of the Temple stands as the most significant testament to the will and enduring legacy of the Senate. Composed of eight granite monoliths, each column stands thirty-six feet tall from the base of the plinth to the lintel. As the last remaining vertical evidence to the Temple's restored splendor, they offer an enticing synecdoche of the fourth century Temple. However, these grand elements of the restoration effort do not simply exist as replacements to the lost originals, but as salvaged spolia, a term used to indicate fragmented, reused pieces of buildings—and these inject a unique architectural vocabulary into the Temple. The six grey granite columns that form the Northwest colonnade are preceded by two red granite columns, which exhibit markedly different circumferences and entases, or profile curvatures, than their counterparts. Most strikingly, the red granite column on the southern façade was placed upside-down upon the plinth. Given the enormous gravity and consequence associated with the restoration, not to mention the sheer amount of planning required to raise such a monolith, it seems unlikely that the inversion was inadvertent. A further testament to the designers' intention is evidenced by the conversion of the previously Corinthian capitals to Ionic.[8] While this may merely constitute an aesthetic decision to modern viewers, the order of the capitals existed as a means by which to date the entirety of the architecture itself. Essentially, the conversion of the columnar order signified an intentional demarcation of a transition of authority, while the physical continuity of the columns themselves maintained a connection to Rome's storied past.

This stratification of the temporal identity of the Temple of Saturn allowed the architects and politicians to trigger specific recollections and manipulate the public's memory of the lineage of the holy site. While this infers a disregard for the implied linearity of the temporal component of Bakhtin's chronotope, the physicality of architecture forces the recognition that the acts of construction, renovation, and destruction carried a power to affect the Temple's spatial composition within its chronotopic memory. The relative rigidity of realized architecture belies a powerful medium through which a tangible recording, erasure, or augmentation of the physical, and by association temporal, memory of a culture may occur.

The Roman Senate House, the *Curia Julia*, serves as testament to the prominence of spatial reorganizations as means of political battles for influence. Its numerous restorations, additions, and conversions since its conception by King Tullus Hostilius in 672 BCE allowed the *Curia* to act as a spatial barometer of the Roman political atmosphere.[9] The

Senate House itself has been redesigned and rebuilt as a result of fires, invasions, political aspirations, and Senatorial expansions, and the late Roman restoration by the collegially ruling emperors Diocletian and Maximian does not fail to meet the expectations set by its numerous predecessors. Constructed as a replacement to the Senate House initiated by Julius Caesar in the first century BCE, the *Curia* in the fourth century presented itself as a remarkable departure from its classical surroundings. Taken into consideration the context of the Roman Forum, the stoic facades give no indication of their historical heritage: a planar brick wall punctuated by three windows above the entrance. Structural buttressing provides additional relief in the four exterior corners, which creates strong, powerful shadow lines along the rippling brick walls.

The interior hall follows the exterior aesthetics, designed in a manner appropriate to the reserved regency of the Senatorial Class. While the emphasis in this restoration was the creation of a reserved, legislative atmosphere, the spatial composition of Domitian and Maximian's restoration provided an intriguing example of scalar manipulation. The size of the large hall, approximately 22 meters in height,[10] juxtaposed against the three hundred Senators filling the aisles, created a drastic perception of negative space, and a heightened sense that the building itself, rather than the senators or the emperor, sought to embody the directive of Roman senatorial politics.

The efforts of Diocletian and Maximian did not relegate the restoration to the original Curia alone, as three additions created a complex of Senatorial buildings along with the Curia.[11] The spatial repercussions of these physical elaborations of the Senate House echoed loudly in the political climate of the fourth century. With the expansion of the physical manifestation of the Senatorial class, the senators were able to use the Curia as an expansion of their occupation of the Forum, and, symbolically, the Empire in the absence of a strong imperial presence. Access to the Senate House occurred along the *Via Sacra*, the most sacred road in the Forum and an important processional route that links the traditionally revered spaces of Rome. The original footprint of the Senate House lies off the Via Sacra, which deviates and dissociates the building from the path through the Forum. The restoration ameliorated this condition, as the colonnaded portico created a filtered connection between the Via Sacra and the Senate House, and therefore heightened the spatial relationship between the Senate and the artery of Roman life.

Ultimately, these two precedents serve to give insight into both the political and religious connotations of late antique Roman architecture, and the various factors in the development of each. The last work of architecture I would like to discuss encompasses a rare margin between these two spheres of influence, existing as a dichotic manifestation of both political and religious agendas in the restoration of a public monument that manipulated the perception of its temporal and spatial identity.

In the first quarter of the fourth century, Constantine the Great, the emperor from 306-337 CE, converted to Christianity and issued the "edict of toleration,"[12] thereby aligning religion as a matter of political importance. However, the legality of Christianity did not discourage some Romans from continuing to embrace the traditional rites and beliefs of paganism, as the "economic, social, and intellectual forces underlying paganism were too powerful and deeply entrenched to be casually legislated out of existence."[13] The persistence of these ancestral memories within the Roman elite manifested themselves in subversive acts of restoring pagan temples in the late fourth century. Completed under the auspices of Valentinian I, the "unusually tolerant" Christian Emperor of the West, the restoration of the Portico of the Harmonized Gods stands as a defiant act of chronotopic manipulation.[14]

Vettius Agorius Praetextatus, serving as Rome's urban prefect in 367 CE, concurrently held some of the highest positions within the pagan priesthoods.[15] His influential political appointment, along with his unusual social and religious life, afforded him the unique opportunity to perform the last official restoration of a pagan temple within the city of Rome during the Roman Empire. Praetextatus also took advantage of Article 11 in Book XV of the Theodosian Code. The law, written in 364 CE, stated:

> *None of the judges shall construct any new building within the Eternal City of Rome … However, we grant permission to all to restore those buildings which are said to have fallen into unsightly ruins*[16]

The Portico of the Harmonized Gods, a small series of pagan temples nestled into ancient stonework within one hundred meters of both the Temple of Saturn and the Senate House, did not significantly occupy the collective memory of the Romans in its early existence. However, its ruined condition in the fourth century qualified the Portico as a building eligible for restoration.[17] Its original construction, as proposed by modern archaeologists, dates from the Second Punic War, where it likely served as a dedication to Jupiter and his Divine Council in hopes that a recreation of a Sacred Banquet in marble would beckon the good will of the deities.[18] However, given its location on the Via Sacra, the last monument before the ascension to the Temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus, the Portico occupied a space embedded in the ritual movements of pagan tradition. As the pagans of late Antique Rome made their ritualistic processions to the Temple, they would encounter the recently renovated Portico immediately before their ultimate destination. The power of association alone would have propelled the Portico from a relic along the Via Sacra to an accomplice to the crescendo of the Temple of Jupiter. Furthermore, its geographic proximity to both the Senate House and the Temple of Saturn gave Praetextatus the unique opportunity to reiterate the traditional importance of pagan traditions to the Senatorial class.

Two specific formal movements define Praetextatus' restoration of the Portico of the Harmonized Gods: the removal of the deities' statues from their sacred niches and the reconstruction of the obtuse-angled portico. The twelve chapels that inhabit the ancient cappellaccio stone walls originally served as chambers in which pagan worshippers could pay their respects to the gods of Jupiter's Divine Council. Until the restoration, these moments were private, even guarded, by nature of the protection of the stone niches. However, Praetextatus' position afforded him the opportunity to augment both the traditions and memories of the role of paganism in the public eye. Rather than reduce his fellow pagan worshippers to *sub rosa* practices, he moved the statues from their veiled chambers and into glorified, exposed locations within the colonnade. This action forced a public recognition of the subversive pagan resistance, as well as encouraging a dialogue about the memory of paganism in Rome's history.

Praetextatus also completed a restoration of the portico itself, which constituted a full renovation of the obtuse-angled colonnade, the capitals, and the lintels. These elements serve two purposes in the rejuvenated monument: one, to define the sacred space upon the level plain, and two, to influence the movement of those invoking the memory of pagan rites. The obtuse angle of the portico responded to the preexisting wall of the Tabularium, but by offsetting the colonnade from the wall surface, the Portico created two distinct spaces: the ambulatory between the colonnade and the brick wall, and the open plain overlooking the *Via Sacra*. The division of this space allowed pagan worshippers access to the statues without overt public exposure, while the open plain created a defined place of gathering once a critical mass of pagans congregated at the monument, a congregation

encouraged by the threshold between the Portico and the sacred path. Praetextatus intended the restoration to serve as a means by which to revitalize the presence of paganism within the memories of Roman citizens, and the fluid connection between the *Via Sacra* and the sacred space facilitated a scalar relationship between the public and the monument.

The fourth century CE restoration of the Portico, a deliberate reinterpretation of the architectural record, inscribed itself into Rome's chronotopic memory as it altered the spatial procession of the *Via Sacra* and the temporal hierarchy of the religious landscape. The cognizance of Praetextatus' intention in the fourth century's religious and political context deliberately transformed the conception of the Portico's role in the evolution of paganism in Roman tradition, altering the collective memory not only of the monument, but also of pagan rites in a Christian empire.

The possibility to securely credit and date specific architectural interventions within these monuments allows for a visceral comparison of spatial compositions and movements to social and political cultures. Diagrammatically, the reorganization of ruins and architectural elements had the potential to alter dramatically the experiential and historical relevance of these structures, a process that has created a palimpsest of restorations throughout the formal existences of the monuments.

Ultimately, contemporary architects and preservationists must reconcile themselves to the fact that their own efforts in the transformation or reuse of historic structures engage the same chronotopic issues of time and space as their Roman brethren. In this sense, a conscious awareness of the implications of restoration and preservation should guide the decisions about each element of the architectural composition: from the building's program and purpose to the design of the doorknobs. Each physical artifact, spatial ordering, and processional movement within a historic structure exists within the flesh of time, creating haptic and tangible connections to the traditions and connotations of our past.

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Endnotes

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2 Bakhtin (1981) 85
3 Grant (1970) 75
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Andrew Ruff graduated from the University of Tennessee's College of Architecture + Design with a B.Arch in 2011, receiving the Tau Sigma Delta medal for his thesis work. In addition to studies in Rome and Switzerland, his design portfolio includes projects in Haiti, Detroit, the American Gulf Coast, and the Appalachian Mountains. His creative research explores the architectural potential of fiction, chronotopic palimpsests, and the beauty of dreams.

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