



No Longer and Not Yet

Edward Hollis ¹

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Abstract:

The forest of Kilmahew, around twenty miles west of Glasgow, conceals an architectural cautionary tale. In the 1960's, the landscape was radically transformed by a building. St Peter's seminary was built to house around a hundred catholic novices. Its plan and section, the work of the architects Gillespie Kidd and Coia, were a rigorous statement of the modernist maxim that form follows function. But within a decade, there were not enough priests to fill it; and St Peter's became a form without a function. That was 1987, and since then it has resisted numerous attempts to provide it with a new one: designed as closely as it was to a specific programme, the building remains empty, and derelict. It is no longer what it used to be, and not yet what it can be. The caution is simple: design a building programmatically, and you'll end up with a ruin.

This author has been involved since the Venice Biennale of 2010 with a new proposal for St Peter's led by the Glasgow arts collective NVA (Nacionale Vitae Activa). We have no images of what it will look like, or when it will be ready. St Peter's isn't going to be restored any time soon. Instead, we propose to leave the building perpetually incomplete – both ruin and building site. It's a model of what all buildings should be: they are, in environmental terms, expensive. We shouldn't be building more of them, but rather, exploiting and transforming the ones we already have, again and again. St Peter's was originally designed to teach moral lessons, but now it presents a different ethical challenge. This article will narrate NVA's proposals, and set them in the context of the modernist ethics they question, arguing for a different discourse, of suspension in time – in being no longer and not yet.

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Photograph: Edward Hollis

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SPACE AND LIGHT REVISITED: THE SAD STORY OF ST PETER'S SEMINARY

In 2009, the Scottish director Murray Grigor released a new film. At least, he'd reworked on an old one premiered at the Royal School of Arts Music and Drama in Glasgow. *Space and Light Revisited* was shown on two screens. Both screens followed one another, shot for shot, around the same building. On the left hand side, everything was in perfect order. The building was, as the title of the film suggested, a study in space and light. Young men opened doors, walked up and down corridors, ascended and descended stairs, dined in the refectory, cooked in the kitchen, studied in the cells, and prayed at the altar.

On the right hand screen, the building was devoid of people. The charred remains of doors and fragments of smashed windows littered a floor dusted with snow. Corridors had been blasted open to the elements, and the stair was no more than a cranked concrete beam, covered in moss. The refectory was cavernous and dark, the kitchen roofless, the cells covered in graffiti, and the altar smashed. The two screens were identical in every dimension, save that of time, for the images on the left hand screen had been shot in 1972, those on the right in 2009. Thirty seven years separated the functioning modernist machine on the left from the ruin on the right.

The wooded estate of Kilmahew has a long history – in the eighth or ninth centuries a forest hermitage, in the middle ages a feudal estate, and in the nineteenth century an arboretum assembled by a shipping dynasty around a mock baronial mansion. The place had, like many such estates, become impossible to maintain in private hands by the end of World War II. Kilmahew was acquired by the Archdiocese of Glasgow in 1946, and in 1953, they approached the architects Gillespie Kidd and Coia to convert the baronial mansion into a seminary for around two hundred priests. The design went through several iterations, and by the time it was completed in 1966, St Peter's seminary was largely the work of Isi Metzstein and Andy Macmillan, already the *enfants terribles* of the Scottish architectural scene.

Their powerful use of *béton brut*, shallow vaulting and heavy timberwork owes much to the idiosyncrasies of late Le Corbusier, or Frederick Gibberd at Liverpool Cathedral; but the *parti* of the building had more in common with Stirling and Gowan's contemporary experiments in Leicester and Cambridge. Like them, St Peter's was the three dimensional expression of a functional programme. A single section enclosed without distinction, a refectory at one end, and a chapel at the other. As a later conservation report² prepared by John Allan of Avanti Architects in 2008 states: 'buildings were [at that time] conceived primarily as instruments, rather than monuments', and St Peter's was, par excellence, an

instrument, a machine, for educating priests.

It was a machine that soon started to malfunction, and even by the time that Grigor filmed *Space and Light*, the seminarians were complaining about the leaks and the cold. But the seminary was also a functional programme that, no sooner had it been clothed in a building, started to wither away. There were never enough trainee priests to fill the building, and by the time it was complete, the church had decided to train priests in parishes and small houses among their congregations, rather than in isolated phalansteries. In 1980, the Catholic Church closed St Peter's down, and sent the seminarians elsewhere. The place was used as a drug rehabilitation centre for a few years until, in 1986, the building was mothballed. A fence was built around it, the doors were locked, and the place abandoned.

St Peter's has fallen remarkably rapidly into ruin. The weather of the west of Scotland has done its work, of course, but so have the locals. The fence the church put about the site is riddled with holes, and the building has been comprehensively raided for building materials, used as a canvas for graffiti, and the theatre for countless parties, usually culminating in some act of other of minor arson. The original baronial house was gutted in one such performance in the mid 1990's, and was pulled down by the fire service – it was too dangerous, they said, for anyone to risk visiting it again. Any empty building is, of course, an invitation to its own destruction, particularly any building that is as loathed by its neighbours as completely as St Peter's, and the more it is ruined, the more loathsome it becomes to some. One resident is quoted as saying:

*It's an eyesore - a total blot on the land. Nobody but pretentious, self-serving architects would miss it. Let it rot and become a folly to the monumental planning mistakes of the 20th century.*³

But the holes in the fence have also permitted entry to other visitors, and St Peter's has become, in the process of its ruination, a cult object for artists and architects, locally and internationally. Some graffiti is obscene, sectarian, or nihilistic, but other is extraordinary, and beautiful. Rock bands occasionally clear the floor of the chapel of its heaps of broken glass to film videos, and students from Glasgow School of Art use the walls of the building to practice on when canvasses and studios became too expensive, or restrictive for their art.

The elegiac modernist ruin has also provided material for many speculative projects over the years, from architecture, art and design students, all of whom find themselves appalled, seduced, and provoked by the concrete beast lurking inside its forest fence. Some envisage the complete restoration of the building, others its occupation as a monumental ruin, and others still, its complete conversion into something else. And here have been several rather more conventional proposals to bring a new life to the building, notably an attempt by Urban Splash and Gareth Hoskins to turn it into a hotel in 2007. This scheme, like several others, was defeated by the inconvenience of the site, the cost of the proposals, and the very specificity of the building itself. Designed as closely as it was around one particular programme, it has proved almost impossible to convert it into anything else.

As the result of this diverse interest in, and activity around St Peter's, the building itself has acquired a cultural status that increases in directly inverse proportion to its state of repair. The building was 'A' listed in 1992, and in 2005, Prospect magazine named it the most significant postwar building in Scotland. In 2008 St Peter's joined the World Monuments Watch List of 100 most endangered buildings on the globe and at the same time, Avanti Architects prepared a conservation report for Historic Scotland. St Peter's seminary has become, to invert Avanti's phrase, a monument rather than an instrument; but ruination, as the Catholic Church has learned to their cost, is not a static state. It is, particularly in modern

buildings made of fragile concrete and steel and riddled with cavities for services, a rapid process.

The building has proved uniquely resistant to attempts to ‘save it’: the remoteness of the site, the restrictive programmatic form of the architecture, and the resistant materials of which it is constructed make it difficult to deal with it, but leave St Peter’s as it is, and it will soon disappear. Thus, what follows is an examination of a new proposal for St Peter’s rooted in the dimension of time, as explored in *Space and Light Revisited*. As John Allan’s conservation report states, St Peter’s has, between 1986 and 2008, undergone an extraordinary transformation that ‘necessitates a double assessment of significance – the significance of St Peter’s as built, and the significance of the building in its current state.’⁴ The proposal discussed here is based neither on the restoration of the building as it once was, nor the conservation of it as it is now, but on the provocation posed by the journey between those two states, and the process of transformation itself.

SPACE AND LIGHT REVISITED, REVISITED: POSSIBLE FUTURES FOR ST PETER’S

In November 2011, *Space and Light Revisited* was shown again, this time in a disused church in Venice, as the *acqua alta* rose outside. The screening took place as part of Scotland’s contribution to the Architecture Biennale of that year, curated by the Glasgow Arts Charity NVA. The name NVA is derived from the acronym ‘Nationale Vitae Activa’ which means, loosely, ‘the right to influence public affairs’, and their work is born out of the idea that it is publicly funded. NVA eschew the notion of public art as the provision of static, monumental objects in favour of the organisation of events that provoke public activity.

*NVA champion an emerging form of collaborative art practice that aims to galvanise public partners and bridge the gap between political strategy and practical implementation through temporary and permanent works.*⁵

Their best known work, *The Storr: Unfolding Landscape*, was not as the images of it might make it seem, a spectacular highland *son et lumiere*, but a provocation to explore the mountains of Skye at night. *The Speed of Light*, planned for the 2012 Olympiad lit up Arthur’s Seat in Edinburgh through public participation: the light display was generated by hundreds of volunteer runners jogging around the hill in specially designed light suits, and walkers climbing its steep traverses with luminous, singing walking sticks.

And the screening of *Space and Light Revisited* in Venice was no passive night at the movies. When the lights came up a debate was held. Angus Farquhar, the founder of NVA, was in attendance, with Tilman Latz, the landscape architect responsible for the conversion of the derelict steelworks in Duisberg, Germany, as a park; Hayden Lorimer, the cultural geographer; David Cook, head of the newly refurbished Briggait Arts Centre in Glasgow; Gerrie Van Noord, the artist; Morag Bain of the Lighthouse, Scotland’s centre for architecture and design; Adam Scarborough, who runs the Grizedale Arts project in Cumbria; Ian Gilzean from the Scottish Government; Ranald McInnes from Historic Scotland, and several others, including the author of this article.

These people were gathered together for the different perspectives they might offer on the future of Kilmahew. Some, like Latz, could offer professional perspectives on the conversion of derelict modernist sites. Others, like Cook, or Van Noord, were used to working with artists on site specific projects. Bain, Gilzean and McInnes were present as policy makers and funders, while Scarborough’s Grizedale Arts project offers radical models of public engagement with the arts and culture in rural settings, from the

establishment of a school for tourists, to the construction of paddy fields in the Lake District. Lorimer's work on the geographies of walking and driving offered a corrective to the natural tendency among the (architect-led) group to concentrate on the building at Kilmahew, rather than the landscape as a whole.

While the debate was used to reflect on the film, it also provoked speculation on the future of the building, and since that time, NVA have assembled a proposal for it quite unlike any of the others that have been wrought against its pebble dashed concrete. Key to their proposal is that there is no proposal. Nothing complete, anyway. Most of the landscape will be left to run wild. Most of the building will stay ruined, for the moment at least. The project has already, they say, started on site, without a drawing, or a designer. It won't be finished for at least another twenty years, if at all. It doesn't sound – or look – much like a proposal.

But the future of Kilmahew speculatively constructed at the Venice Biennale in 2010 represents a carefully considered challenge to the ways in which we deal with existing buildings, and, in particular, ruins. In the remainder of this article we will show how this alternative future deals with, and questions, some of the key 'building blocks' of our attitudes to the architecture (and the landscapes) of the past. The care of monuments has, since the nineteenth century existed between two poles of thought: Restoration, and Conservation. The former approach is best articulated by its first great proponent in nineteenth century France, Viollet le Duc:

The term restoration and the thing itself are both modern. To restore a building is not to preserve it, to repair, or to rebuild it; it is reinstate it to a condition of completeness which may never have existed at any given time.⁶

The restorer supposes that the authenticity of a building lies in its stylistic and aesthetic unity, and that this is an ideal state to which any building may be returned. For example, Viollet le Duc worked for many years on the restoration of Notre Dame in Paris. He removed Baroque and Neoclassical additions that he believed to conflict with the purity of the Gothic style of the original building. He also 'completed' many parts that he supposed the medieval masons to have left unfinished.

To imagine a restoration of St Peter's Seminary, then, one must imagine all the graffiti and the overgrowth removed, and, at the same time, all the disappeared timber revetment of the structure replaced, so that the building might look exactly as it did in 1986, at the moment of its abandonment by the Catholic Church. This is the approach that the French authorities have taken to the conservation of the palace of Versailles, for example, which is being restored to its state on the eve of the revolution of October 1789: what the palace is 'for' once the restoration is complete is a question they cannot, or dare not answer. Quite aside from the cost of the process, Palace and seminary were malfunctioning white elephants then, and would be white elephants now.

At the same time as Viollet le Duc was writing, conservationists in England led by John Ruskin, saw restoration as

'a destruction accompanied by the false description of the thing destroyed.' For conservationists completeness and authenticity lay in the fact of a building's survival, weathered and worn, in whatever form, from one age of culture to another. 7

However, while a building itself might survive, the people and the society who had made it do not. Historic buildings stand as epitaphs to their now-obsolete ways of conceiving and making things; and if this is the case, then restoration is a double crime. On the one hand all sorts of age-old accretions are

removed in order to return the building to a spurious modern notion of ‘purity’. On the other hand, in order to restore formal unity, gaps in the original execution of the design are filled with modern insertions. These latter cannot not be made in the same way, or by the same hands as the originals (even the technology that built St Peter’s in the late 1960’s is already obsolete). They will always be, in the words of Ruskin, ‘a false description’, even if they do match the original fabric exactly in formal or physical terms. As William Morris who founded the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings in 1877 commented:

*Surely it is a curious thing that we are ready to laugh at the idea of the possibility of the Greek workman turning out a Gothic building, or a Gothic workman turning out a Greek one, but we see nothing preposterous in the Victorian workman producing a Gothic one.*⁸

If the Historic building is the epitaph of its makers, then nothing might be added or taken away from it without compromising its integrity. The most that might be admitted is unobtrusive repair.

*Watch an old building with an anxious care; guard it as best you may, and at any cost, from every influence of dilapidation...bind it together with iron where it loosens; stay it with timber where it declines; do not care about the unsightliness of the aid.*⁹

Conservation is a radical strategy, and as such is rarely actually practised, since it permits no alteration to what it finds. Viollet le Duc said of the principles of conservation:

*We understand the rigour of these principles, and we accept them completely: but only when we are dealing with a curious ruin, without a future or an actual use’.*¹⁰

And while this may be appropriate for the ruin or the obsolete shrine, it is an impossible strategy for the vast majority of old buildings. The consequence of ‘conserving’ St Peter’s in the pure form advocated by Ruskin or Morris would be as irrational as restoring it. The building would be stabilised in its current state, as an overgrown ruin, surrounded by a fence riddled with holes, perpetually vulnerable to further vandalism, arson, and abuse. The nineteenth century battle between conservation and restoration was fought between ideological extremists, and it was not until late in the century that a third position evolved, that allowed architects and historians to contemplate the modern alteration and extension of historic buildings. The first charter regarding the Restoration of Historic monuments in Italy, from 1883 states:

*Architectural monuments from the past are not only valuable for the study of architecture but contribute as essential documents to explain and illustrate all the facets of the history of various peoples throughout the ages.*¹¹

This approach – philological, or documentary restoration – sees the authenticity of the historic building not in its aesthetic unity, not in its survival, but in the legibility of the diverse parts of which that survival is composed. For example, the ancient Theatre of Marcellus in Rome, which was converted into a castle in the middle ages, and a palace in the Renaissance, has been converted into a block of flats. At the same time, the area around the building has been excavated to expose to the ‘reader’ all the layers of this complex, collaged, hybrid building.

Postmodernist architectural writers, such as Colin Rowe and Robert Venturi, took this notion further, suggesting that buildings are incomplete assemblies of fragments in the process of perpetual addition and subtraction. In the context of historic buildings, this opens up a new possibility – if they are *already*

composites and collages, if their ‘purity’ is *already* compromised, then there need be no interdict on adding to (or subtracting from) them further, provided that the new ‘layer’ of alteration is legibly different from its predecessors. It is an approach that finds its most assured expression in the work of Carlo Scarpa – particularly at the Castelvecchio, Verona, and the Palazzo Querini Stampalia, Venice.

One can imagine, then, a refurbished St Peter’s in which extraneous ‘historic junk’ is removed, and then the concrete frame, cleaned and exposed, is draped with contemporary interventions that allow the building to perform a new function. This is in fact the strategy that Urban Splash attempted to employ in their 2009 proposal for the building, but it was defeated by something with which Scarpa, working on medieval structures, did not have to deal – the extreme programmatic specificity of a modern building like the seminary, which is so rigid that it makes it almost impossible to envisage new functions for it, without committing serious vandalisms on the structure, and ruining whatever vestigial integrity it might still possess.

As is implicit in all three of the positions outline above, history, and what to do with its remains, are closely bound together; the latter being a concrete metaphor for the former. History is a continuous and multifarious process of change while buildings, on the face of it, are both too fixed and too ephemeral to represent its protean continuities. Restorationists destroy what is there in order to ‘reveal’ – in fact create – the intentions of the original designer, which becomes their fetish. History is frozen at the moment of the conception of the building – it is still-born. St Peter’s returns to the moment of its abandonment. Conservationists freeze history in the present: the building’s life is suspended in coma. This is the result of their fetishisation of the link – seen as sacred and irreproducible – between the intentions of the designer and the building. St Peter’s remains an unloved ruin.

The fetishisation of the multiple intentions of the designers of the Historic Building lead postmodernists to deny it any unity. Each part is separated from the other to aid legibility. History is made discontinuous and the building is eviscerated. St Peter’s, in order to be re-used, must sacrifice the functional and spatial integrity that gave it life. It is therefore clear that traditional approaches to architectural restoration/conservation/ call it what you will, will not suffice when dealing with a building like St Peter’s. Restoration is a sort of still birth, conservation a mummifying, and philological restoration an evisceration. They are all concerned with fixing buildings in time, imposing upon them a static state, an embalming that they never enjoyed ‘in life’.

Tilman Latz, reflecting on the debate in Venice, wrote:

Originally the architects of St Peter’s were challenged to find a non-dogmatic new architectural form, which created, on the one hand, a ‘sacred place’ and, on the other hand, respected and transformed ecclesiastical traditions of a thousand years of the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland into a conceptual and spatial programme. By cleaning and restoring it, the seminary could possibly tell this story, but it would be devoid of any of its own further history. It would be just another clean museum piece.¹²

But to conserve the building as it is, even as a mysterious ruin is also not a sustainable option. While it is no longer, in its present state, habitable, it is still far from the condition of stump of castle, or ancient temple. Recent as it is, its current state still provokes real loathing and fear (and consequent antisocial behaviour). To refurbish the building completely is, as the Urban Splash experience has already shown, also not a sustainable option – not immediately, anyway. The programmatic specificity of St Peter’s precludes any easy conversion from the old use to a new one. The sum of money required to do so is quite simply too large, and the money to be made from the site too small to reward such a significant

investment.

As David Cook, veteran of a long campaign to raise the funds to convert a similarly derelict building in Glasgow into the Briggait Arts Centre commented:

*The very challenges of the building are the things that create the opportunities, in the sense that conservation practice would normally say, 'Let's look for an end use', and once you had found the end use, the ability to develop, the ability to raise money would all pour in. There is a sense of this building waiting for a purpose that is never going to arrive. There is no commercial solution, no practical solution for it, and it will sit and wait forever unless something is done.'*¹³

What is needed at St Peter's then, is time, and NVA believe that doing as little as possible, for the moment, is what will buy it. Angus Farquhar writes: 'I'm glad we can't just go and create some instant fix for St Peter's, because as a result, we can't make the wrong decisions. We have to do this slowly.'¹⁴ NVA's masterplan is phased. The first phase involves cutting paths through the woods, and making gardens, so that the site is populated with people as a deterrent to vandalism and crime. The second is the stabilisation of the ruin, and the third the occupation of a small part of it, converting the chapel into a meeting hall. Beyond, at some unspecified future date, more of the building might be occupied, but in ways as yet unpredicted. It is a strategy of tiny moves: Latz writes:

*Very often business plans decide the destiny of such structures in a very short period of time....I think we need an approach that leads to a practical application in time and in accordance with the public interests. But it is equally important to respect the notion of time that is now accumulated within the site. Consequently, it is just as important to take time for interventions, to keep things open and propose structures that can develop further and take new ideas on board...That's what makes such a project sustainable over time.'*¹⁵

SPACE AND LIGHT REVISITED, REVISITED, REVISITED: AN INCOMPLETE PROPOSAL FOR ST PETER'S

So the incompleteness of NVA's proposals for St Peter's isn't borne out of penny pinching, or an excess of respect for the original building. But it's not just a strategy to buy time: it is also a provocation. In his 1949 essay, *the Future of the Past* John Summerson¹⁶ argues that the pleasure of ruins lies in their suggestiveness – too ruined, and the heap of stone gives no purchase to the imagination. Not ruined enough, and the building restricts its flight. But the suggestive contemplation of ruins is not just an idle reverie, for every building is in some sense, a ruin. As Christopher Alexander observed, 'No building is ever perfect. Each building, when it is first built, is an attempt to make a self-maintaining whole configuration. But the predictions are invariably wrong. People use buildings differently from the way they thought they would.' Accordingly, people have to make changes in order to maintain the fit between a structure and the events that take place in it. Each time this happens to a building 'we assume we are going to transform it, that new wholes will be born, that, indeed, the entire whole which is being repaired will become a different whole as a result.'¹⁷

This has already happened at St Peter's, whose startling present state is the result of predictions that were invariably wrong. The proposed occupation of St Peter's is (unlike a restoration, conservation, or refurbishment) an attempt not to stop this iterative process of transformation, but to perpetuate it, so that the building will always be in flux and incomplete. The incomplete occupation of St Peter's is designed to encourage the proprietors and users of the site to complete their own version of the site, in their minds at

first, and then in time, perhaps, on the ground itself. Each new intervention, itself fragmentary, then becomes a new provocation, and a new round of intervention can begin. Buildings and ruins are never whole, and this is their very provocation – to reverie as Summerson suggests; action, as Alexander proposes; and also to critique. In his studies of British industrial ruins, the geographer Tim Edensor has commented:

...ruins are largely understood – especially by bureaucrats, city promoters and planners - as offensive to the character and aesthetics of the city. The sooner these scars on the landscape are demolished and swept away, effaced in the name of civic order, the better. They are matter out of place, a continuing rebuke to attempts to render urban space productive, smooth and regular. Imagined as sites of urban disorder, dens into which deviant characters – drug-users, gang-members, vandals and the homeless – are drawn, the imperative is to extinguish their decaying features from the urban backdrop. This website is dedicated to putting forward a different view. The following pages feature photographs and text which attempt to provoke a different assessment of these ruined spaces, and stimulate a critique of certain contemporary social and cultural processes. As spaces by the side of the road, ruins can be explored for effects that talk back to the quest to create an impossibly seamless urban fabric, to the uses to which history and heritage are put, to the extensive over-commodification of places and things, to middle-class aesthetics, and to broader tendencies to fix meanings in the service of power.¹⁸

Edensor argues then, that ruins provide a critique of the city itself – or, at least, of our desire to organise it. It is an idea that finds its source in Richard Sennett's first published book *The Uses of Disorder*. Writing in the 1960's in the face of mass suburbanisation on the one hand, and youth revolt on the other, Sennett drew parallels between the self-righteous certainties and communities of the teenager and their suburban parents, and saw in both the spectre of, to quote Edensor, 'meanings fixed in the service of power'. The myths of community' writes Sennett, 'are self-destructive in that they take a strength developed on the eve of adulthood, and use it to repress other human strengths, like curiosity and the desire to explore.¹⁹ And they result, he argued, in an approach to society and its habitus, the city, all too familiar in his time:

'Aesthetic and humanistic values and institutions must be in a planned relationship to economic and political values and institutions. Thus all such activities must be designed as a unit both physically and as social structures'. ...these are not the words of a mad superman. They are rather a clear statement of the goals of a large and influential segment of the profession that plans modern cities. The ideal is that nothing be out of control.²⁰

Sennett's response to the planner is to foster disorder in the city: to abolish zoning, local government, central control – in short, to allow the city to be what it is already: chaotic, changing, and forever incomplete. It would not, by any means, be easy to live there:

Let us imagine a community free to create its own patterns of life...the outstanding characteristic of the area, for the young people who move into it, would be the high level of tension and unease between the people living there...precisely because the community was on its own, because the people had to deal with each other in order to survive at all, some kind of uneasy truce between these hostile camps, these conflicting interests, would have to be arranged by the people themselves.the very diversity of the neighbourhood has built into it the obligation of responsibility.²¹

For, at the largest scale, Sennett suggests, diversity, brokenness, and constant change are the very drivers

that bring us out of adolescence (however old we are) and make us into adults. People, buildings, and cities, are more than mere machines:

When a machine's parts wear down, which is their 'form of experience' in time, the machine cannot operate. But the essence of human development is that growth occurs when old routines break down, when old parts are no longer enough for the needs of the new organism, this same kind of change, in a larger sphere, creates the phenomenon of history in a culture.²²

This is an idea about cities, but it could also be applied to their microcosm: buildings, and indeed, buildings like St Peter's. The ruin and the partial occupation then, incomplete, malfunctioning (or a-functional) does not just stimulate reverie, but demands action and re-action. It invokes freedom – not in the modern sense of choice (although the partial ruin demands that its occupants make choices about its future) but in the sense of liberty, and the duties that run concurrently with her rights. In this sense, it is not enough to *be* free – instead, it is required to perform its privileges and duties.

This means that St Peter's as a project can never be finished, for if it is, it will be finished. Morag Bain of the Lighthouse comments:

I am really fascinated by the whole idea that this is about process and that there isn't an end use. The process is the thing that is driving it. Remembering the conversation about how the Church thinks nothing of a hundred years. Thinking of an end use: it might not happen in our lifetime; and that is fine.²³

THE INVISIBLE COLLEGE

NVA have no idea what their proposal will look like when it is complete. Get it right, and it never will be. They do however have a fairly clear idea about how it will happen, for their proposal is not just a matter of architecture. St Peter's was built as a place of sacred reflection and education, but seminaries are not, like monasteries, secluded. Rather, their purpose is to train priests to go out into the world, both locally and further afield. The functional programme planned for the site is intimately connected to the formal programme for the buildings, since it is the former that will drive the latter.

The programme revolves around the idea of an 'invisible college', less an institution than a series of events, in which academics, architects, and, crucially, the local people who have spent their lives around the site, will investigate its past and, in doing so, model its future. The invisible college, like the site it addresses, is not a fixed entity, but a protean body, in the process of perpetual evolution. The observations of one summer school provoke the agenda for the next one, and, in the process, proposals for the next stage of the fragmentary re-occupation of the building in which it has taken place.

The idea is modelled on the summer schools held in the Old Town of Edinburgh in the late nineteenth century by the cultural geographer and sociologist Patrick Geddes. At the time, the Old Town was a slum. Geddes invited thinkers of international renown to work with local people for a limited period of time. Their task was to conduct what was called a 'regional survey', finding out about living conditions, geography, the weather, and the history of the locale.

But they weren't positivistic exercises in data collection. Geddes hoped that, in recording and articulating the place in which they lived, the inhabitants of Edinburgh's Old Town would appreciate its value, understand its problems, and in doing so, begin to find solutions to them. His regional surveys (he went

on to carry them out elsewhere – in England, Montpellier, and even in India) resulted in significant improvements to areas that had hitherto been slums, and, importantly, these improvements weren't imposed from above. Edinburgh's Royal Mile is still dotted with gardens that Geddes encouraged people to make in the drying greens, stairs they were inspired to clean, ancient buildings they shamed the city fathers into preserving.

Farquhar echoes the aspiration:

It's not a process of us becoming tied into a sort of exploitation of individuals who must pay vast sums of money in order for us to impart wisdom. It should be the inverse of this approach. It is to create places where the subject matter is so interesting and so rich that you would simply use great minds from many different disciplines to allow people to draw what they can from this narrative. Maybe it is about teaching people to grow vegetables; that is as important as understanding the tradition of Ruskin and Scarpa and Le Corbusier and Mackintosh and how their lineage runs through the building.²⁴

Kilmahew still is, as the Old Town of Edinburgh once was, a contested and difficult territory. St Peter's seminary may be an icon to architects and designers, but it is locally loathed and abused. The 'invisible college' is a mechanism designed to heal these wounds and, in doing so, to heal the building itself, step by step, unlocking and articulating the memories it contains. The Invisible College is now well underway. An AHRC (Arts and Humanities Research Council) grant has been obtained to run three workshops and an application submitted, to the ironically named Heritage Lottery Fund, for the initial works to the landscape and the building. The first workshops took place in 2012, testing the ground for future activities, and refining the first, fragmentary proposals for the revival of St Peter's seminary itself.

Two of these workshops have taken place to date, each attended by around fifty diverse guests, from the Australian landscape writer Gini Lee, to the Scottish Land rights campaigner Andy Wightman. In each workshop, a walk to the site leads to a series of activities on the ground. In the first workshop, some attendees replanted the old vegetable patch, and others excavated a long lost Japanese garden. In the second workshop, half the guests were given hazard tape and cones, and asked to demarcate and clear areas within the ruined seminary where it would be safe for a child to play. Others were given a spade, and invited to excavate patches of earth one metre square; beneath several decades of turf they found the floor of a Victorian wintergarden, an old tennis court, and a cobbled lane.

Each of these workshops is carefully designed as a little act of archaeology on the site – a scraping back and revealing, that leaves a mark, however tiny, on the building or the landscape. Individually, they are nothing. Incrementally, however, they begin to occupy and ultimately to transform the site from a dangerous, uninhabited *terra incognita*, into a place people used to live in, and will again. These activities culminated in the final workshop in September 2012, in which attendees were invited to excavate an object or element from the site – and then to bring it back to a white painted art gallery in Glasgow, for archaeological display. A building which has suffered decades of neglect and abuse will finally be accorded historic status, even if only for a while, before the junk is returned back behind the fence to the wilderness from whence it came.

Each of these days concludes with keynote addresses – from architects (Tilman Latz), historians (Ed Hollis), geographers (Tim Edensor) to activists (Andy Wightman) – which are designed to set the day's activities in a cultural and theoretical context. However, set as they are in the local village hall, and ultimately, it is hoped, in temporary enclosures on the site itself, these concluding thoughts are themselves removed from the context of the studios and lecture halls from whence they came, engaging audiences and bodies of opinion in the wider world. This year's activities are just the first for the Invisible

College – prototypes for a longer term testing of the site, not just as a place but as a provocation for thought and action, its medium, its subject, and its end result. Plans are already in play to gain further funding to continue the process of conversation between people and place.

CONCLUSION

St Peter's Seminary is unique; but its pasts and futures hold lessons for anyone – and that's everyone – who dwells in, and deals with, existing buildings.

The building, like so much of our recent inheritance, is just emerging from that period of time when it is no longer what is once was, but not yet what it will become. Medieval castles and Georgian houses were built so long ago that we have forgotten the innumerable cruelties and errors that spawned them. 'Modern' buildings, however much designers might like the way they look, present us with a different sort of problem: no longer instruments, not yet monuments, they provoke unease. But that is not an argument to destroy them. There are too many recent buildings that survive, even if derelict, to make it worth our while, or indeed, environmentally responsible to dispose of them. Their particular form, rigidly defined by obsolete programmes, also make it financially, functionally, aesthetically, and ethically undesirable to restore or conserve them.

This article has tried to show how traditional methodologies of dealing with such sites are found wanting – St Peter's will not, and has not responded kindly to efforts to restore, conserve, or intervene into it as a complete building. NVA's approach therefore is to break the problem down, and to posit a new model for dealing with ruins – particularly ruins of the modern sort. It is a strategy that is firstly, realistic: in a period of time without much money, not much needs to be done. Secondly, it attempts to be sensitive: small mistakes are more easily undone than complete ones. Thirdly, it is open ended: allowing the future to alter what it finds as well as the past, and finally, it is challenging: incompleteness, as Sennett has observed, requires response, and challenges the visitor not to be a spectator, but a participant.

This proposal flies in face of conventional thinking on this subject, and has encountered considerable opposition, mainly from the architectural community, who hold the works of Gillespie Kidd and Coia in high regard, and see the dereliction of St Peter's as an act of *damnatio memoriae*; but also from the local community, who would rather the building just disappeared. In seeking funding, NVA must do battle with conventional desires for a beautiful object, delivered on time and on budget, for they cannot, and will not deliver one.

As with all buildings, we must learn to accept that St Peter's Cardross is no longer the instrument it was designed to be nor yet a monument. Once the programme that generated them has disappeared, their form will never, to misquote Louis Sullivan, follow function. Neither are they perfectible, or perfect, deserving of absolute preservation. Buildings are iterative processes rather than products. They exist in time, and never have been, are not, and never will be complete. Architecture is an activity, not a thing, no less ephemeral than space or light, and always in the process of being revisited. The changing nature of its social context makes this inevitable. That this challenges the way architects think about design and that the public think about buildings – as something complete for which they have no responsibility – and in whose future they have no control, is to be welcomed – and encouraged.

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- ² John Allan, Avanti Architects *St Peter's College, Conservation Report* (Edinburgh: Historic Scotland, 2008), 60
- ³ Philip Corner, 'St Peter's Cardross on global endangered sites list' *Urban Realm* (July 2007), accessed December 12, 2011 http://www.urbanrealm.com/news/432/St_Peter%E2%80%99s_Cardross_on_global_endangered_sites_list.html
- ⁴ Allan, *St Peter's College*, 62
- ⁵ <http://www.nva.org.uk/about/>, accessed August 2012
- ⁶ Viollet le Duc, *Dictionaire Raisonne VII*, In *A History of Architectural Conservation*, Jukka Jokilehto (Butterworth Heinemann, 1999) 151
- ⁷ John Ruskin, *7 Lamps of Architecture: the Lamp of Memory*, In *A History of Architectural Conservation*, Jukka Jokilehto (1999), 75
- ⁸ Chris Miele, ed., *From William Morris: Building Conservation and the Arts and Crafts Cult of Authenticity, 1877-1939, History and Architecture*, (1996), 118
- ⁹ John Ruskin, *7 Lamps of Architecture: the Lamp of Memory*, 180
- ¹⁰ Viollet-le-Duc and Lassus, "Nous comprenons la rigueur de ces principes, nous les acceptons complètement, mais seulement, lorsqu'il s'agira d'une ruine curieuse, sans destination, et sans utilité actuelle," In *Project de Restauration* (Imprimerie de Mme de Lacombe Paris, 1843), Translated by the author
- ¹¹ Camillo Boito, *Risoluzione del III Congresso degli ingegneri e architetti Roma 1883*. Quoted in: Jukka Jokilehto, (1999), 201
- ¹² Latz Tilman, 'Once Upon a Time', In *To Have and to Hold: Future of a Contested Landscape*, edited by Gerrie Van Noord, (Edinburgh: Luath Press, 2011) 65
- ¹³ David Cook, "Conservation and Preservation," debate excerpts in *To Have and to Hold: Future of a Contested Landscape*, ed. Gerrie Van Noord (Edinburgh: Luath Press, 2011), 53
- ¹⁴ Angus Farguhar, "Conservation and Preservation," debate excerpts in *To Have and to Hold: Future of a Contested Landscape*, ed. Gerrie Van Noord (Edinburgh: Luath Press, 2011), 52
- ¹⁵ Farguhar, "Conservation," 65
- ¹⁶ John Summerson, *Heavenly Mansions* (London: Butterworth Heinemann, 1949)
- ¹⁷ Christopher Alexander, *The Timeless Way of Building* (Oxford University Press, 1979), 479
- ¹⁸ http://www.sci-eng.mmu.ac.uk/british_industrial_ruins/ (accessed August 2012)
- ¹⁹ Richard Sennett, *The Uses of Disorder*, (Yale University Press, 1970), 43
- ²⁰ Sennett, *Disorder*, 94
- ²¹ Sennett, *Disorder*, 143-4
- ²² Sennett, *Disorder*, 98-99
- ²³ Morag Bain, in *To Have and to Hold: Future of a Contested Landscape*, ed. Gerrie Van Noord (Edinburgh: Luath Press, 2011), 85.
- ²⁴ Farguhar, "Conservation," 87

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