

Paradigm hunting: architectural and argumentational decorum in Marvin Trachtenberg's research

Robert W. Gaston

A doctoral student in history of architecture of Richard Krautheimer, Wolfgang Lotz and Richard Pommer at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University in the 1960s, Marvin Trachtenberg published his thesis on the Campanile of Florence Cathedral, known as 'Giotto's Tower,' with New York University Press in 1971-72. This, his first book, won the Alice Davis Hitchcock Book Award, given by the Society of Architectural Historians for the outstanding book on an architectural subject by a North American scholar. The citation stated:

This book is something of a milestone, both for its intrinsic merits and for its contribution to the field at large. It is visually perceptive, intellectually imaginative, and methodologically sound. Trachtenberg establishes a high standard of formal and thematic analysis in the study of late medieval Italian architecture, appreciation of which has lagged behind that of contemporary painting and sculpture. Above all, perhaps, the book is a shattering revelation that this most familiar of monuments had been nearly overlooked as architecture.

Creighton Gilbert's review in *The Art Quarterly* commented:

'Giotto's Tower,' the campanile of Florence Cathedral, has been unclear to us, and treated vaguely in our analyses, precisely because it is an art lover's classic (...) this has now been changed by Marvin Trachtenberg's attractive and intelligent book. Its hundreds of thoughtfully produced and well reproduced photographs are no more stimulating than its lively text. This is a book of style analysis with a good deal of excited feeling, articulated in vivid terms. We read of one architect's 'high-tension crystalline organism,' of another's 'hyperplastic and often ambiguously slick capitals', with 'slippery, impotent movements' and his 'resolutely ambiguous, leaden massiveness and tactilely abhorrent shapes,' and we know we are with someone who looks with wide-open eyes, makes sharp distinctions and is trained in a satisfying school familiar to us from the verbal tradition of [Henry Russell] Hitchcock, [Vincent] Scully and others.¹

¹ C. Gilbert, review of Trachtenberg, *The Campanile of Florence Cathedral: Giotto's Tower*, New York: New York University Press, 1971: *Art Quarterly*, 33, 1972, 427-33. For examples of Gilbert's own literary sensitivity see his *Poets seeing artists' works: instances in the Italian Renaissance*, Firenze: Olschki, 1991. A draft of the present paper was delivered at The Renaissance Society of America, Annual Meeting, Boston 2016, a session entitled

Robert W. Gaston Paradigm hunting: architectural and argumentational decorum in Marvin Trachtenberg's research

Common to these critical judgments is the perception that while Trachtenberg's early methodology is 'sound,' and its 'formal and thematic analysis' of a 'high standard,' it nevertheless offers a surprising aspect in its use of language, in its 'excited feeling, articulated in vivid terms,' despite the reviewer's conviction that Trachtenberg 'looks with wide-open eyes' and 'makes sharp distinctions' that allegedly arise from his training 'in a satisfying school familiar to us from the verbal tradition' of Hitchcock and Scully (Trachtenberg informs me that as an undergraduate he was indeed affected by the latter's 'inspiring' lectures at Yale). The final sentence of the Hitchcock citation is, however, the most revealing comment on the intrinsic novelty identified then in Trachtenberg's methodology, noting that 'the book is a shattering revelation that this most familiar of monuments had been nearly overlooked as architecture.' The implication that such a prominent building had never been studied within the discipline 'as architecture' irresistibly begged the question, what had architectural history been doing with 'Giotto's Tower' before Trachtenberg rendered it susceptible to study 'as architecture?' A provisional answer might include the facts that Trachtenberg's book offered a fresh analysis of the virtually unstudied architectural styles and careers of all three of its architects, and not just the familiar, iconic period of Giotto's intervention in the planning and partial execution; it gave a lucid analysis of the building's sculpture, and —characteristically—included a sociological and socio-political analysis of the building's program. 'Giotto's Tower' was therefore far from entirely belonging to the great painter, and was a remarkable example of what Trachtenberg, in his later *Building in Time* came to call 'continuous redesign,' or 'slow architecture'.²

Looking broadly across Trachtenberg's career to this point in time, one can say that his scholarly mission has in large part been self-generated, but not uninfluenced by teachers and authors. Speaking comparatively, one learns from Michael Baxandall's case of a spectacular mismatch occurring between questions his 1990s interviewers asked about his readily presumed reception of mainstream theoretical literature, and his systematic evasions of those expectations.³ The more gifted the scholar the less likelihood the comfortable disciplinary template will fit.⁴ This caveat stated, in what follows I explore aspects of Trachtenberg's work that occasionally cross with my own work in art history. My subjectivity is freely admitted because it's a precondition of what I am able to see in Trachtenberg's words.

'Architecture, Urbanism, and the Arts in Honor of Marvin Trachtenberg. V: "Paradigms Reconsidered"' organized by Areli Marina and chaired by Alina Payne. Quotations from Trachtenberg's private correspondence are reproduced with his permission.

² Marvin Trachtenberg, *Building-in-Time. From Giotto to Alberti and Modern Oblivion*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010, 132, 174-86.

³ See Robert W. Gaston, "'What I wanted was concepts": Michael Baxandall's intellectual Odyssey' review of Peter Mack and Robert Williams (eds), *Michael Baxandall, Vision and the Work of Words*, Ashgate 2015: *Journal of Art Historiography*, 13, December 2015.

⁴ As a poet and scholar of literature has noted: 'The more gifted the writer the more alert he is to the gifts, the things given or given up, the *données*, of language itself.' Geoffrey Hill, *The Enemy's Country. Words, Contexture, and other Circumstances of Language*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991, 15.

Robert W. Gaston Paradigm hunting: architectural and argumentational decorum in Marvin Trachtenberg's research

I shall begin with some consideration of decorum, a phenomenon that covertly influences modern art and architectural history through the scholarly community's rules for 'suitable' or 'profitable' topics, via the ordering of written presentation, in students' ways of acknowledging teachers, and in editors and peer-reviewers moderating the tone of argumentation between researchers in journals and monographs.⁵ Scholars of applied linguistics (notably Charles Bazerman and Greg Myers) have documented the linguistic strategies of 'politeness theory' in the physical sciences, describing how research communities are formed and controlled, as they channel received knowledge and new paradigms.⁶ This 'politeness theory' bears little relation to, and seems never to have been directly connected with the classically-derived decorum concepts familiar to art and architectural historians.⁷ Nevertheless, I find some useful analogies to Trachtenberg's work in both fields of decorum theory.

One occurs in the historian of science Steven Shapin's superb study of the seventeenth-century scholar Robert Boyle's 'literary technology,' the verbal means by which 'the phenomena produced by his air pump were made known to

⁵ On acknowledgements see Ken Hyland, 'Graduates' gratitude: the generic structure of dissertation acknowledgments', *English for Specific Purposes*, 23, 2004, 303-24.

⁶ Charles Bazerman, 'From Cultural Criticism to Disciplinary Participation: Living with Powerful Words' in *Constructing Experience*, Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1994, 73-80; Bazerman, 'The Interpretation of Disciplinary Writing' in *Constructing*, 83-90; Bazerman, 'Scientific writing as a social act: A review of the literature of the sociology of science' in Paul V. Anderson, R. John Brockman and Carolyn R. Miller (eds.) *New essays in technical and scientific communication: Research, theory, practice*, Farmingdale, NY: Baywood, 1983, 156-186; Bazerman, *Shaping written knowledge: The genre and activity of the experimental article in science*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988. Bazerman, 'How natural philosophers can cooperate: The literary technology of coordinated investigation in Joseph Priestley's History and present state of electricity (1767)' in C. Bazerman and James Paradis (eds.) *Textual dynamics of the professions*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991, 13-44. Greg Myers, 'The pragmatics of politeness in scientific articles', *Applied Linguistics*, 10, 1989, 1-35; Myers, *Writing biology: Texts in the social construction of science*, Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990; Myers, 'Lexical cohesion and specialized knowledge in science and popular science texts', *Discourse Processes*, 14, 1991, 1-26. Dwight Atkinson, 'Language and science', *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 19, 1999, 193-214 is a valuable field review.

⁷ An exception is a different stream of theory of argumentation deriving from Jürgen Habermas' 'discourse ethics' where 'appropriateness' is a criterion of 'claims to validity in speech acts.' See Klaus Günther's *The sense of appropriateness: application discourses in morality and law*, trans. John Farrell, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993; Jan Dietrich Müller's *Decorum: Konzepte von Angemessenheit in der Theorie der Rhetorik von der Sophisten bis zur Renaissance*, Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2011, applies this Habermasian framework to limited decorum concepts in Graeco-Roman and Renaissance rhetoric. Mirco Limpinsel, *Angemessenheit und Unangemessenheit. Studien zu einem hermeneutischen Topos*, Berlin: Ripperger & Kremers, 2013 explores his antithetical concepts as 'argumentational topoi'.

Robert W. Gaston Paradigm hunting: architectural and argumentational
decorum in Marvin Trachtenberg's research

those who were not direct witnesses.⁸ Shapin integrates Boyle's 'literary technology' with a 'material technology embedded in the construction and operation of the pump,' and a 'social technology that laid down the conventions natural philosophers should employ in dealing with each other and in considering knowledge-claims.' For Shapin, Boyle's 'literary technology was a 'virtual witnessing' that involved 'the production in a reader's mind of such an image of an experimental scene as obviates the necessity for either its direct witness or its replication. (...) It was therefore the most powerful technology for constituting matters of fact.' Boyle, however, adopted a 'naked way of writing', a 'plain, puritanical, unadorned (...) style (...) identified as functional,' an 'appropriate mode of speech,' distinguishing 'matters of fact from the locutions used to account for them...'

Trachtenberg diverges from this scientific model of expository prose, criticizing (in his 1988 *Art Bulletin* review essay) architectural writing that is 'heavy, obscure, or pretentious, and (...) concerned with technical matters understandably unpalatable or irrelevant to' art historians.⁹ Yet his own writing possesses linguistic characteristics designed to 'constitute matters of fact.' Trachtenberg's reader experiences the knowledge-claims in his extraordinary descriptions and beautifully targeted photographic images. His close-reading of texts and of the facture of buildings provokes an intense visualization, closer in its rhetorical character to literary criticism than to architectural history. Trachtenberg creates an ekphrastic discourse far removed from John White's 'formal criticism,' a phenomenon in art history that Trachtenberg regards as repressive in motivation and effect.¹⁰ In Trachtenberg's text-criticism, historical witnesses, like Antonio Manetti in the case of Filippo Brunelleschi, are uniquely keyed to his own new paradigms.¹¹ And Trachtenberg's critical language is unmistakably modern in its metacritical suspicion of received knowledge and illusory methodological comforts.

Trachtenberg's decorum is patent in the argumentational tact with which he differentiates his positions from those of scholarly predecessors. Less obvious is his enfolding of historical notions of decorum into his readings of siting, planning, construction and execution processes. Each of Trachtenberg's books radiates awareness of the legal, civic, liturgical, technical and authorial conventions of

⁸ Steven Schapin, 'Pump and Circumstance. Robert Boyle's Literary Technology' in Shapin, *Never Pure: historical studies of science as if it was produced by people with bodies, situated in time, space, culture, and society, and struggling for credibility and authority*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010, 89-116, citations from 91-2, 97, 101.

⁹ M. Trachtenberg, 'Some Observations on Recent Architectural History'. *Art Bulletin* LXX, 2, June 1988, 208-41, 208.

¹⁰ See M. Trachtenberg, review of John White, *Art and Architecture in Italy, 1250-1400*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1966, in *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 29, 3, 1970, 276-79; in a letter to the present author, December 13, 1997, Trachtenberg wrote: 'I am very much in agreement with the point you make here (...) about the repressive role of iconographic analysis—I would add formal analysis as well...'

¹¹ See, most recently, a fresh critique of Manetti in, Marvin Trachtenberg, 'Building and Writing S. Lorenzo in Florence: Architect, Biographer, Patron, and Prior'. *Art Bulletin* 97, no. 2, 2015, 140-172.

decorum. His complex and encompassing readings contrast with the simplicity of the *decoro/licenzia* binary formation that Renaissance theorists themselves often posited as the core of the critical phenomenon.¹² Relatively uninterested in decorum's rule-bound aspect, Trachtenberg addresses the reverse side, the challenges to boundaries of artistic limits and the historical interpretation of them within the disciplines of art and architectural history.

The unusual lyricism and 'tactility' of Trachtenberg's prose was noticed early by Creighton Gilbert, in his review of *Giotto's Tower*.¹³ Gilbert, whose own work exhibited a constant concern with the relations of word and image in Renaissance art history, did not propose that the ancient Greek term 'ekphrasis' could be relevant here. Yet an exploration seems appropriate, given recent scholarship on the function of that rhetorical device in art and architectural history. Applying the term ekphrasis to Trachtenberg's descriptions may seem strange, but only (and here I follow Liz James and Ruth Webb) if one misconceives ekphraseis as simple 'indicators of aesthetic attitudes' and as 'a form of art criticism which may be distinguished from modern critical works by their narrative qualities and their neglect of the formal and technical aspects of the work described.'¹⁴ It is precisely towards those technical aspects that Trachtenberg directs his captivating prose descriptions. Nor are Trachtenberg's descriptions 'dry' and 'archaeological,' as

¹² For a lucid account of the latter see Alina A. Payne, *The Architectural Treatise in the Italian Renaissance. Architectural Invention, Ornament, and Literary Culture*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. Wolfgang Braunfels, *Mittelalterliche Staatsbaukunst in der Toscana*, Berlin: Gebr. Mann, 1953, was especially attentive to Trecento civic notions of decorum inscribed in legal and contractual documents that facilitated location and construction. Trachtenberg's 'integrated' approach to decorum's contexture and role in facture is curiously comparable to Vasari's in his *Vite*, according to which works are judged decorous only if they are superlative in all technical and narrative respects: on which see Robert W. Gaston, 'Vasari and the Rhetoric of Decorum' in *A Research Companion to Vasari*, ed. David Cast, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2014, 245-60.

¹³ C. Gilbert, review of *The Campanile of Florence*, *Art Quarterly*, 33, 1972, 427-33.

¹⁴ Liz James and Ruth Webb, 'To understand ultimate things and enter secret places: Ekphrasis and Art in Byzantium', *Art History*, 14, 1, 1991, 1-17. Paolo Berdini, in his review of Trachtenberg's *Dominion of the Eye*, *Art Bulletin*, LXXXIV, 1, March 2002, 170-72, at 172, comments on Trachtenberg's 'description' as follows: 'A reflection on the quality of Trachtenberg's observations and his mode of processing them explains the impulse toward contextual disclosure. Their strength lies in their pertinence and effectiveness. His strength as an observer lies in the subsequent ability to describe the observed; in the detection of recurrences and their conceptualization as principles; in granting some interpretative status and assigning others explanatory value; in the delicacy of distinctions that separate the observations that will coherently structure an argument from those that will never rise above the level of data; and, above all, in the ability to grasp the distinction between what the phenomena observed manifest and what they imply. Description is first and foremost an unfolding of the implications of the manifest, and its critical incisiveness resides in its ability to monitor the recursive movement and continual iteration between the manifest and the implied.' The latter two sentences, while not explicitly referring to Trachtenberg's paradigm theory, come close, in noting the presence in his particular use of description 'the distinction between what the phenomena observed manifest and what they imply,' to affording a link to what I shall argue below regarding Trachtenberg's distinctive use of 'paradigm reversal.'

scholars have sometimes characterized Byzantine ekphraseis.¹⁵ In 1987 David Carrier's attempted unsuccessfully, in my view, to contrast Vasarian narrative ekphrasis in his biographies of artists with modern art historical 'interpretation' of images. Both in fact can be 'systematic' and 'controversial, and emotive and subjective.'¹⁶ As James and Webb and Simon Goldhill have shown, ancient and Byzantine ekphrasis also does something Carrier considers an invention of modern scholarship: it turns the reader into an emotionally and imaginatively aroused spectator.¹⁷ James and Webb note that, in both classical and Byzantine rhetorical definitions, *logos periēgēmatikos* has the root meaning of 'leading [someone] around an object or event,' a narrative 'composed in the form of a tour.' In Longinus' version 'the effect of rhetorical visualization ... when it is closely involved with factual arguments (...) as well as persuading the listener, (...) enslaves him.'¹⁸ Trachtenberg's intense narratives of facture are similarly designed to seduce his reader.

Two powerful forces in Trachtenberg's writing are his melding of empirical observation and paradigm reversal, or inversion. Like the science historiographers, Trachtenberg is concerned with the linguistics of 'constituting matters of fact.' In his preface to *Dominion of the Eye*, for example, he identifies a 'conspicuous lacuna' in our knowledge that was not inconspicuous to Trecento Florentines, namely the significances and planning principles of the civic piazza. Defining this invisibility as a historical problem to be solved, Trachtenberg pursues 'obvious traces of rational planning.'¹⁹ This argument might appear merely empirical, were it not that Trachtenberg reverses a series of paradigms to achieve his purpose. His ocular, descriptive, photographic and analytical powers coalesce to enable his setting his boldly innovative argument vividly before the reader.

¹⁵ See James and Webb, 'To understand'. 1, 9.

¹⁶ David Carrier, 'Ekphrasis and Interpretation: Two Modes of Art History Writing'. *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 27, 1, 1987, 20-31.

¹⁷ See James and Webb, 'To understand'. 8; Vasari incorporates the spectator too, by identifying represented human actions and feelings that will guide the spectator's visual exploration, or reading of the narrative in an image or cycle. Simon Goldhill, 'What is ekphrasis for?', *Classical Philology*, 102, 2007, 1-19 offers a penetrating analysis, using Webb's fundamental reinterpretations of the rhetorical device. Goldhill, 2, states: 'We see [in ancient Greek ekphrasis] the category of 'professional viewer' being developed, contested, and competed for. The critical gaze, which is the sign of the art historian, finds its institutional origin here. This critical gaze, thirdly, is committed to a value-laden view of things. It creates and regulates the viewing subject—both by a selection of what to look at and how to look—and by parallel exclusions too. The epigram's endemic concern for the discrete, pointed, witty surprise is part and parcel of what is known as Hellenistic aesthetics. You must learn to look like this.'

¹⁸ See Caroline van Eck, Stijn Bussels, Maarten Delbeke, Jürgen Pieters (eds), *Translations of the Sublime: The Early Modern Reception and Dissemination of Longinus' Peri Hupsous in Rhetoric, the Visual Arts, Architecture and the Theatre*, Leiden: Brill, 2012; and the review by James I. Porter in *Rhetorica*, 32, No. 4, Autumn 2014, 419-423.

¹⁹ M. Trachtenberg, *Dominion of the Eye. Urbanism, Art, and Power in Early Modern Florence*, Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997, ix-xviii.

Robert W. Gaston Paradigm hunting: architectural and argumentational
decorum in Marvin Trachtenberg's research

Trachtenberg signals how paradigm-reversal based on a semiotic/structuralist interpretation of empirical observation works, in the pointed context of his essay 'On Brunelleschi's Choice,' pointed because it inverts his mentor Krautheimer's position on what 'post-Constantinian Roman churches' were 'about.' The essay bristles with reversals of received knowledge, applied, *inter alia* to received conceptual interpretation, to the reading of Manetti's text, and to Brunelleschi's reception of the Pantheon's coffering.²⁰ As Trachtenberg wrote to the author in 1997: 'It's not that the 15th century is identical to the 14th or earlier, any fool can see that, but [I intend] to REDEFINE the way we conceptualize and articulate the difference, the differences themselves (which are sometimes the OPPOSITE that we think).' Trachtenberg goes on to refer in this letter to Michel Foucault's essay 'What is an Author,' licencing me to note that Bouchard's 1969 preface to his English translation suggests that Foucault's 'primary working method' is 'reversal' and that 'the immediate consequences of this stand is the demarcation of a field of study which is recognized for its discontinuity, specificity, and exteriority.'²¹

Inverted paradigm theory exists in a discrete number of scientific papers, as does inverted taxonomy.²² These appear to differ from Trachtenberg's approach by focusing on tweaking newly-minted paradigms. Trachtenberg confronts accumulated knowledge across several disciplines and his inversions are closer to Thomas Kuhn's revolutionary stage of new paradigm formation.²³ Dorothy Winsor

²⁰ M. Trachtenberg, 'On Brunelleschi's Choice: Speculations on Medieval Rome and the Origins of Renaissance Architecture' in Cecil L. Striker, ed., *Architectural Studies in Memory of Richard Krautheimer*, Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 1996, 169-73. In two explosive paragraphs at 170, Trachtenberg transforms (implied) 'presence' into 'absence,' 'weighed down' into 'sustained,' and 'negative' into 'positive,' a remarkable display of paradigm inversion that opens the way into reinterpretation of Brunelleschi's focus in Rome (171): 'it was not the pagan ruins that Brunelleschi mainly cared for, but the great network of churches, including those built as Christian shrines and those that had been converted.'

²¹ Michel Foucault, 'What is an Author'. [1969] in Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice. Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard, trans. D.F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977, 113-38, and citing Bouchard, pref. 17.

²² The following are known to me: S. M. Merritt and K.K. Lau, 'A logical inverted taxonomy of sorting algorithms' in *Communications of the ACM - Special section on computer architecture: CACM Homepage archive*, 28, 1, Jan. 1985, 96-99:

www.cslab.pepperdine.edu/warford/cosc320/Merritt-Sort-Paper.pdf (accessed 2 August 2015);

Errol R. Hoffmann, 'Effective target tolerance in an inverted Fitts task'. *Ergonomics*, 38, 4, 1995, 828-36 :www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00140139508925153 (accessed 26 February 2016).

M. Franz and Z. Tesanovic, 'Algebraic Fermi Liquid from Phase Fluctuations: 'Topological' Fermions, Vortex 'Berryons'. and QED3 Theory of Cuprate Superconductors', *Physical Review Letters*, 87, 257003 – Published 3 December 2001:

<https://journals.aps.org/prl/abstract/10.1103/PhysRevLett.87.257003> (accessed 29 May, 2017).

Surya R. Kalidindi, Joshua R. Houskamp, Mark Lyons, Brent L. Adams, 'Microstructure sensitive design of an orthotropic plate subjected to tensile load' *International Journal of Plasticity*, 20, 8-9, 2004, 1561-75.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijplas.2003.11.007> (accessed 29 May, 2017).

²³ On inversion in classical rhetoric see Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969, 994, s.v. 'inversio' citing Cicero, *De oratore*

Robert W. Gaston Paradigm hunting: architectural and argumentational
decorum in Marvin Trachtenberg's research

notes that Steven Jay Gould and Richard Lewontin, in their famous paper of 1979, 'The Spandrels of San Marco and the Panglossian paradigm: a critique of the adaptationist programme,' 'borrow evidence from articles they disagree with and turn it to their own account. (...) they make (...) adaptationist evidence turn traitor and support their own position.'²⁴ Trachtenberg's thorough recounting of predecessors' research allows him to exercise a similar 'inversion of explanation.' Aspects supposedly too obvious to warrant analysis or features too hidden to attract attention are grist to Trachtenberg's mill. He inverts the meanings of what seems cosily familiar or strange: he makes them 'the main argument.'

I believe, however, that Trachtenberg's paradigm-inversion has roots in his university studies preceding his contact with German architectural history in New York or with Kuhn's work of 1962. As a Yale undergraduate Trachtenberg excelled in the study of literature under Harold Bloom. In Bloom's *Shelley's Mythmaking*, published in 1959 when Trachtenberg studied with him, we recognize Bloom's habitual savaging of rival critics as being simply right or wrong.²⁵ Trachtenberg, however, exposes the critical influences on scholars whose work he dismantles: he is committed to critical historiography.²⁶ Still, Bloom's use of 'inverted metaphor' in his critique of F. R. Leavis's analysis of Wordsworthian elements in Samuel Coleridge and Percy Bysshe Shelley may have afforded deep theoretical structure for Trachtenberg.²⁷ Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence* was begun in 1967 and published

2, 65, 261: similar 'ironical inversion of verbal meanings'; Quintilian, [*Institutio oratoria*], I, v, 40: as 'transposition' [anastrophe] 'inversion of the natural order of words.' Cf. also the use of inversion in the *proemium* in [the formerly attributed to Cicero] *Ad C. Herennium* I, vi, 10: ed. Harry Caplan, Cambridge MA and London, Harvard University Press, 1931, 18-19: *inversio* may be used by the speaker as in 'an ironical inversion of the meaning of a word' that 'may provoke laughter'. as a means of winning the audience's attention and good disposition.' Cf. Richard A. Lanham, *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms*, 2nd ed. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991, 33, on the related terms *chiasmus*, and 191 on *antistrephon*.

²⁴ Dorothy A. Winsor, 'Constructing scientific knowledge in Gould and Lewontin's 'The Spandrels of San Marco'' in Jack Selzer, ed., *Understanding Scientific Prose*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993, 127-43, at 135. See Gould and Lewontin, 'The spandrels of San Marco and the Panglossian paradigm: a critique of the adaptationist programme'. *Proceedings of the Royal Society of London, Series B: Biological Sciences* (1979) 581-98, reprinted in Selzer, *Understanding*, 339-56; the authors allude to inversion in the introduction to their article (148), in referring to the function and design of the spandrels of the central dome: 'The design is so elaborate, harmonious and purposeful that we are tempted to view it as the starting point of any analysis, as the cause in some sense of the surrounding architecture. But this would invert the proper path of analysis. The system begins with an architectural constraint: the necessary four spandrels and their tapering triangular form (...) evolutionary biologists, in their tendency to focus immediately on adaptation to local conditions, do tend to ignore architectural constraints and perform just such an inversion [as does Dr Pangloss in Voltaire's account] of explanation.'

²⁵ Harold Bloom, *Shelley's Mythmaking*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959, for example in his treatment of F. R. Leavis's readings of Shelley.

²⁶ See especially Trachtenberg's subtle, discriminating introductory chapter to *Giotto's Tower*.

²⁷ Bloom, *Shelley's Mythmaking*, 25: 'Mont Blanc's subject is the poet's contemplation of a natural scene, but Shelley rushes *in medias res*, with no touch of natural description in his

in 1973, well after Trachtenberg had completed his dissertation with Krautheimer at the Institute of Fine Arts. Nevertheless, I detect resonances of Trachtenberg's experience of Bloom's teaching. Bloom's preface to his 2nd, 1997 edition of *Anxiety* is crucial for charting the book's theoretical genesis. He admits insights from philosophical theory, but displays authorial control in ways paralleled in Trachtenberg's writing. Bloom, for example, abhors Heidegger, but approves his argument for thinking 'one thought only, and to think it through to the end.'²⁸ Trachtenberg practices this on multiple, intersecting concept-groups across time. Bloom demonstrates rhetorical inversion in writing that he favors 'A Shakespearean reading of Freud (...) over a Freudian reading of Shakespeare or anyone else...'²⁹ Bloom's argues that 'strong poets make [poetic] history by misreading one another, so as to clear imaginative space for themselves.'³⁰ And Bloom's notion of 'antithetical criticism,' acknowledging Lacan, is analogous to Trachtenberg's critical inversion based on close reading of architectural phenomena.³¹ For early Bloom 'A poet antithetically 'completes' his precursor by so reading the parent-poem as to retain its terms but to mean them in another sense, as though the precursor had failed to go far enough.'³² Think now of Trachtenberg's Brunelleschi.

Pursuing reversal, I turn now to Trachtenberg's invitation by the *Art Bulletin* in 1988 to 'write an essay on recent architectural history'.³³ He chose an 'extreme' option, that of 'doing anything from my own specialization to the field as a whole. It would, therefore, not be like (...) true state-of-research analyses written by specialists and restricted to single fields, often of quite narrow focus.' His 'comments' would be 'far more selective and exploratory, with extreme contractions and expansions of discussion depending on the subject and my knowledge of it and my sense of its relevance.' 'I will often be skating in thin ice,' he stated.³⁴

Trachtenberg boldly repositions his editorial remit, abandoning the field-review essay genre for a broader and deeper critical discourse. With just a hint of authorial modesty (in ancient rhetorical theory this is being decorous in a proemium) he launches blame upon both art and architectural historians, the former keeping architectural history at arm's length through their implicit interpretive

first section. We must assume the Arve river and the ravine it rushed through, in order to comprehend that we are dealing with metaphor, albeit inverted metaphor. What compounds the reversal, and angers Leavis, is that Shelley is not content to describe the second term of his metaphor in its own particulars, but rather alternates its presentation by extensively looting the components of the suppressed first term. The justification for this mingling is that it enables the poet to write simultaneously on two levels of apprehension which can be understood on one level of meaning.'

²⁸ Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence. A Theory of Poetry*, 2nd, ed. New York and Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1997, pref. xi.

²⁹ Bloom, *Anxiety*, pref. xxii.

³⁰ Bloom, *Anxiety*, 5.

³¹ Bloom, *Anxiety*, 14, 65.

³² Bloom, *Anxiety*, 14.

³³ Trachtenberg, 'Some Observations on Recent Architectural History', *The Art Bulletin*, LXX, 2, June 1988, 208-41,

³⁴ Trachtenberg, 'Some Observations', 208.

Robert W. Gaston Paradigm hunting: architectural and argumentational decorum in Marvin Trachtenberg's research

inadequacy, the architectural historians failing to communicate in palatable and engaging language. Breaking clear of the review-article genre, Trachtenberg 'hit on a shortcut' that he believes 'serves the present purposes effectively.' He would 'base this coverage on a reading of all the book reviews published in the *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* of the past fifteen years, together with what I know from my own previous and current reading.'³⁵ Trachtenberg thus inverts his job description into a meta-critical study, where the reviewers are themselves reviewed. He exposes inherent limitations of reviewing itself, especially the reviewers' neglect of 'what the author intended as the main theme.'³⁶ Trachtenberg's 'main theme' becomes the complexity of recent writing about architecture, its 'many pronged' methods, the obsession with 'process' of the vertical kind, 'by which architecture relates to everything else.' Trachtenberg undermines the model reviewers adopt, namely by his pointing out 'that their profession is not a science in which new methods abruptly displace old ones, but a humanistic art that has grown by a process of accretion...'³⁷

Greg Myers's perceptive study of how scientists write field-reviews notes that they 'betray (...) uneasiness about the lack of originality in the genre, if only by insisting again and again on this originality.' Field reviewers 'shape the literature of a field into a story in order to enlist the support of readers to continue that story.' By ordering publications into a narrative that is 'still without an ending,' the reviewer's influence 'does not all travel one way, from writer to audience. The discovery of this broad audience is also a rediscovery of the topic' seen 'from outside with these readers.'³⁸ This is an intellectual process comparable to Trachtenberg's 'thin ice' experience. In a study of the Gould and Lewontin *Spandrels* paper, Myers uses politeness theory to define how these two authors criticize the work of other scientists.³⁹ As a rule, Myers writes, 'scientists make friends to define enemies. Gould and Lewontin take an opposite strategy of identifying error with the established disciplinary consensus, inviting the imaginary reader to join them outside it. They make enemies to define their friends. It is a high-risk strategy. But when successful (...) the gamble has a high payoff; the new center of a field forms around the position that was previously defined as outside it.' This is Trachtenberg's method in the 1988 review. Gould noted in 1993 that the Gould-Lewontin paper had challenged the genre-boundary of both the review article and

³⁵ Trachtenberg, 'Some Observations'. 209.

³⁶ Trachtenberg, 'Some Observations'. 210.

³⁷ Trachtenberg, 'Some Observations'. 211-12.

³⁸ Greg Myers, 'Stories and styles in two molecular biology review articles, in Charles Bazerman and James Paradis, eds, *Textual dynamics of the professions: historical and contemporary studies of writing in professional communities*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991, 45-75, at 45-6.

³⁹ Greg Myers, *Making enemies: How Gould and Lewontin criticize*, in J.Selzer, ed., *Understanding scientific prose*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press. 1993, 256-275, especially 258-61. Myers (257) defines 'politeness theory' as 'in linguistics...a handy name for ...all of the ways speakers define their relations to hearers in the performance of actions in a given social and linguistic system.'

Robert W. Gaston Paradigm hunting: architectural and argumentational decorum in Marvin Trachtenberg's research

the research article.⁴⁰ He provocatively called the prestigiously published paper an 'opinion piece, with its inevitable personality and point of view,' saying the style responded to a personal need for a new kind of discourse. Gould added, 'I regret the impenetrable and sterile language of so much scholarship in the humanities, the dry, impersonal and barbarous passive voice of scientific prose. I want to break through.'

In Trachtenberg's 'breaking through' cumulative approaches to architectural history in 1988, language is a key issue. He admires publications possessing historical complexity and special linguistic qualities. These are implied in his quotation of James Ackerman's caustic review of the language of formal positivism, and in Trachtenberg's glowing appraisal of Joseph Connors's book on *Borromini*, where Trachtenberg identifies an unusually 'imaginative' treatment and 'special subtlety,' 'all ... presented with unusual lucidity and style.'⁴¹ He hovers over Krautheimer's *Rome: Profile of a City*, observing his teacher's 'ever-varied synthesis of themes and shifting perspectives,' its detail, insight, interdisciplinarity and, in the absence of a 'novel methodology,' its effortless mastery of an 'extraordinary range of methods,' all, by inference, existing within a positivist approach.⁴² Yet Trachtenberg offers no comment on Krautheimer's rhetoric. In a letter to the author in 1999 Trachtenberg had more to say about this dimension: 'I much recommend [he said] ... Richard Krautheimer's method of making radical assertions, which is to simply make a calculated series of one factual point and undeniable observation after another, leading the reader by the hand irresistably to a conclusion that cannot be refused.'

Krautheimer's empiricism has remained accessible in Trachtenberg's method, but does not explain its distinctiveness. That is achieved through more aggressive argumentation, through description that transforms empiricism into ekphrasis, and through paradigm manipulation that inverts received knowledge into original paths of inquiry. Trachtenberg's critique of Krautheimer's 'leading his reader by the hand' was expressed to me in 1999, when he commented on drafts of my own work on decorum. He wrote: '(...) I urge you to push your perceptions

⁴⁰ For this point and what follows, see Stephen Jay Gould, 'Fulfilling the Spandrels of World and Mind' in Selzer, ed., *Understanding scientific prose*, 310-36. At 321 Gould elaborates on the customary placement (or displacement) of the 'opinion piece' in scientific writing: 'Opportunities for this third genre are more limited; most standard journals will not accept such pieces, or will limit them to one or two per issue, in a separate section. But several forums exist for such articles—Festschriften, published symposia, special meetings, presidential addresses, etc. Moreover, complex fields like evolutionary biology, which must struggle with deep questions of an essentially philosophical nature, tolerate more writing in this mode...'

⁴¹ Ackerman's comments on the limitations of positivist writing that eschews 'evaluation' or 'personal response' arose in his review of Christoph L. Frommel, *Der römische Palastbau der Hochrenaissance*, Tübingen, 1973, *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 34, 1975, 74; Trachtenberg, 'Some Observations', 241, adds: 'In other words, we are all in the same boat with the critics and not mere practitioners of a mythical *Kunstwissenschaft*.' On Connors's book, see Trachtenberg, 'Some Observations'. 217.

⁴² Trachtenberg, 'Some Observations', 232.

Robert W. Gaston Paradigm hunting: architectural and argumentational
decorum in Marvin Trachtenberg's research

forward in the most dramatic (...) Foucaultian manner (...). That's always my ideal, to seize, seduce, entangle the reader in one's ideas and leave them no choice but to follow you willingly, eagerly, complicitly where you are going (...).'⁴³ The contrast with Krautheimer's method could not be clearer. The Foucault connection here is neither with the lecture on the ancient Greek term *parrhēsia* delivered at Berkeley in 1983, published somewhat inappropriately under the title 'Fearless Speech,' nor with Foucault's lecture on this topic at Grenoble in 1982.⁴⁴ As Foucault expounds it, *parrhēsia* comprised the speaker's courage, freedom, and personal exposure to danger. Trachtenberg's verbal entrapment denies *parrhēsia*'s essential aspect of the speaker confronting persons to whom he owes reverence or fear. Trachtenberg likely derives his enforced literary enchantment from immersion in Foucault's habitual expository method, and perhaps from the example of Bloom's agonistic self-assertion. Bloom states in his book *Agon* in 1982: 'If you don't believe in your reading, then don't bother anyone else with it, but if you do, then don't care also whether anyone else agrees with it or not. If it is strong enough then they will come round to it anyway (...)'⁴⁵ Yet we should not neglect the points of contact that exist

⁴³ There is an intriguing parallel in Bazerman's account of Isaac Newton's prose; Charles Bazerman, 'From Cultural Criticism to Disciplinary Participation: Living with Powerful Words' in *Constructing*, pp. 73-80, at 78: 'In studying the development of Isaac Newton's way of discussing his optical findings, a way that would have profound implications for all scientific discourse to follow, I saw Newton working to make sense of the discourses around him, find appropriate ways to address his audiences, respond to the conceptions and objections of his readers, and reforge a new discourse style that would carry overwhelming force on the discourse field that he only gradually came to understand. His final solution as in the compelling 'Newtonian style' seemed to suppress all other voices but actually encompassed them in a way that they could not escape to make alternate claims for a century.' A question of interest is how does Trachtenberg's notion of seducing and seizing the reader gell with Thomas Kuhn's idea (*The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd ed. enlarged, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970, Postscript 1969, 176) of a paradigm being 'what the members of a scientific community share' with the development of the concept of 'the community structure of science.' If, as Kuhn says (177) 'the members of a scientific community see themselves and are seen by others as the men uniquely responsible for the pursuit of a set of shared goals, including the training of their successors' then how is Trachtenberg's idea of their being 'carried away' compatible? Kuhn's notion of paradigms being 'something shared' (178) is too weak a description to match Trachtenberg's process of the reader's dramatic seduction and capture. Trachtenberg associates this seizure with the author 'letting himself go,' an unleashing of persuasion and control, and connects this literary seduction, as we have seen, with Foucault's approach to the exposition of ideas: not to his content, rather to his style. Cf. Kuhn, 'Second Thoughts on Paradigms'. [1974] in *The Essential Tension: Selected Studies in Scientific Tradition and Change*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977, 293-319

⁴⁴ Michel Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, ed. Joseph Pearson, Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2001: see especially 16 and 19 of this admittedly paraphrased transcription of an auditor, rather than an authorized text; cf. Michel Foucault, *Parrēsia*, trans. Graham Burchell, *Critical Inquiry* 41, 2 Winter 2015, 219-53, the Grenoble lecture. There is a new critical edition: Michel Foucault, *Discours et vérité; précédé de, La parrēsia*, Henri-Paul Fruchaud and Daniele Lorenzini eds, introd. Frédéric Gros, Paris: Vrin, 2016.

⁴⁵ H. Bloom, *Agon. Towards a Theory of Revisionism*, New York and Oxford, 1982, 20.

between Trachtenberg's intense historical analysis incorporating vivid descriptions of the processes of architectural facture and the paradoxical elements in ancient Greek rhetorical discussion of brilliant visualization (*phantasia*) that evokes an emotional reaction in the listener, but which, as Longinus argued, can be augmented in power by argumentation that is potentially seductive, to the point of 'enslaving' the hearer.⁴⁶ And one might add that Trachtenberg's paradigm inversion has its own somewhat magical dimension of mental and visual trickery: it is notably seductive, as the reader's mind seeks to adjust to, and to cope with, the logical reversal entailed in this deceptively simple process.

For Trachtenberg's thoughts on how Kuhn's paradigm theory might compare with or be utilized in his own research, one looks especially to his article of 2001, an editorial introduction to the volume of *Res* entitled 'Desedimenting time.'⁴⁷ Trachtenberg frames his account by first identifying the current persistence in the history of art of a 'nineteenth-century stratigraphic practice (with origins stretching back to Vasari and Petrarch): the familiar system of Romanesque, Gothic, Renaissance, Baroque, and so on, and subcategories (and parallel systems in non-Western zones).' He argues that 'Despite the strong self-critical trends and powerful new methodologies of recent decades,' this system has not been 'fully historicized,' and while 'Most scholars, of course, realize that all of these terms are problematic and that they are interrelated in a tangle of often perverse, perplexing hierarchies, yet it seems difficult for many of us to imagine art history without this mapping.' Trachtenberg formulates two questions directed at 'this antiquated diachronic system,' namely 'in specific case studies, how does it continue to affect art historical practices?', and 'is such a stratigraphy of discrete historical spaces, defined stylistically or otherwise, necessary to chronology and the diachronics of practice, or are there possible alternatives?' He then explicitly personalizes the focus of his inquiry by stating that these questions 'stemmed from problems that deeply affect my own work in the trecento, early Renaissance, and northern Gothic architecture. It is out of the transhistorical perspective of my teaching and scholarship that metacritical questions have emerged and risen to a state of urgency in my thinking.' Trachtenberg proceeds to describe the particular 'sometimes nightmarishly entangled cluster of problems and issues' arising from the existing medieval 'style-system,' which 'is, among other things, ferociously absolutist, hegemonic, and intolerant in its ways. It is based on exclusion rather than inclusion. It makes for notorious difficulties in formulating authentic transhistorical understanding and in establishing meaningful social, political, and economic grounds for the production

⁴⁶ Goldhill, 'What is Ekphrasis For?'. 5; Goldhill states: 'A brilliant visualization [*phantasia*], then, has the power to astonish—*ekplessein*, that key term for psychological affect in rhetorical and realist art. Visualization amazes in so doing, visualization conceals facts. Visualization is a blind. It dazzles. And, confirms Longinus, this is a natural psychological response. We are dragged by force away from proof, away from demonstration towards passive experience: *paschomen*.' Cf. also the earlier Sophist rhetorical model in James I. Porter, 'The Seductions of Gorgias'. *Classical Antiquity*, 12, 2, 1993, 267-299.

⁴⁷ Marvin Trachtenberg, 'Desedimenting time: Gothic column/paradigm shifter', *Res*, 40, Autumn 2001, 5-28

Robert W. Gaston Paradigm hunting: architectural and argumentational
decorum in Marvin Trachtenberg's research

of art.⁴⁸ 'Gothic' architecture is identified by Trachtenberg as being especially problematic, a 'style' in search of secure 'criteria,' and one increasingly being investigated through 'particular context-based issues—the functions of individual spaces, questions of patronage and liturgy, the specific social, political, material, and ideological dimensions of architecture.'⁴⁹ This alleged diversion of scholarship away from what Trachtenberg regards as the central, tormenting unresolved question, 'What is Gothic,' provokes his 'turn to another historical discipline—intellectual and scientific history,' suggesting 'that it offers a model that may possibly serve to help us find a way out.'⁵⁰

The model Trachtenberg alludes to is Kuhn's notion of 'paradigm shift,' and in doing so refers to Kuhn's account in his 'brilliant' book of 1962. Trachtenberg opens his account of Kuhn's 'analysis of the process of scientific innovation' by noting that, like Foucault, 'Kuhn sees history not as a continuum of change and development but as a series of distinct, discrete systems (a stratigraphy, in fact).' But Trachtenberg differentiates Foucault's being 'interested only in defining and exploring the operational terms of each discursive formation, and not at all in transitions (or shifting) from one to the next,' from Kuhn's sole interest 'in the transitional process in all its micro- and macrodynamics, and not especially, or really at all, in the scientific paradigms themselves.'⁵¹ Trachtenberg's summary of Kuhn's paradigm theory reads as follows:

Paradigm shifts in science do not just happen at random (...) or as unmotivated individual inspiration. Most scientific work ('normal science'), he explains, is not about formulating new ideas (a common misbelief), but rather involves testing and working out various implications and unresolved problems of the established paradigm in a given field, gradually finding and tying up all those loose threads (or 'puzzle solving'). Sometimes, however, it is found that one of these problems—often a seemingly minor issue, an obscure, marginal detail left long in the dark—can be resolved only with immense difficulty and complications and distortions of the paradigm. In fact, sometimes forcing the paradigm does not work at all; it simply cannot be made to accommodate the problem. But the problem cannot simply be disregarded; it will not go away; something else is needed.⁵²

Trachtenberg then states Kuhn's idea of 'paradigm shift':

'Exceptional science' (mistakenly thought to be the norm by the public) occurs when such a critical impasse (or 'crisis point') leads a researcher to formulate a modified or new *general* paradigm that will accommodate the 'impossible'

⁴⁸ 'Desedimenting time', 5.

⁴⁹ 'Desedimenting time', 5-6.

⁵⁰ 'Desedimenting time', 6.

⁵¹ 'Desedimenting time', 6. Trachtenberg writes in note 4: 'This approach is found in all of Foucault's books, but see especially *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York, 1972) and *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, (New York, 1970).'

⁵² 'Desedimenting time', 6-7.

problem at hand. The term 'paradigm shift' describes not merely this intellectual turn in itself, but its motivation, as well as the complex social-intellectual, discursive process by which a new paradigm is itself further tested and filled out to the point that it replaces the former paradigm, usually against much initial resistance in the scientific community (especially from its older, established members, who have much symbolic capital invested in the status quo, as opposed to those just entering). Paradigm shifts, moreover, alter not only the way problems are solved but the kinds of questions that are asked (in Foucault's terms, the entire discursive formation changes).⁵³

In the latter paragraph we must notice how Trachtenberg glosses Kuhn with Foucault. In Trachtenberg's next paragraph he translates Kuhn's analysis into terms that may disclose a direct debt to narratology, in saying that Kuhn's account of paradigm shift 'could be said to posit a classic narratological dynamic for science (giving its self-transformations, or Kuhn's reading of them, or both, a great appeal.' The term 'classic' implies that Trachtenberg's reading may refer to the genesis of narratological theory, perhaps in Roland Barthes' work of the 1960s, or to more recent substantial formulations.⁵⁴ Yet he is not specific here, creating another suggestive theoretical parallel in order to at once paraphrase and potentially enrich Kuhn's account as he moves toward his own destination. The subsequent accurate summation of Kuhn's description of how 'science move[s] from one paradigm, one interpretive model, or order of scientific thinking, to the next' is not similarly augmented.⁵⁵ Trachtenberg recognizes, however, that in order to transfer Kuhn's model convincingly to his own central concern, namely the historiography of styles in architecture, he will need some additional theoretical tools. Thus, he writes:

In the 'Gothic' zone of art history, there may be any number of hidden corners where such a tropology, or transfer, of Kuhn's model of the scientific process-of-change to the aesthetic world might be brought into a parallel life. What we would need is to identify an anomaly that cannot be accommodated by the current 'Gothic' paradigm (or any known one), a disturbance, a fault line or fracture in the 'Gothic' order of things in historical thought, that will force a search for a solution for a new paradigm.⁵⁶

Trachtenberg's reference to 'tropology' could well set a reader off in the direction of Hayden White's work, however the subsequent phrase, 'order of

⁵³ 'Desedimenting time', 7.

⁵⁴ Paul Cobley's historical account, *Narratology*, 2nd ed. 2005, Johns Hopkins University Press, supplies extensive bibliography: <http://www.davidlavery.net/Courses/Narratology/JHGTC/Narratology.pdf>; accessed 12 May 2017.

⁵⁵ 'Desedimenting time', 7.

⁵⁶ 'Desedimenting time', 7.

Robert W. Gaston Paradigm hunting: architectural and argumentational decorum in Marvin Trachtenberg's research

things,' suggest that Trachtenberg is meditating on the role of tropes in Foucault's 'discursive formation changes' as a foil to Kuhn's paradigm shift.⁵⁷

Now Trachtenberg is able to present his 'Gothic problem.' This 'aberration' is: '(...) just what on earth are those big, solid, *classical*-looking columns doing in this quintessentially *Gothic* church,' namely Notre-Dame in Paris? These constitute 'an alien presence, right there where you can reach out and touch it.'⁵⁸ There follows a ruthlessly analytical account of how 'the interpretive challenge posed by these Gothic columns' is explained away by a series of leading scholars (whose work I shall not summarize in detail) determined to 'produce' the 'formal unity underlying the apparent surface contradictions.' Ever attentive to words, Trachtenberg's searing critique identifies in Willibald Sauerländer's formal descriptions, for instance, 'what I term column-avoidance language, the way formalist scholars will, attempting to declassicize it, call the Gothic column a pier, shaft, cylinder, respond, anything but a column.'⁵⁹ Trachtenberg asks why 'the operative interpretive paradigm will not accommodate and legitimately 'normalize' the anomaly. Why is this so? He argues as follows:

In these various cases the paradigm is more or less structuralist in its stylistics. It works in exclusionary terms of difference as it posits closed sets of traits incompatible with other sets. Gothic by its very (structuralist) definition is opposed to the classic; that which is classical—whether of the antique, Romanesque, or Renaissance variety—cannot be Gothic (...). The column being a primary, quintessential classical form, its presence in what is termed 'Gothic' produces a problem that cannot be solved when confronted openly; the contradiction is absolute and ineradicable. Hence the various historical attempts to avoid, rationalize, or explain away the columns (...) In every case these maneuvers either exclude columns from the Gothic building, transform them into something else, or marginalize them. This happens not by choice, or by chance, or by intellectual incapacity, but by necessity, if the traditional paradigm is not to be broken.⁶⁰

Trachtenberg speaks of the paradigm being thus 'bent, stretched, and distorted,' yet

it will not work; only by conjuring and disappearing tricks performed on the building and its elements, which are made to disappear into thin air, or transmute in flesh, spirit, or abstraction, is even a rhetorically credible description possible. By understanding this, we have navigated the difficult and crucial first move of the paradigm-shift protocol: the demonstration that

⁵⁷ Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse. Essays in Cultural Criticism* [1978], Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986, 352-55 analyzes Foucault's tropology.

⁵⁸ 'Desedimenting time', 7.

⁵⁹ Willibald Sauerländer, "'Première architecture gothique', or 'Renaissance of the twelfth century,'? Changing perspectives in the evaluation of architectural history', *Sewanee Medieval Colloquium Occasional Papers*, 2, 1985, 25-29.

⁶⁰ 'Desedimenting time', 11.

for a particular, yet irreducible crucial problem in the field of study, the old paradigm is simply not viable no matter what.⁶¹

Trachtenberg pauses here to explain 'why the interpretation of Gothic architecture is so problematic in the first place.'⁶² In this tightly-argued account he identifies a significant historiographic paradigm inversion and reversal that allegedly lies at the heart of the methodological problem he addresses.

'Gothic architecture' (...) was a fiction devised by the Renaissance. In order for Vasari and other writers of the Petrarchian genealogy to erase the legitimacy of the immediate past, to bury it as the 'dark ages,' its architecture had to be depicted as darkly as possible. Thus it was constructed by Renaissance ideology in the most alien and strange terms possible: built with no rules or order, in wild decadence and disorder, by savage barbarians who had destroyed the ancient buildings and killed all the architects (as Vasari famously tells us). But the main point is that even after the positive reversal of fortunes of 'medieval architecture' beginning in the eighteenth century, Gothic did not shed the strange and alien character assigned to it at its discursive birth. Its traits essentially were now inverted, as if its original 'Renaissance' features now were seen in reverse: not decadent but spiritualized; not disordered but hypersystematized; not the complex product of living history, but a brittle schema of abstract forms and symbols. It seems to have been fated that the various now positive style-sets concocted to explain it would remain deeply problematic. The Gothic column conundrum is only a marked symptom of a wider critical-historical malaise.⁶³

The argument that Trachtenberg develops in support of his progress 'Toward a critical new paradigm for the 'Gothic'' in the rest of his article is too lengthy to rehearse in detail here. It will be most profitable to consider briefly the elements and structure of his argument pertaining to what kind(s) of 'paradigm-shift' he will work with in the context he has established so far. His departure point is to suggest 'shifting the interpretive paradigm at the most effective juncture, its historical point of origination.'⁶⁴ Therefore he contemplates the term 'Gothic' itself,

⁶¹ 'Desedimenting time', 12.

⁶² At 12, note 20 Trachtenberg adds: 'I have explored the paradigm analysis that follows in two previous articles, 'Gothic, Italian 'Gothic': Toward a Redefinition'. *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, [50, 1,] 1991, pp. 22-37 (with an emphasis on the Italian difference to France) and 'Suger's Miracles, Branner's Bourges: Reflections on 'Gothic Architecture as Medieval Modernism'. *Gesta*, 39, 2000: 183-205 (with an analysis of Suger's writings as they apply to the paradigm, and of Bourges as an epitome of medieval modernity in specific formal terms).'

⁶³ 'Desedimenting time', 12. Trachtenberg's most recently published thoughts on Vasari are to be found in: 'When did the Renaissance in Architecture begin? From Panofskian Mythography to Vasarian History' in Alina Payne ed., *The Companions to the History of Architecture, Volume 1, Renaissance and Baroque Architecture*, Hoboken NJ: Wiley, 2017, 1-37.

⁶⁴ 'Desedimenting time', 12.

and whether, 'despite the blatant absurdity' in its usage, it may 'contain a germ of etymological truth' when viewed within 'the linguistic practice of the Renaissance' outlined in the paragraph quoted above. He continues:

In the eyes of the Renaissance, the Goths were the destroyers of Rome and its architecture. They were, in other words, the literal embodiment of anticlassicism. This, of course, was bound closely with the Renaissance view of medieval architecture: its essence (by necessity) was its anticlassicism. But the Renaissance also used another term for the recent post/non-antique architectural phenomenon, 'lavori moderni.' If we put this term together with 'Gothic'—that is, put together the two earliest descriptive terms for the movement—we have an architecture that is both 'modern' and 'anticlassical'—or going a crucial step further, 'modernist' and 'antihistoricist,' which are two ways of saying nearly the same thing. I submit that these early sources were on to something closer to a better paradigm than most later, 'scientific' scholarship preoccupied with rib vaulting, skeletal structure, scholasticism, diaphaneity, geometry, diagonality, and so forth. I propose that were it possible to give later medieval architecture a name more descriptively accurate and less loaded with misinformative connotations than 'Gothic'—while at the same time retaining the historically and conceptually legitimate, hidden meaning of that otherwise nonsensical term—that name would be 'medieval modernism.'⁶⁵

Seeking to avoid reducing this 'complex' architectural phenomenon 'to the sort of monadic paradigm that the implications of the concept of 'modernism' might imply,' Trachtenberg then takes his reader back to a reformulation of Romanesque, arguing that 'the original core meaning' of that word 'also has a certain powerful validity,' providing 'a more accurate take on the period it denotes than all the later academic analysis in terms of square-schematism, bay systems, radiating chapels, and the like, which, like the usual attributes of 'Gothic' do not hold up under hard scrutiny regarding accuracy, compatibility, or comprehensiveness of application to this highly varied architecture.'⁶⁶ On this reading, 'the early nineteenth-century term Romanesque was nearly on the mark, more historically accurate than late-nineteenth- and early twentieth-century rumination (...). At this level of analysis, it would mean that pre-Gothic medieval architecture was quite simply, Roman-*esque*. It was, in other words, deeply historicizing.'⁶⁷ Trachtenberg allows for his 'conceptually clarified medieval sequence: a phase of historicism, followed by one of modernism,' to remain a 'schema' projected upon a historical 'picture' that was 'far from being so simple.' In revealing this depth of understanding that the 'components of historicism and modernism varied widely in form and strength throughout 'Romanesque' Europe,' Trachtenberg demonstrates both the necessity of his new paradigm and the intrinsic weakness of 'the usual models of descriptive

⁶⁵ 'Desedimenting time', 13.

⁶⁶ 'Desedimenting time', 13.

⁶⁷ 'Desedimenting time', 13.

Robert W. Gaston Paradigm hunting: architectural and argumentational
decorum in Marvin Trachtenberg's research

analysis (which cannot accommodate this complexity).’ He turns to problematic cases in ‘Romanesque’ displaying varying degrees of historicism and modernism, ranging from Rome to Speyer, while strongly attacking the modern notion of an ‘inexorable ‘transitional’ movement towards ‘Gothic.’”⁶⁸ In describing the late 11th-century transformation of the early 11th-century design of the imperial cathedral at Speyer, which stimulates his methodological criticism of ‘transition,’ Trachtenberg again introduces his perception of a role for the notion of (in this case, potential) ‘reversal’:

[Romanesque at Speyer] (...) was not driven by any unconscious process of stylistic evolution but rather guided by a strongly self-conscious view of history, of the present in its relationship to the past, in which the latter was not to be relinquished in architecture but instead emphasized (its strength depending on specific circumstances, which could easily go ‘in reverse’). It did not want vainly to be ‘Gothic’ but—not unlike our own recent Post-Modernist architecture, as well as much of the nineteenth century’s—was both modernist and historicist at the same time.⁶⁹

Again we see Trachtenberg rigorously inverting the paradigms used by the architectural historians he has in his sights: ‘unconscious’ becomes ‘strongly self-conscious;’ what is presumed to be ‘relinquished’ is ‘emphasized.’ These are deep wounds inflicted on the traditional assumptions of stylistic ‘development.’ Always awake to the subversive consequences of his arguments, Trachtenberg describes ‘the fairest characterization of what has been called the Romanesque period’ as ‘a conflict, an instability, an unresolved tension between the two currents of historicism and modernism, in which the former tended to predominate, although not in any progressive way or with any clear pattern.’ In working toward a ‘viable new paradigm,’ Trachtenberg here exhibits a flexibility that should not be misinterpreted as lack of conviction. In his new reading of Romanesque ‘the Gothic turn would no longer be construed as a replacement of one style-set by another, but rather a shift in orientation, a move towards the resolution of the contest, away from historicism and in favor of an ascendant, eventually dominant, modernism.’⁷⁰ And now Trachtenberg leads the reader back to the Notre-Dame columns that sparked his discourse, noting that ‘further qualification and elaboration’ would be required for his ‘more critically nuanced diachronics of medieval architecture.’

Considering the paradigm-problem highlighted in this essay, what is required is an intellectual framework that accounts for the marked presence of historicism in a time of dramatically intensified modernism without compromising either term—a means to relate the problematic Notre-Dame

⁶⁸ ‘Desedimenting time’, 14.

⁶⁹ ‘Desedimenting time’, 14-15.

⁷⁰ Quotations in this paragraph from ‘Desedimenting time’, 15-16.

Robert W. Gaston Paradigm hunting: architectural and argumentational
decorum in Marvin Trachtenberg's research

columns to the rest of the building in a manner coherent with a view of the architectural movement as a whole.⁷¹

Trachtenberg proceeds with his meticulous construction of the underpinnings of his new paradigm by admitting that he needs 'to refine and reinforce certain distinctions (working, not absolute) in the terminology employed here, especially regarding the word 'modern/ism.' He responds to Habermas's concept, employed within his *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, of 'cultural production,' 'in the historicist mode,' a phenomenon 'categorically grounded in and legitimated by reference to historical precedent.'⁷² Yet he finds 'the more relevant parallel' to his 'reading of the medieval' in two nineteenth- and twentieth-century examples of architecture (Labrouste's Bibliothèque Ste Geneviève, and Le Corbusier's Villa Savoie) which explore both historicism and modernism. In distinguishing 'modernism' and 'Modernism,' Trachtenberg opposes 'a transhistorically potential mode of consciousness and experience and its specific historical realization, as in the Modernist movement of the twentieth century.'⁷³ This distinction permits him to align

'medieval modernism' with recent Modernism's 'anthistoricist grounding in the 'present,' an emphasis on the critical power of reason over precedent and authority, and ultimately to some degree an empowering of individual subjectivity, but—and this is the crucial distinction—not necessarily any particular formal features of its cultural production. Unlike recent Modernism, which has been so transparent and omnipresent in culture, medieval Modernism experienced a much more problematic, often submerged or disguised existence as a cultural project, especially in terms of its explicit presence in the textual record.⁷⁴

The 'presence' or absence of textual evidence in the 'historical record' is one of the most critical issues that Trachtenberg habitually confronts in his approach to architectural history. He addresses the strengths and limitations of particular texts (*e.g.* Manetti and Vasari) that have proved influential in determining modern historians' interpretations of building processes and their visual reception into disciplinary practices. His own paradigm-building is sceptical and ruthlessly analytical in assessing whether surviving words and their authors are historically reliable, limited, or compromised in their designated roles within traditional and recent art history. This unwillingness to 'capitulate,' one might say, to what many historians have regarded as 'authoritative' sources on the grounds of their contemporaneity with the

⁷¹ 'Desedimenting time', 16.

⁷² 'Desedimenting time', 17, note 30. J. Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: twelve lectures*, trans. Frederick Lawrence, Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1986.

⁷³ 'Desedimenting time', 17.

⁷⁴ 'Desedimenting time', 17-18.

building process, unleashes a familiar tension within Trachtenberg's work between his extraordinarily detailed descriptions of facture and other forms of historical evidence. As hinted earlier in this paper, Trachtenberg's vividly persuasive, eye-witness accounts of facture and intrusive photographs of parts of buildings seek to open a reader's vision to these very 'submerged or disguised' elements in medieval and Renaissance building practice.

Trachtenberg pointedly excludes the familiar 'newness' inference of the term 'modernism' from 'the core' of his redefinition of the medieval passage known as 'Gothic.' 'My usage [he writes] focuses instead on the evident, underlying shift in historical consciousness, grounding, and desire rather than on the associated formal novelty of the cultural products of the shift, that is, specific formal difference from immediately preceding works.'⁷⁵ He calls this the 'cultural historical consciousness paradigm,' which he claims offers 'certain advantages' over a 'style-centered methodology.'

It allows for irrationality and exception, for the messy complexity and contradiction of life, and of art. Thereby the (...) paradigm permits, indeed fosters, the explication of conflicted, multilayered works. It encourages us to see works in anti-hegemonic terms, to see the cathedrals formally as the complex and even self-contradictory entities that much contemporary research is in fact proving them to be socially, and to explain that complexity unburdened by the demands of style, yet within a coherent view of their general formal character.⁷⁶

And, returning now to his initial architectural 'problem,' Trachtenberg argues that this cultural historical consciousness paradigm 'permits the unproblematic interpretation of periods of instability and of tension between historicist and modernist desire,' thus it 'enables us to understand those problematic classicizing columns in Notre-Dame in Paris in the same terms as the predominant modernism of these buildings without compromising or subordinating either presence in the manner unavoidable when using the old Romanesque-versus-Gothic paradigm...'⁷⁷ Trachtenberg goes into more detail about the potential application and theoretical reach of his paradigm within the field than we can explore here.

Applying his nuanced Kuhnian reading to how 'the classical apparatus of groin and barrel vaults, pilasters, trabeation, and load bearing walls, is now in diverse ways and to varying degrees, over time, negated through exclusion, suppression or conversion,' Trachtenberg

⁷⁵ 'Desedimenting time', 18.

⁷⁶ 'Desedimenting time', 18

⁷⁷ 'Desedimenting time', 18.

asserts the emergence of 'a medieval mode of architectural modernism,' a 'comprehensive, vital, new deep-rooted program of structure and form, which is inherently both modernist and anti-classical in logic and effect, and in signification and self-conscious motivation.' He sees this 'modernist program' arising from 'a paradigm shift that occurred within the cathedral workshop itself (rather than a shift in our terms of understanding the past).'⁷⁸ This attribution of a shift in contemporary building techniques, 'transformations which in close sequence produced the rib vault, the pointed arch, and the flying buttress,' is fundamental to Trachtenberg's case, which he suggests can conform to 'the protocols of paradigm-shift theory and its ruthless self-critical procedures. That is, each was motivated by an impasse in the given design paradigm, one or more intractable problems that it simply could not resolve, thus requiring a reconceptualization, a new paradigm, which once formulated was gradually explored in its problematics and implications and eventually spread into general modernist practice.'⁷⁹

Having identified these serial, 'iconoclastic' transformations emanating from cathedral workshops, Trachtenberg once more isolates a 'radical mutation and reversal' as the 'paradigmatic center of this transformative process in the 'ruthless, powerful, and (...) highly self-conscious critique of the logic, geometry, technique and appearance' of the groin vault, 'which had been the workhorse of vaulted buildings.' The 'reversal' of 'virtually all' of the groin vault's traits in the rib vault's construction techniques means that 'the formerly secondary groin line thus becomes the visually primary rib, with the vaulting surface now appearing as the visually secondary infill, which serves as the ground for the dominant figure of the ribs.' The third novel solution, 'even more boldly revealing of the deeply critical, iconoclastic thrust of the rising movement and its profound and dazzling engagement in the paradigm-shifting process is the closely associated modernist element of the pointed arch.' Given the technical problem of making 'the various arches and ribs (...) of a vaulting unit rise to the same height' a 'daring new paradigm, the so-called pointed arch, completely solved the difficulty.' So-called, Trachtenberg argues, because 'to the contemporary spectator it would have perhaps most of all looked not 'pointed (a post-medieval English term) but instead like a *broken* arch.' It would have been seen, 'especially in the early period of its use, as a literal breaking—and reconstitution—of the semicircular, unbroken arch that through the entire middle ages had provided one of the primary historicist elements, a central point of reference to antiquity.'⁸⁰

Subsequently the flying buttress rendered 'the exterior of the cathedral (...) the purest and most powerful modernist aspect of the

⁷⁸ 'Desedimenting time', 19.

⁷⁹ 'Desedimenting time', 19.

⁸⁰ Quotations in this paragraph from 'Desedimenting time', 20-21.

entire building.' Trachtenberg continues, and it is necessary to quote him at length:

Again the novelty was produced by a paradigm shift, in this case the most profound of all. The traditional reinforcement system of large vaulted construction, going back to Rome, was entirely contained within the building or closely adhered to it (e.g., as flat buttresses). Following an unwritten rule of structural decorum, components that could not be disguised as ordinary piers, arches, and other standard elements of the Roman-based form language, tended to be hidden. In this mode, as the great churches grew higher and larger, the massive framework of aisles and galleries grew with them (...) and such assemblages could have been stacked even higher (...) The intractable problem of this traditional buttressing frame was not size, as is often thought, but flexibility, economy, and lighting. The paradigm of reinforcement by closed lateral assemblages was expensive, clumsy, inefficient, spatially redundant, and severely limited the height of the clerestory. A completely new paradigm was needed if development other than sheer size was to occur. The buttressing arrangement was reconceptualized. The new idea was rational, simple, and extremely bold (...) The paradigm-shifting logic here was impeccable. But it was attended by a powerful motivational factor rooted in the deep iconoclasm of the movement. In this perspective the salient point is the way modernist radicalism in a few decades of practice destroyed the classical probity of closed volumes in which buttressing was essentially contained within the building.⁸¹

Trachtenberg calls this 'openwork reinforcement' of the flying buttress 'modernist structural exhibitionism, in opposition to historicist 'Roman-esque' structural decorum.' He argues that 'nothing created in the entire middle ages could have been more alien or shocking to the classical sensibility than those giant, angular piers and half-arches leaping impossibly through space.' Such a 'dramatic transformation' was facilitated by both 'the internal structural logic of paradigm theory,' and 'the powerful, iconoclastic antihistoricist urges of the medieval modernist movement.'⁸² And here Trachtenberg's beginning point, the curious and persistent presence of the problematic 'classical' column in these extraordinary buildings, resurfaces.

Contrary to the 'extinguishing' one might expect, 'the new churches make [columns] proliferate in their interiors (...) and they are everywhere—as main supports, as responds, in the galleries and triforiums, and in multiple layers and levels of the tracery (...) The entire

⁸¹ 'Desedimenting time', 21.

⁸² Quotations in this paragraph from 'Desedimenting time', 21-23.

elevation (...) comes to consist of nothing but columns and slender arches (and multiple arch-profiles), together with a few stringcourses and patches of remnant wall. So important are they, that the cathedral interior cannot easily be imagined without them.' Trachtenberg's explanation is uncomplicated: 'the columns were multiplied because they were the only language available, even as yet conceivable, for the vital needs of architectural self-representation in the elevation—that is, in the visually primary interior aspect of the church.'⁸³ He employs additionally Anne-Marie Sankovitch's argument that 'the classical orders constitute a resonant language with an established vocabulary and syntax which transcends their usage in individual buildings, meaning that it is not only ideological or symbolic but also tectonic.'⁸⁴ Thus, for example, the column's syntax of base-shaft-capital signifies 'support' and does so even if its metamorphosis as a Gothic pier.'⁸⁵

Trachtenberg goes on to present one of the most subtle presentations of what I would identify as his paradigm-inversion:

It is just such metamorphosis that I emphasize here, although in its ideological rather than structuralist function. In this process the column is not merely submitted to the modernist vision: it is co-opted by modernism as a form of symbolic expression, as an indispensable medium of representation, not only of rationalist (or 'scholastic') structuralist values but, more critically, of the modernist movement itself. What largely happens in the cathedrals to the column is that this primary historicist element is turned against itself, not merely neutered into pseudo-scholastic logic but forced to represent the anticlassical. Thus, although historicist and modernist desire were theoretically oppositional, in practice they came to be intricately interwoven, with the latter colonizing the former.⁸⁶

Trachtenberg's powerful inversions of 'expected,' traditionally received meanings, are communicated as a series of 'not only...but' antithetical, argumentational constructions that employ vivid metaphorical terms which are offered only to be rejected, radically qualified, or flat-out reversed in meaning. Terms denoting action ('submitted to,' 'co-opted by,' 'turned against,' 'neutered,' 'forced to,' 'interwoven,' 'colonized') are then summarized as a process of 'representational self-affirmation and violence' that was 'achieved' over many generations. Trachtenberg goes on to describe how 'these

⁸³ Quotations in this paragraph from 'Desedimenting time', 23.

⁸⁴ Anne-Marie Sankovitch, 'A reconsideration of French Gothic Church Architecture' in Jean Guillaume (ed.), *L'église dans l'architecture de la Renaissance*, Paris: Picard, 1995, 161-80, at 165.

⁸⁵ Trachtenberg, 'Desedimenting time', 23-25.

⁸⁶ 'Desedimenting time', 25.

conspicuous historical forms are subsequently 'subverted, transmuted, and ultimately eliminated (not in a linear process, but in a far more complex developmental choreography).' Then, beginning with Leon Battista Alberti

a new historicism emerged in Italy, soon brutally to cut short the life of medieval modernism throughout Europe, long before it showed any signs of faltering. This time, however, the violence was achieved not through the internal critique of paradigm-shifts or the symbolic colonization of form language, It was mainly the printed book—the illustrated architectural treatise—that killed the thriving virtuoso art of modernist architecture. The main point of these concluding lines, however, is not to resolve this extremely complex architectural turn but merely to suggest how the historicist-modernist paradigm of modalities of cultural-historical consciousness may enable us finally to speak of 'medieval' and 'Renaissance' in compatible, conceptual, and interpretive terms—in the same breath.⁸⁷

Trachtenberg's final footnote returns to selected aspects of Kuhn's account of how problems and paradigms emerge in science:

All crises begin with the blurring of a paradigm and the consequent loosening of the rules for normal research (...) And all crises close in one of three ways. Sometimes normal science ultimately proves able to handle the crisis-provoking problem despite the despair of those who have seen it as the end of an existing paradigm. On other occasions the problem resists even apparently radical new approaches. The problem is labeled and set aside for a future generation with more developed tools.⁸⁸

Trachtenberg comments: 'Having in the second instance effectively more or less described the state of research on 'Gothic' prior to my present thesis, Kuhn's further words may conjure a difficult road ahead for our discourse:

(...) finally, the case that will most concern us here, a crisis may end with the emergence of a new candidate for paradigm and with the ensuing battle over its acceptance.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ 'Desedimenting time', 27-28.

⁸⁸ 'Desedimenting time', 28, n. 49. All quotations of Kuhn here from *The Structure*, 84, in both first and second editions.

⁸⁹ 'Desedimenting time', 28, n. 49.

Kuhn himself later returns in his *Postscript* to 'this last mode of closure.' Overall, however, Trachtenberg's paper is both unusually forceful within architectural history in its approach to descriptive language and rhetorical exposition, and in its systematic application of novel analytical terminology to a topic traditionally dealt with in terms of simpler, diachronic stylistic categories and sequential technical invention. His argument is explorative and experimental, identifying a highly provocative 'problem' that requires solving, and formulating a complexly-conceived paradigm-shift, which he interrogates against Kuhn's descriptions of how scientific 'problems' arise and paradigm-shifts occur. Foucault is called upon at certain places where Trachtenberg requires discourse theory to render Kuhn's approach to paradigm-shift more adaptable to his needs with respect to 'cultural-historical consciousness.' But by and large he sticks to Kuhn and uses his own, highly distinctive—and always seductive—argumentation to test the usefulness and validity of the Kuhnian model.

In his 1969 *Postscript*, Kuhn relates his sensitivity to 'metaphysical' paradigms supplying the disciplinary group 'with preferred or permissible analogies and metaphors' to help 'to determine what will be accepted as an explanation and as a puzzle-solution.'⁹⁰ Kuhn also notes in the *Postscript* that an engaged member of the scientific community 'will have learned to translate the other's theory and its consequences into his own language and simultaneously to describe in his language the world to which that theory applies.'⁹¹ Yet, to my knowledge, Kuhn does not conceive, as Trachtenberg does, of paradigms being inverted, or reversed, let alone being 'bent, stretched, and distorted,' as though they were themselves virtually tangible, malleable components of architecture itself, somehow hypostasized in the service of what Kuhn might have called 'translation'. One can, however, relate Trachtenberg's powerfully allusive language here to his conviction, recorded above, that much professional writing in art and architectural history lacks persuasive force. He seeks to change this by demonstration, however inimitable that might remain.

In Trachtenberg's most recent volume, *Building-in-Time*, the pace of construction of argument is leisurely, uncannily paralleling the subject he is investigating. He wants a secure historical and theoretical foundation set in place before he turns to his selected architectural examples. Because Trachtenberg's departure point is Alberti as the theoretical source of modern 'Building-against-Time,' he judges that he should deconstruct our reception of Alberti's writings on architecture while simultaneously tracing the historical genesis of that author's ideas in ancient, medieval and humanist thought. Throughout this analysis, which is fundamentally an act of paradigm inversion directed at Alberti's modern reception, Trachtenberg offers a series of original conceptual terms, definitions and argumentational strategies that make the book shape-shift continually. His

⁹⁰ Kuhn, *The Structure*, 1969, 184.

⁹¹ Kuhn, *The Structure*, 1969, 202.

Robert W. Gaston Paradigm hunting: architectural and argumentational
decorum in Marvin Trachtenberg's research

analytical 'principles,' namely 'continuous redesign,' 'myopic progression,'
'concatenation,' and 'retrosynthesis,' are not offered as

a codified set of rules in the manner of Vitruvius, Alberti, Serlio, and others
but rather [as] aspects of a virtual system embedded in practice, with great
epistemic power. This methodology comprised a number of interlocking
conceptual and practical paradigms, which describe essential conditions,
tendencies, and directives that may be seen at work structuring and guiding
the complex precedures of the design/build process in the period.⁹²

Yet Trachtenberg adds a crucial caveat:

These mediating 'principles' ...should not be seen as any final decoding of this
immensely complex architectural story. As with all of the interpretive
paradigms advanced here regarding Building-in-Time, these principles are
intended not as a definitive account of architectural possibilities under this
regime but as an initial formulation of a working model of its social and
professional dynamics, inner logic, and foundational structure of architectural
thinking and practice regarding time, change, and associated concerns,
including the site and visual display of the work.⁹³

As with all of Trachtenberg's challenging work on paradigms in
architectural history, however, it is not unexpected to find that a cautious
declaration regarding the limits of his methodology is followed at once by a bold
statement of the yields to be expected from his thoroughgoing inversion of
disciplinary expectations:

The principles will enable us now not only to recognize more clearly
that change was inevitably present but also to perceive its presence more
fully, and, above all, to understand how it was managed and to discern a
dynamic order where it has been thought to be absent. They will allow
study of this system in more detail in actual practice at a number of key
sites, which will further clarify, solidify, and expand our modern
understanding of the temporal regime. It is intended that in this ensuing
practical analysis, the principles, which at first reading may be
experienced as somewhat dry and schematic, will come to life.⁹⁴

It is argued thus that the inner historical logic of architectural 'change' that
scholars in the discipline previously found impossible to 'recognize' and 'perceive'
was indeed historically present, and that this logic can, through the lenses of
Trachtenberg's new 'principles,' be identified and described in extraordinarily
precise detail in a series of case studies. It is in this contested space between

⁹² Marvin Trachtenberg, *Building-in-Time*, 131.

⁹³ Trachtenberg, *Building-in-Time*, 131-32.

⁹⁴ Trachtenberg, *Building-in-Time*, 132.

Robert W. Gaston Paradigm hunting: architectural and argumentational
decorum in Marvin Trachtenberg's research

Renaissance theorists' self-comprehension and modern architectural historians' alleged theoretical incomprehension of medieval and Renaissance building practice, that Trachtenberg roams.

In *Building-in-Time*, Trachtenberg returns to buildings on which he constructed his early academic career, such as the Campanile of Florence cathedral, the Palazzo Vecchio, and the Piazza della Signoria, as well as addressing other works including Siena and Milan cathedrals, new Saint Peters, and Pienza. Throughout he generates an innovative reading of the monument according to his changing conceptual apparatus. Intellectual flexibility of this kind is rare among art and architectural historians, Michael Baxandall being a notable exception. In Trachtenberg's publications, buildings completely familiar to him in their complexity of *fabbrica* are continually transformed in the spotlight of his new theoretical approaches. As he sees them afresh he allows the reader to re-engage with them through his intense revision of facture, one transcribed into a distinctively moderated yet powerfully persuasive rhetoric.

Robert Gaston took his Ph.D. at The Warburg Institute under the supervision of Otto Kurz. Among his books is *Pirro Ligorio, Libro dei fiumi, dei fonti e dei laghi antichi. Napoli. Vol. 9*, Rome, De Luca, 2015. He is co-editor (with Louis Waldman) of *San Lorenzo: A Florentine Church, Villa I Tatti*, Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Series, 33, Florence, 2017. He was appointed Membro della Commissione Nazionale per l'Edizione Nazionale delle Opere di Pirro Ligorio, Rome, in 2012.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/)