

Title: No Longer and Not Yet

Author: Edward Hollis

Architecture_media_politics_society. vol. 3, no.2.

September 2013

Affiliation: University of Edinburgh

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.