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# Looking, Designing, Looking

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Looking at buildings; looking twice, five times, ten times. Not only do I like such looking, I am obsessed with haunting the premises. I photograph buildings' relationships to each other, I photograph the way people use them or pass them by. I ask what secrets their windows conceal, reveal, or reflect. I wonder where their openings lead. Which buildings attract each other? Which buildings hug each other, the street, or the landscape? My camera clarifies my thoughts about buildings and records my designs on their existence.

Yes, designs on their existence. The photographic image is a special, perhaps mysterious, surrogate for the building itself, the place itself. We may no longer know whether the building is here, with us, or there, from us. All the photographs we have ever seen, or taken, begin to form a collective memory. In our search for a certain building, we may stop at a photographic image. In other words, photographs breed photographs.

In Rome, I was on the trail of a building I had first seen as a photograph in a book on

eighteenth-century Roman architecture. Christian Elling's photograph of San Biagio (which appears in my article "Travel Documents," *Places* 3:2) showed the church against a wide street with no cars and one person. The image depicted an isolation of building and person in a large space, a wall with shimmering light, an idea of a long walk, a kind of elation before the facade.

Now that space exists only in the image Elling formulated more than 40 years ago. The road in front of San Biagio was closed to allow for

more excavations around the amphitheater of Marcellus. The evocative space of the photograph is now filled with cars, parked; and the new road, moved closer around the base of the Capitoline Hill, is filled with cars, moving at high speed. So I am pushed up against the building, along a narrow street. I look up. If I am adept at not getting run over, I can keep looking up. The message seems to be in the sky. San Biagio seems to grasp its neighbor in a special sky room.

In Florence, beautiful volutes are a kind of architectural cloud attached just about where Santo Spirito meets the sky, hinting at other designs within the structure and beyond. Just beyond the edge, just inside the door, just around the corner, are other architectural dreams.

A photograph is the design of a dream. That dream may be a composite of many visits and memories. How many times did I actually walk the long path to the Flavian Amphitheater? On what day was the monument stark against the sky? On what other days was it hidden in scaffolding from the intensity of my gaze and the lens of my camera? The dream, the photographic image, is designed to collect and house all the layers of memory, all the looking.



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1 San Biagio, Rome, 1986.

All photographs by Alice Wingwall

2 Flavian Amphitheater, Rome, 1986.



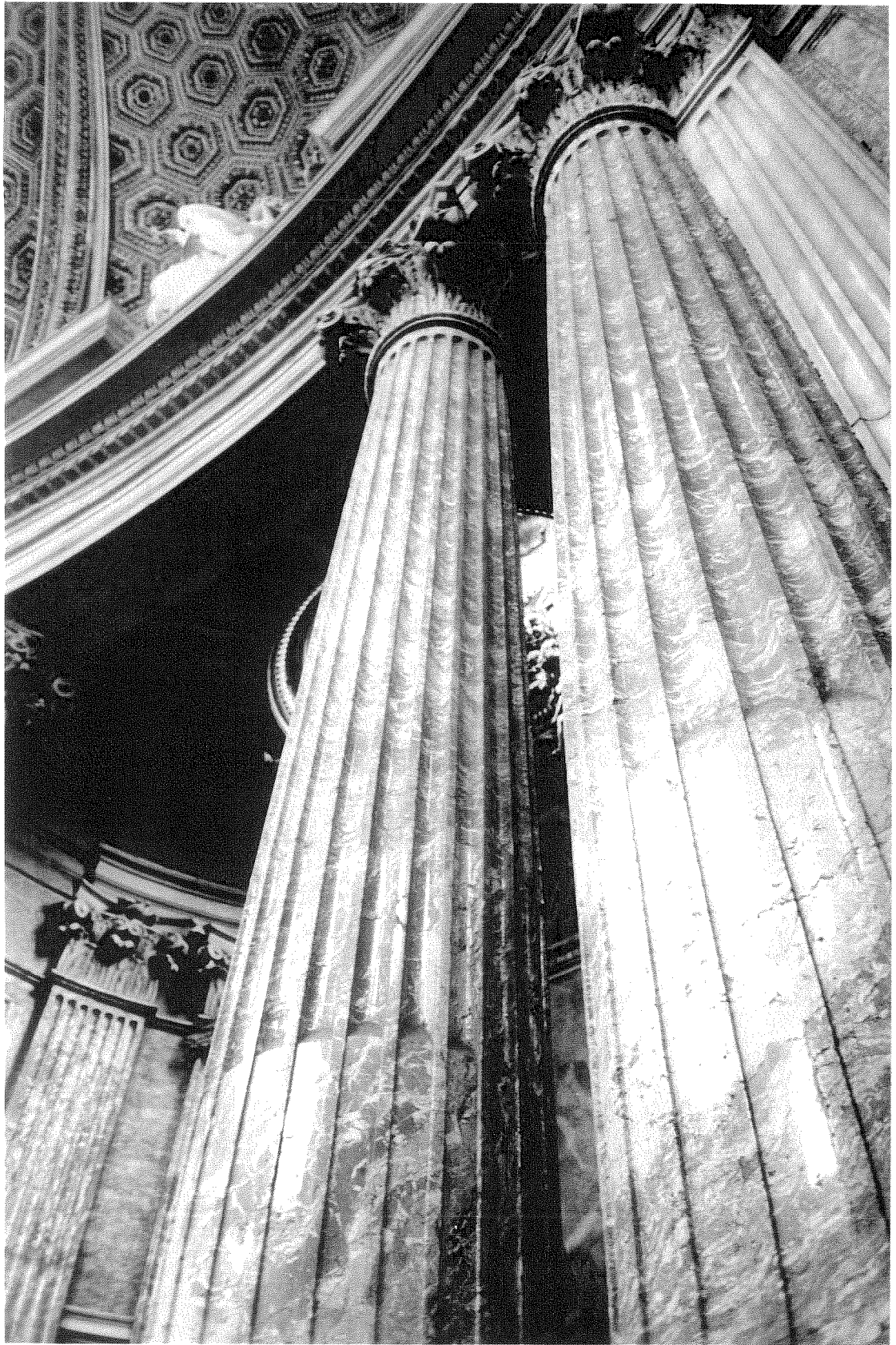
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3 Bargello, Michelangelo Bacchus,  
Florence, 1986.

4 Santo Spirito, Florence, 1986.



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5 S. Andrea al Quirinale, Rome, 1986.