Genre Bending: Scarpa, Dialogism and the Cangrande della Scala

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The exceptional work of Carlo Scarpa exists outside of the events of "modern" Italian architectural culture defined by Argan, Cacciari, Tafuri and Rossi. Through self imposed seclusion in Venice, he was alienated from the current architectural issues debated in the '50s and '60s and subsequently, his work was categorized by his peers as outdated. Questions addressing his ability to generate architectural "concepts" challenged the validity of his work on an academic and cultural level.

Through attempted explications of the problematic of Scarpa's mature work, two distinct positions have surfaced. Teyssot argues for the mourning of Scarpa's architecture, eulogizing the open organization of broken phrases—the fragments of his work. His language seems based on a poetic that, straining interpretation, mightbereadina melancholy key, a modern translation of Benjamin's Baroque allegory. As a fragment of an irretrievable past, Scarpa's work lives, but rejects its own autonomy. It is in itself an "event of mourning." Tafuri suggests a positive assessment of the work based on a rereading of French critic Blanchot, quoted by Teyssot in his essay. Tafuri seeks to leave the "fragment" with its nostalgic quality behind, instead, proposing via Blanchot a "new mode of completion" inherent in the discontinuous work of Scarpa. This expectancy of a future anterior as opposed to an alienated present leads Tafuri to believe that the fragmentary poem of Scarpa is not incomplete, but one which opens up a different mode of completion, or "an affirmation irreducible to unity." While Tafuri's rereading suggests a new interpretation which is neither chronophilic or chronophobic, his thoughts are fragments of fragments and continue to resist closure.

In this paper, I will argue that coexisting within Scarpa's graphic representations and physical manifestations are seemingly irreconcilable opposites, the impossibility recovering an irretrievable past and the potential for new modes of completion. What is revealed reciprocally presupposes a certain masking by definition. A montage of one mode into the other through the multiplicity of historical time may be cultivated by reading Scarpa's work through the writing of the Russian linguist and philosopher Mikhail M. Bakhtin, particularly his delineation of the literary and cultural term dialogism, chronotope and heteroglossia. These concepts of shared territory and particular affiliation with history resist the individualist assumptions of the recent theoretical grids of discourse targeting Scarpa's work. There is an uncharted dimension in his work which exists between the criticism of Teyssot and Tafuri.

Scarpa's relation to these concepts of space, time, and author are most evident in the Museum project at the Castelvecchio in Verona, which challenged contemporary practices of renovation and preservation as well as museum design, and would have great influence over other significant projects, most notably the Brion Cemetery. This paper will examine the Cangrande della Scala at the west end of the museum as a historical and tectonic "problematic," illuminated through the lens of the concepts generated by Bakhtin. As a brief introduction to the complexity of this problem, it is necessary to outline two significant issues: Scarpa's relationship to contemporary museography and Bakhtin's concept of "translinguistics."

SCARPA AND MUSEOGRAPHY

Everything ends up on a wall or in a display case.
— P. Valery

In The Museum Device, Hubert Damisch recounts the Marxist interpretation of the museum as an instrument of order, a tool functioning in the service of the state apparatus. As a device of memory, a monument, museums contribute to the capitalistic mechanisms of social production—a place for the disposal of the subject and dispersal of political ideology. In short, the museum as factory prototype, a warehouse for the dissemination of art to the masses, served as the dominant typological model from the 19th century forward. However, a small group of museum installations and conversions in Italy in the 1950’s led Bruno Zevi to summarize a new perception of museum space, one in which the works of art, as integral components of the design methodology, contribute to the creation of the space in which they are to be housed. The "Italian School" attempted to elicit a break with the prewar museum and forge stronger links between conceptions of space and history as related to the display of art and artifacts. For example, Franco Albini's cryptic installation at San Lorenzo in Genoa deploys methods similar to Scarpa’s earlier projects, displaying each work as an independent artifact in an attempt to 'suspend' the atmosphere; yet he failed to develop any further critical intervention. The BBPR, at the Sforza Castle in Milan, constructed powerful forms, taking ancient objects as pretexts, the objective being to utter romantically evocative warnings about values they felt were strongly indicated; in many opinions, too contentious to be convincing. While Scarpa's contemporary's were concerned with providing individual and permanent settings to heighten the qualities of artifacts as fragments of history, critics were not convinced of their successful assimilation with the past. Yet, beginning with his installations at the Venice Biennale in the early 1950’s and his proposal for the renovation of the Palazzo Abatellis in 1953, Scarpa would define two significant themes in museum design: balance and unity between the new function of a building as museum and the historical significance of its layers and spaces, and the investigation and installation of each individual work of art as an integral part of the architecture as a means to amplify the dialogue between object, viewer and architecture.

By the beginning of the work at Castelvecchio in 1957, Scarpa was quite capable of devising increasingly complex spatial layouts,
transforming the dialogue with older, existing elements through deliberate processes of abstraction. The power of abstraction invigorated his early tectonic interventions, as evident in his increasing concern with detail. "But for our discussion, the "adoration of the joint" is only one aspect of a larger, more significant problem: Scarpa's relation to the multiplicity of historical time. While Scarpa's investigations were most often limited to interventions or insertions into other buildings, his relation to a historical 'problematic' was nonetheless rigorous, particularly in his work in Venice and Verona. Perhaps not as ideologically and semantically prescribed as Aldo Rossi's, his was no less significant in that there was a distinct attempt to come to terms with the overwhelming sense of history and the recent Italian past. Scarpa's was a problem of what to do with the past, of how to live with history, of preservation rather than restoration. And while Scarpa refused to define his work ideologically in the light of other cultural hegemonies, he issued an invitation to accept the discontinuity of historic time, to work on it and fashion it by means of reading effects, messages, proposals and texts of successive constructions, essentially involving the relation between the many kinds of time in the collective memory."

The renovation of the Castelvecchio began with Scarpa's collaboration with Licisco Magagnato, the curator of the collection, on the exhibition "da Altichiero a Pisanello" and, over time, amounted to a rediscovery of the successive layers of original parts hidden away by previous renovations. Clearly the long time scale of the project (1958-73) allowed Scarpa's method to flourish and permitted time fully understand the art and museum intimately, in that each structure is governed by its own set of rules. This autonomy allowed Scarpa to create a series of forms, or dialogues, significantly greater than that of the whole structure. ! His acute sense of the building as an alpinepest of historical and cultural desires would naturally imply an interpretation, which in the process of decanting the future into the richness of the past, is deposited and endures experience."

**BAKHTIN AND TRANSLINGUISTICS**

Semiotics prefers to deal with the transmission of a ready made message by means of a ready made code, whereas, in living speech, messages are, strictly speaking, created for the first time in the process of transmission, and ultimately there is no code."

As elucidated by Roland Barthes and Claude Levi-Strauss, Ferdinand de Saussure argued against the historical orientation of language theory, in favor of an approach in which language is studied as a functional totality at any given instant in time. While an integral component of language, speech as discursive act is cast out of the object of inquiry, allegedly due to its individuality and infinite variation." In Marxism and the Philosophy of Language, Bakhtin argued against the Saussurian model of a purely "abstract objectivism" based on the premise that there can be no ready made code of language. Bakhtin proposed a 'translinguistics', a theory of language and discourse which emphasized understanding and experience as an equal, integral component to the study of linguistics. To Bakhtin, the Saussurian emphasis on langue - the basic units of language and rules of combinations (as opposed to the parole or speech act), and synchronic isolated instances and actions of language (as opposed to the diachronic continuity of history), was
a misunderstanding of the structure of language and the significance of discourse. In essence, by refusing to scrutinize language at its point of production, as actually spoken, written or disseminated, Saussure stripped language of its social and historical primacy. The utterance will always be determined by its nearest social situation, and verbal communication will never be understood or explained outside of this link to the concrete situation.\textsuperscript{16} Challenging both dichotomies, Bakhtin reversed Saussure's model by emphasizing the diachronic, deemphasizing the language system as an abstract model, and stressing instead paralelo as speech as lived and shared by human beings as the integral ingredient of social interaction. Bakhtin, in essence argued that the Saussurian model of language is untenable precisely because it refutes the problem of historical change.\textsuperscript{17} That is to say, to Bakhtin, language is always evolving in time through the continual interaction between speaker/receiver, author/listener, or space/inhabitant.

To be, means to communicate dialogically, when dialogue ends, everything ends.

— Bakhtin

Within this framework, language is continually evolving through the process of everyday communication or dialogue. The term dialogism designates the relation of every utterance (speech act) to other utterances. Todorov and Kristeva prefer the term 'intertextual' to further define dialogics as belonging to discourse and not to language.\textsuperscript{18} Dialogism refers, in the broadest sense to the infinite and open ended possibilities generated by all the discursive practices of a culture, consisting not in the mere encounter of two voices, but in the fact that every utterance is emitted in anticipation of an interpretation through the discourse of an interlocutor, which in turn implies a matrix of communicative utterances that reach the text not only through recognizable citations, but also through subtle process of dissemination. Artistic texts or constructions, as a component of generically classified, stable types of utterances, must be understood within what Bakhtin calls the differentiated unity of the epoch's entire culture.

In defining any relationship between architecture and context, the interplay between word and image, ideology and building renders a multiplicity of mitigating factors functioning within language and in communion with the more tangible aspects of building such as site, material and technique. Any attempt at contextual interpretation invites multiple connotations regarding intent or outcome and, in many cases, reveals more duplicitous readings. Bakhtin's concept of contextualization may be defined as the meeting of two or more texts, in which context may only be disclosed through other structures or events in dialogue with one another. Dialogism operates within all cultural production, whether literature or non-literature.\textsuperscript{19} Furthermore, the meeting of two or more texts in the form of author/reference, conversations between two or more utterers, etc. is always mitigated by and contingent upon not only the exchange of dialogue, but also each utterer's understanding/misunderstanding of the other. The site of this multiplicity is not the author/speaker, but the reader/listener. The reader is the very space in which are inscribed all of the citations out of which a writing is made. Hence, the essence of any language is reduced to the creativity of the individual, permitting new understandings of the problem of authorship.\textsuperscript{20} The author lives within the dialogue, intertextually. There are pluralities and worlds in one single text. Thus, in Bakhtin's conception of contextuality, historical understanding must precede all other modes of investigation. Bakhtin foregrounds the human capacity to mutually author one another, the ability to dialogically intersect on the frontiers between the selves, as revealing of oneself to another. We might begin to read Scarpà's Castelvecchio as Bakhtin reads Dostoevsky,\textsuperscript{21} what matters most in our assessment is the intertextual interaction of all discourses of time and space, or the discourses upon discourses.\textsuperscript{22}

**BAKHTIN, SCARPA AND THE CANGRANDE DELLA SCALA**

Bakhtin is of particular interest in our discussion of the Cangrande della Scala at the Castelvecchio simply because of the nature and history of the space. The evolution of the Cangrande space is a complex history of dialogues, with excavations and archaeological discoveries interspersed between demolition and new construction, responding equally to Scarpà's objectives of revealing the history of the castle and activating new dialogues between new spaces for the display of the collection and the layers of history.\textsuperscript{23} Scarpà was concerned to explore the relations with the outside world of the city through the apertures and internal layout of the space, changes in materials, and composition of and disposition of the artistic works. The solution to preservation must be different in different periods. I think this is the drawback of eclecticism: the important point of the past is not so much the final solutions, but the themes that have to be dealt with in rebuilding, to preserve identity and history and to increase the tension between the new and the old.\textsuperscript{24} This room (and its adjacent spaces) is the locus for all of the historical layers in the museum, a penetration into the labyrinth of history, a polyglot consciousness, a heterology, an infinite past and future of words, words which overflow with potential meaning.

Demolition and excavation of the space occurred as follows:

1958-Discovery and excavation the Porta del Morbia, a
twelfth century entrance to the city along the river which prefaces the Castle, 1962-Demolition of the Napoleonic stair adjacent to the end room of the barracks and excavation of the newly discovered Scaligeri Moat; 1963-64-Internal and external demolition of the sixth bay of the existing barracks, the future room for the display of the Cangrande statue.

Discovery of the Scaligeri Moat and the removal of the Napoleonic stair lead Scarpa towards the demolition of the last bay of the existing barracks as a means of resolving the tension between the many historical layers. The Cangrande space and its adjacencies may be described today as superimposition of the following layers into and onto another (see illustration):

The Commune wall (1100AD), The Scaligheri Moat (1200AD) with bridge through the Porta del Morbido designed by Scarpa, The roof and walls of the barracks which were delaminated and reconstructed by Scarpa, New First Floor Staircases, A new second floor bridge which traverses the space from the Torre del Mastio, through commune wall and sixth bay into the barrack's building, offering closer eye level views of the statue Cangrande Della Scala (14th century) and the Cavazzola Screen, which delineates the boundary between inside and out on the second floor and holds the Cavazzola polyptych The Passion Of Christ, and the pedestal and viewing platform for the statue.

We may begin to understand the Cangrande space through an investigation of theexegetical and metaexegetical clues functioning within Scarpa's design and placement of the Cangrande della Scala. The most challenging item was the location of the Cangrande, the equestrian statue. When set where it is, up in the air, it is related to movement and conditions it, stressing one of the most significant historical connections to the different parts of the castle. I decided to turn it slightly, to emphasize its independence from the structure supporting it. It is a part of the whole, yet it still lives its own separate life.

By closely examining the history, construction and positioning of the Cangrande della Scala, one finds clues to the strategy Scarpa deploys throughout the castle. At first glance, the most significantrien of the statue is its positioning on a pedestal 7 meters in the air. The juxtaposition/rotation of the statue on top of the stand opens the dialogue between the two pieces, perhaps inviting further interpretation. The pedestal is detached from the walls of the space and has no relative relation to the patterning of gray prun marble on the floor. Essentially floating in space, the position of the statue and pedestal seems quite arbitrary at first, yet as one circulates around it on both the upper and lower level, it reveals itself as the nexus of all historical connections in the museum. As one passes from threshold to threshold, between the Torre del Mastio, the Cangrande space and the Cavazzola screen, virtually every layer described above becomes evident as the background to the statue. All circulation through the space is subservient to the Cangrande della Scala and as one enters and reenters the space, the tautology of circulation becomes evident — the Cangrande space is a double exposure, a superimposition into and onto itself. Constructed from concrete and steel, the pedestal introduces a new material and texture to the already rich palette, and may be read as a union or disjunction with the other elements of the space. Closer examination reveals the pedestal to be a delamination of an existing solid, a series of folded planes, with edges articulated as such to disclose a delicateness, a thinness, an ephemerality. Each plane is subjected to precise incisions, divulging in essence the inner reality of the material. Scarpa's method of drawing the space reveals a similar characteristic trait of it's physical manifestation. The drawings are the narration of an architecture which must be analyzed in layers through its intervals, gaps and joints. Through the drawings of the
Cangrande space one experiences a laying bare if internal organs as Scarpa maps the dialogues between each autonomous piece. "Inscribed" and "read" on the site, each drawing is a proof of the absolute priority of the methods and modes of actual construction. In general, the probing of materials, the dialogue between the statue and the pedestal, and the strategy of incision and delamination of the detail and archaeological mass reveal the inner realities of the Castle and its interconnectedness to the art and insertions in which it houses.

According to Bakhtin, there are always dialogic relationships when multiple periods and styles are represented as aseries of layers. The polysemy of the Cangrande space may be further described by Bakhtin as a textual plurality of unmerged voices and consciousness, a poetic polyphony. Through the deliberate process of excavation and delamination, each layer is revealed as a distinct instance in the history of the Castle and is forced into dialogue with other fragments. This sense of polyphony is further developed as one begins to read Scarpa's other interventions into the space, namely the bridge, the stair, and the Cavazoza screen against the other existing strata of the castle. While it is impossible to deny that Scarpa authored many of the objects and surfaces, there is undeniably a plurality of voices to be interpolated by each individual that traverses the space. The multiple layers generate a state of consciousness which exist as a greater totality beyond the significance of its own autonomy, calling in to question any singular authority over the space. In the same way one is challenged to conjure a potential dialogue between the Cangrande della Scala and the pedestal, the reader must continually reassimilate and reconstruct the space in its entirety based on the multiplicity of historical periods montaged. The individual artist, for Bakhtin, cannot be the sole proprietor of a work, since each work (utterance) inevitably orients with respect to previous performances in the same sphere, both those by the same author and those of other authors, hence generating a hybrid construction. There is no singular authorial voice operating in the Castelvecchio. Events unfold in space and resist closure.

Exploring the chronotope, the fusion or thickening of the time and space is an indispensable in appropriating the asyndetical relation of layers, planes and artifacts within the space. Any given moment in the Cangrande space is overfilled with moments, manifested through the gaps and seams as a deformation of real time, a slowing down of the event of existence, a striving for geographic localization. Scarpa's explorations of form coincide with progressive and never finally completed constructions of his reflections on past experiences. The pauses that rhythmically mark the evolution of his designs as well as the unfolding of his investigations reveal the essence of his mode of conceiving a work in relation to time. Each piece, each episode in the Cangrande space whether specifically designed by or finally completed constructions of his reflections on past experiences reveal the essence of his mode of conceiving a work in relation to time. Each piece, each layer is revealed as a distinct instance in the history of the Cangrande space is transformed, rather than simply restoring the Castle to its previous state, he consciously opens it up to new interpretations, readings, misreadings, actively engaging in dialogue with with present and future readers.

SOME NOTES ON A CONCLUSION

Scarpa's restoration brings out the point of friction and encounter I conflict between the different histories of construction and transformation that exist in the life of the castle. Perhaps in no other work by Scarpa have restoration and recreation, architecture and museography been so intimately fused, producing a work strongly motivated by a critical historical sense. Tafuri would perhaps argue that Scarpa's work is just another retreat to the boudoir and yet Scarpa's relation to the problem of history was unique in many respects. While he did not prescribe to a specific ideology (say Marxism) he worked very deliberately through a style and language which cannot easily be characterized as historicist or "postmodern." His work, like Kahn's, is suspended in space-time, and while contingent on representing modes and layers of history, as well as the techniques available for such manifestations, he is not oppressed nor victimized by the past. In an open, deliberate way, Scarpa engages in a dialogue with the past as a means to the future. There are pluralities of consciousness and worlds in one single text that are today still timeless.

Bakhtinian characterizations and defintions of dialogism, heteroglossia and polyphony, are particularly appealing and appropriate to our discussion of Scarpa's relationship to the problem of history simply because they describe in straightforward terms the episodes and exchanges of our everyday existence in a historical continuum. Saussure's "abstract objectivist" conception of a linguistics which isolates specific instances of language in time is inappropriate for models of scientific inquiry, yet perhaps is sometimes to confining in discussions of the way in which we inhabit space. In the space of the Castelvecchio one is not responding to the intrinsic qualities of the collision of history, through the invitation to discover the building and the art, the visitor engages in dialogues, changing from a mere observer to participant, contributing to contingencies of the moment in the space, an anticipation of the discursive contribution at participant as interlocuter. Castelvecchio presents itself as a unique achievement in the dialogical encounter of past and present, providing a concrete point of departure for the discussion of historical centers. I have attempted to explicate, per Licisco Magagnata's request, the work of Scarpa through a discussion of the Cangrande Della Scala as a key to his relation to history.

NOTES


3 Tafuri, p. 78.

4 Tafuri, p. 72.


6 Dialogism challenges the notion of the author as the primary and sacrosanct source of the text, suggesting rather a nonproprietary attitude toward authorship. As a determinate situational characteristic, each "utterance" is contingent upon previous and further utterances as an instrument to contextualize meaning. The chronotope is literally a thickening of time which mediated between two orders of experience and discourse: the historical and artistic, offering a specific setting where narrative structure can exist. Functioning exegetically and metaexegetically, heteroglossia emphasizes the diachronic nature of a language of narrative over the synchronic. These classifications question the
dialectical Hegelian/ Marxist response through admixtures of utterances.

27 The Complete Works, pp. 209-211.
28 See Marxism and the Philosophy of Language, p. 95. See also Subversive Pleasures, p. 145.
29 Dal Co, p. 27.

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