

Body and Building

Essays on the Changing Relation of Body and Architecture



EDITED BY GEORGE DODDS AND ROBERT TAVERNOR

Desiring Landscapes/Landscapes of Desire: Scopic and Somatic in the Brion Sanctuary

I saw...the pleasant location;...the ornate green plants; the delectable and moderate hills decorated by small and shady groves; [...] And here...I directed with great pleasure my eyes upon this heavenly picture, and I feasted my eyes and looked upon this beautiful and rare image and divine picture with all [my] senses, so that in myself the aroused and impetuous vibrations, which had liquefied the soul by their sweetness, revealed even more pleasure.... Not less I marveled at the skill with which teacher Nature spread out all the Arabian perfume especially and in abundance in this lovely body.¹

The Brion family sanctuary in San Vito di Altivole is arguably the best known of Carlo Scarpa's more than seventy projects for gardens and landscapes. This aspect of his work, largely overlooked in the literature, ranges from small temporary installations to large-scale parks (Dodds 2000). Scarpa is better known for the many museums and exhibitions he designed wherein he carefully honed his ability to direct one's vision through subtly manipulating the body of the visitor. In the design of the Brion sanctuary (1968-78) Scarpa combines the scopic and somatic dimensions of his architectural production, engaging visitors in his personal desire for landscapes and gardens.²

The circumstances of the Brion project are distinct among Scarpa's previous landscape and garden commissions. Unlike his garden for the Venice Biennale (1952), the temporary landscape for the Italia '61 Exhibit in Turin (1961), and the gardens for the Fondazione Querini-Stampalia (1950-63) and the Museo di Castelvecchio (1957-64), the Brion project was privately funded. Moreover, Scarpa was unrestrained by the archeological, museological, and institutional programs that limited these earlier works. The Brion commission is further distinguished by its nominal programmatic requirements for a site that posed few if any spatial limitations beyond its L-shaped configuration. This is not to say that there was no *preesistenza ambientale* into which Scarpa intervened (Rogers 1958, 304). Beyond the obvious physical and historic context of the existing public cemetery of San Vito di Altivole, there was the town itself and the contiguous landscape upon which Scarpa's conception of the garden complex was largely contingent.

Onoria Brion commissioned Scarpa to design the tomb, honoring her husband Giuseppe's wish to be buried in the town of his family's origin.³ To secure a plot of land for the project contiguous with the public cemetery, the Brion family was required to purchase far more property than was originally envisioned.⁴ Consequently, Scarpa assumed the task of inventing an expanded program for the project to fully exploit the possibilities of the 2000-

square-meter site (Scarpa 1989, 17-18). Scarpa's expanded program included a shelter for the graves of additional Brion family members, a funeral chapel, a water garden with a pavilion for private meditation, "cloistered" walkways, a cypress grove for the burial of local clergy, and the symbolic use of specific plants.⁵ The centerpiece of the site and program is an elevated *prato* (or lawn) surrounded by a continuous concrete wall at the center of which is an arched canopy. Beneath the arch, which Scarpa called the "arcosolium," one of many Latin terms he used to describe the garden complex, are the sarcophagi of Onoria and Giuseppe Brion. Scarpa's expanded program for the sanctuary is not limited to an assemblage of architectural objects, however; it includes the historic and mythic dimensions of a culturally constructed site wherein the viewing body negotiates between landscape-as-representation and landscape-as-experience. The Brion garden's visual program includes specific views borrowed from both its walled interior and the surrounding landscape while its somatic program engages one's syncopated movement into and through the garden complex.⁶

Bodies, Landscape, and Painting

This story of the scopic and somatic dimensions of the Brion sanctuary begins with three views: from the loggia of the Palazzo Chiericati in Vicenza, from inside the *Albergo* of the former *Scuola di Santa Maria della Carità* that houses the Accademia Galleries in Venice, and from Carlo Scarpa's apartment in Asolo. These three views are key to understanding a critical aspect of the Brion sanctuary and Scarpa's larger interest in the corporeal dimension of landscapes and gardens, both real and fictive.

Giuseppe Mazzariol, Scarpa's life-long friend who, as the director of the Fondazione Querini-Stampalia collaborated on the design of its garden, recalls that Scarpa's fascination with landscape began when he was a young boy, while visiting relatives at the Villa Tacchi in the Veneto countryside (Mazzariol and Barbieri 1984, 10). When Scarpa was growing up in Vicenza, he enjoyed a relatively close relation to the agrarian landscape that was then much nearer the city center than it is today. It was still possible, for example, to glimpse a view of the countryside from Palladio's loggia of the Palazzo Chiericati which, when it was built, was located at the boundary between city and rural landscape.⁷ During an interview with RAI television in 1972, Scarpa sat on the balcony of his apartment in Asolo — another important locus in this story — recounting his first architectural memories, playing marbles in the loggia of the palazzo (Scarpa 1972). Writers on Scarpa have presumed that the point of this recollection was Scarpa's first consciousness of Palladio's architecture. Yet, just a few years after the RAI interview, Scarpa referred to Palladio's attempt to copy antique Attic bases, such as those in the columns of the Palazzo Chiericati, as "rubbish".⁸ Perhaps there was more to Scarpa's memory than a game of marbles and Palladio's loggia. During the early 20th-century the piazza upon which the palazzo fronts — today the car-covered Piazza Matteotti — seemed

more field than *piazza*. Indeed, it is no less likely that, in a city with a limited amount of public green space but rich in views of distant mountains, the view from the loggia across the piazza to a framed view of countryside may have had an equal impact on the young Scarpa as did Palladio's loggia. The combination of the two — Palladio's hybrid building, half palazzo and half villa, and the view of the nearby landscape — seem to have had an enduring influence on the entirety of Scarpa's work, particularly in relation to his design of the Brion sanctuary.⁹

When Scarpa was 13 his mother died and his family moved back to Venice; as a result this direct connection to the Veneto landscape, if not closed to him, was significantly altered. As a student of painting at the Accademia in Venice, Scarpa encountered a Veneto landscape that differed substantially from the landscape views associated with the Palazzo Chiericati or the Villa Tacchi. This was an idealized Veneto, the Veneto of the Venetian School of painting to which the Accademia was singularly devoted.

The Accademia Galleries contain the core of the Venetian School, displayed in 24 rooms that Scarpa reorganized and redesigned between 1944 and 1959. The first space one enters on the *piano nobile* of the Accademia is the former Chapter room of the *Scuola di Santa Maria della Carità*. Here many great *Trecento* paintings and artifacts from the Veneto are exhibited. Among these is the *Vision of St. John the Evangelist* by Jacobello Albergno, the center of which is dominated by the body of God the Father enclosed in a mandorla. The almond-shaped mandorla is a common iconographic device found in early Christian, Byzantine, and Gothic art works; it typically frames the body of Christ and/or the Virgin Mary (Brendel 1944; Focillon 1963, 108). First appearing in Greek and Roman mosaics and vase decorations, often in vague egg-shaped forms, the mandorla has always signified a separation between quotidian human experience and an "other" realm (Brendel 1944).

Adjacent to the Chapter room, is the former *Albergo* of the *Scuola*, the last gallery on the museum's circuit. In the *Albergo* Titian's *Presentation of Mary at the Temple*, still hangs in the room in which it was originally installed in 1539. Mandorla-shaped mountains are the focus of the painting's background. In the foreground the child Mary climbs the steps of the temple enclosed in a luminescent mandorla amidst an idealized architectural setting influenced by the architecture of Jacopo Sansovino and Sebastiano Serlio (Pozza 1976, 216-217). The background landscape that Titian constructed had both liturgical and personal significance for the artist. It evoked the iconographic relation of the mandorla-shaped mountain to the body of the Virgin Mary as the Christianized *Magna Mater* (underscored by the glowing mandorla), and the artist's relation to his home of Pieve di Cadore in the Dolomites, where such mountain types are common (Cirlot 1962, 194; Graves 1966, 120; Jung 1968, 160; Keightley 1877, 467).¹⁰

Scarpa positioned Albergno's painting in the Chapter room so one can view both it and Titian's *Presentation* simultaneously through the broad doorway of the *Albergo*. These two

15.1
Detail, *Vision of St. John the Evangelist*,
Jacobello Albergno (© Accademia
Galleries, Venice; from Francesco
Valcanover, *The Galleries of the Accademia*)



works, one representing the beginning and the other the zenith of the painting patrimony of the Veneto, appear simultaneously in the visitor's cone of vision once having seen the entire collection. Describing his arrangement of sculptures in the Museo di Castelvecchio in Verona Scarpa explained that, by positioning works of art in certain ways, visitors can be encouraged to move their bodies in relation to the works being viewed so as to heighten their critical appreciation (Scarpa 1972). The juxtaposition of Albergno's mandorla to Titian's mountains and the child Mary surrounded by a mandorla of light at the end of the museum's circuit seems to demonstrate Scarpa's complex understanding of the body's relation to both works of art and to landscape. This relation was not simply scenographic, but involved both the physical movement of one's own body and the iconographic tradition of Venetian painting in which the distinction between bodies and landscapes is often obscured.¹¹

During a lecture in Madrid in the summer of 1978, Scarpa commented that he understood his work as being located inside a longstanding and deeply felt tradition.¹² Scarpa's relation to the Venetian School of painting must be considered a key part of this tradition, an aspect of which is the representation of bodies as landscapes (Spengler 1926, 271) and landscapes as bodies (Wilde 1974). In the Venetian School the body that was represented in this manner



15.2
Presentation of the Virgin, Titian,
Albergo Room of the Scuola della Carità
(© Accademia Galleries, Venice; from
Francesco Valcanover, *The Galleries of the
Accademia*)

was invariably female and often nude (Muir 1981, 119-134).¹³ Johannes Wilde compares Giorgione's portrait Laura – in which “the flesh has been rendered in a variety of tints, among them a very intense red” – with the “colour sensations [one experiences] in the south in the deceptively transparent air which precedes a sudden storm in the summer.” Wilde concludes that, in this manner, Giorgione has purposefully demonstrated, “that figure and surrounding are inseparable, and that plastic form only exists in a space full of light and atmosphere” (Wilde 1974, 77).¹⁴ The key here is not so much the ancient and more generic association of nature as feminine, but rather the particularly Venetian tradition of the fleshy female anthropomorphizing of landscape (Clark 1976). Naomi Schor has argued that the paintings produced in Venice during this period had long been gendered female, largely because of their emphasis on the presentation of the (beautiful) detail over the representation of the (sublime) whole. Sir Joshua Reynolds, Schor argues, codified this gendering of the Venetian school in his *Discourses on Art* (1769-1790).¹⁵ For Reynolds, the role of the artist, who was invariably male, was both to correct the many defects found in nature and edit-out her multitudinous and distracting details (Schor 1987, 11-22). In this way, “the scattered beauties of nature,” as Boullée characterized a similar process in his architectural treatise of the same period, could be reassembled and made sublime.¹⁶ Naomi Schor argues, “To focus on the detail ... is to become aware ... of its participation in a larger semantic network, bound on the one side by ... ornament, with its traditional connotations of effeminacy and decadence, and on the other... The detail ... [therefore]... is gendered and doubly gendered as feminine.”³⁰



15.3
Framed view of Asolo's *rocca*, Gipsoteca canoviana, Possagno. (© Casabella *continuità* 222, 1958)

The relation between the gendered and eroticized ground of Venetian painting and the physical ground of the Veneto, the Veneto as signifier and signified, is a key to Scarpa's understanding of landscape and garden, and the role that the body, particularly the female body, played in the gardens he designed. Whether Scarpa was consciously aware of the historicity of gender in relation to detail is unclear. Nevertheless, the role of detail in the construction of a feminized and eroticized landscape, particularly in relation to Venetian painting, would have been well known to him from numerous sources.¹⁷ To better understand how omnipresent was this notion for Scarpa on a personal level, his apartment in Asolo may hold a key. From one side of his apartment the view was of the green slopes of the hilltop town and the verdant plains below. From the other side Scarpa had a magnificent view of the town dominated by its *rocca*. Both views, at least in the 1960's, had changed relatively little during the centuries since Pietro Bembo resided there, resulting in his *Gli asolani* (1495-1505) dedicated to Queen Cornaro in which "the author explores a Platonic and anti-sensual conception of love in a beautiful garden" (Lagerlöf 1990, 7).¹⁸ Arrigo Rudi, Scarpa's longtime associate on such projects as the Museo di Castelvecchio and the Banca Popolare di Verona, recalls standing on Scarpa's balcony in Asolo as Scarpa pointed out specific sections of the landscape, comparing them to details from various paintings of the Venetian School.¹⁹ Scarpa considered these bits of vista as details, not fragments, which he associated with details of paintings, related to both

the region's tradition of landscape painting and its general history.

Scarpa's personal desire to locate views of an idealized Veneto landscape often extended into his architectural designs so that the occupant encounters carefully framed views of a related landscape. The Gipsoteca Canoviana in Possagno is, perhaps, the earliest example of Scarpa constructing views of this type. His addition, built alongside the existing 19th-century Canova sculpture gallery, frames a view of Asolo's *rocca*. [Figure 1] This view, was originally foregrounded by Canova's sculpture grouping, *The Three Graces*.²⁰ While Canova's sculpture-group remains, the view is long since obscured behind the unchecked growth of vegetation contiguous with the museum. The *rocca* of Asolo, located mid-way between Possagno and San Vito di Altivole, is also the focus of a seminal view Scarpa constructed from the Brion sanctuary. It was this image of the Veneto landscape, feminine, full-bodied, and full of details, that Scarpa wanted to see for himself, and perhaps wanted others to see, from both the Canova gallery and the garden he constructed for the Brion family

At the time of his death Scarpa was at work framing a very similar landscape view in Monselice at the home of his patron and friend, Aldo Businaro. As part of his renovation and reorganization of the villa compound called "il Palazzetto," Scarpa designed an apartment for himself above the garage at the edge of the property. His design of this apartment was prompted by his being forced to vacate his flat in Asolo a few years earlier due to the owner's desire to reoccupy the space.²¹ Scarpa lived in the Asolo apartment for ten years (1962 to 1972). He loved the small medieval city, relating to its history, fabric, and relative isolation (Brusatin 1984). After leaving Asolo, Scarpa and his wife ultimately relocated to an apartment above the stables of the Villa ai Nani in Vicenza. This was Scarpa's last official home. While living there, he often visited the Palazzetto for extended periods, in part to hide from students and clients but also to regain a more direct connection to the Veneto landscape.²² The design of the apartment at the Villa Palazzetto was intended to recreate, at least in part, another lost aspect of Scarpa's former living arrangement – the view from his apartment of Asolo's mountaintop *rocca*. From the Palazzetto apartment, left unfinished at the time of his death, Scarpa had constructed a framed view of the mandorla-shaped Monte Ricco. [Figure 2] This view fulfilled two of Scarpa's seminal desires: to frame views of Veneto landscape corresponding to details of Venetian paintings, and the lost view he associated with Asolo.

The Palazzetto apartment relates to another important experience of loss that Scarpa associated with this particular landscape. Here in Monselice, while painting this same *rocca* many years earlier, Scarpa finally realized that his competency as a painter was not equal to his desire to paint (Pietropoli, May 1997). Although Scarpa gave up his aspiration to paint, focusing instead on the design of exhibitions, buildings, and gardens, the concepts and techniques of painting continued to influence his productive activities.

The painterly undercurrent of Scarpa's thinking is implied in his description of the design

15-4

View of Monte Ricco from Scarpa's unfinished apartment, "Il Palazetto," Businaro Estate, Monselice. (Photo: Author)



process for the Brion project, recounted in his lecture in Madrid:

I suddenly decided that at this point there ought to be a water element that would interrupt the perspective. I like water very much, perhaps because I am Venetian. ... At this point I thought of devoting part of the site to the making of a small, "tempietto." ... Having thought about this, I decided I needed an element in the background. Here there is a pure sky like there was today [in Madrid], very beautiful. ... At this location I felt the need of a dark value. From the first it seemed that the scheme called for a dark depression at this point, otherwise the perspectival value would not have had any sense. These are the reasons that I have made it this way. (Scarpa 1978)²³

Scarpa's use of a painterly vocabulary in describing landscape and architectural decisions is fundamental to understanding the Brion enclave. In his Madrid lecture, Scarpa described the perspectival view he was constructing – not in terms of converging lines and vanishing points typical of the Florentine-based method *disegno* – but in terms of figures and atmospherics. He focused not on line, but on the values of colors, dark and light, near and far, and the direct use of materials, all essential characteristics of *colore*, the method and philosophy of Venetian Renaissance painting (Rosand 1982, 18, Brusatin 1983). In the *colore* method bodies and the spaces between them are built-up simultaneously from the direct application of fields of color, without elaborate preparatory drawings. Space in such paintings tends to be a function, not of linear perspective, but of a combination of *chiaroscuro*, intensity of color, degree of detail,

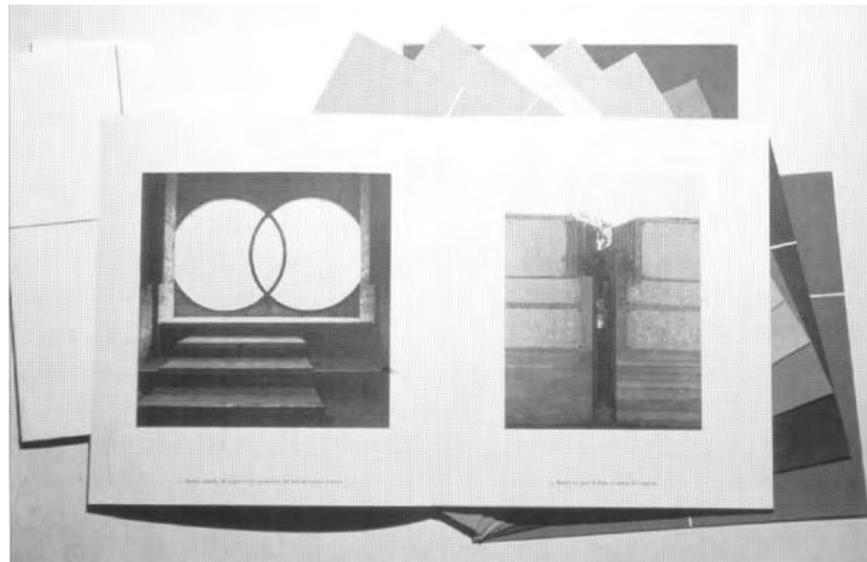
and relative size of objects.

In addition to the painterly undercurrent in Scarpa's work, the design for the Brion project was also influenced by his study of literature. In commenting on the design process and the locale, he cited a number of key works of literature upon which he reflected while designing the project. These include the garden landscapes of Francesco Colonna's *Hypernotomachia Poliphili*, where the chaste body of Polia is pursued in the dream of Poliphilo; the garden of Professor Canteral in Raymond Roussel's *Locus Solus*, where preserved bodies float in a strange and magical watery substance called *acqua micans*;²⁴ and the funereal landscapes of Edmondo De Amicis whose picturesque cemeteries are inhabited by young maidens eating and drinking (De Amicis 1896, 92-93 and 99). In all of these visual and textual narratives the body – typically the female body situated in a landscape or garden – figures prominently. This may help explain why the design drawings for the Brion sanctuary, more than any of Scarpa's other projects, abound with images of nude females. Although these images often appear somewhat ghostlike, they reflect the manner in which Scarpa imagined the living body physically engaging the Brion sanctuary, both directly and as a site from which to view a distant idealized landscape.

Memoriae Causa

Perhaps the most important published interpretation of the Brion sanctuary is a little known monograph that Scarpa edited – his only book. Scarpa apparently never wrote about architecture, due largely to what Francesco Dal Co calls his "hypersensitivity to the written word (Ranalli 1984, 7)." Yet this did not stop him from producing a book – a privately published monograph on the Brion sanctuary, *MEMORIAE CAUSA* (Scarpa 1977). The Brion family paid for 200 copies of the monograph; it was printed by Stamperia Valdonega, known for its publication of fine art books, catalogues, and such works of literature as their reprint of the *Hypernotomachia Poliphili*, a copy of which Scarpa owned. *MEMORIAE CAUSA* consists of a hardboard folder holding 11 unbound and folded folio sheets. The only text in the monograph, save for spare captions to the 19 black-and-white photographs, is an inscription, in Latin, on the first folio: "The images contained on these sheets are of the monument constructed in memory of Giuseppe Brion, his wife Onoria, and their children."²⁵ Consistent with Scarpa's intentions for the Brion garden, the monograph is a collection of carefully selected images. Scarpa chose all of the photographs himself. The general title of the monograph suggests that the memories the Brion monument was intended to prompt in the mind of visitors were not limited to Brion family history alone, however; they included Scarpa's memories and potentially, those of the visitor.²⁶

The first photograph in *Memoriae Causa* is a now-familiar image of the entrance from the public cemetery.²⁷ It is a close-up of the stairs and interlocking circles that form a vertically



oriented mandorla. The image, rendered in stark chiaroscuro by the ambient lighting conditions, is the frontispiece of the monograph much as the entrance itself is the frontispiece for the entire garden complex. [Figure 3] The public entrance introduces many of the project's essential themes. Among these themes are the asymmetry of left and right, the construction of thematic views, the negotiation of interrupted passages, the model of Venetian private gardens, the iconography of Venetian Renaissance painting, oriental and Arabian gardens, and perhaps most importantly, the movement and orientation of the visitor's own body in relation to its layout/organization.

Scarpa called this entrance, the "propylaeum," signifying its importance within the hierarchy of the garden experience.²⁸ He referred to the interlocking circles that first greet the visitor as the "eyes" of the garden, underscoring the somatic implication of the garden as, in Francesco Colonna's words, a "lovely body."²⁹ By Scarpa's own account, the propylaeum is the critical origin point or navel of this garden-as-body.

The view from the public cemetery into the propylaeum, was originally obscured behind a low-hanging weeping cedar (*Cedrus atlantica*), lost during a severe winter in the mid-1980's (Seddon 1991, 149). This cedar is one of the most tangible signs of Scarpa's collaboration on this project with Italy's most important landscape architect of his generation, Pietro Porcinai (Matteini, 1991, 214). Scarpa intended visitors to encounter the stairs and mandorla, only after moving aside the branches of the cedar, which he described as "a kind of tent" (Scarpa 1979, 50). On the left-hand side of the entry portal are stairs with a conventional ratio of

rise to tread; the ratio of the right-hand stair is doubled, discouraging normative use. In two earlier plan drawings of the enclave (ACS 70 129 102, and ACS 70 129 105) in which many provisional ideas for the project are depicted, the stairs fill the entire passage. In a composite elevation/section study of the propylaeum made somewhat later (ACS 70 129 300), the stairs are depicted in their current left-sided position. Beneath this elevation Scarpa drew a line to the stairs, ambiguously noting, "*Spostare a destra...tutti vanno a destra*," one translation of which is, "Move to the right-hand side...everybody to the right." Guido Pietropoli observes that by providing two different stairs and by locating the conventional stairs off-axis, Scarpa required the visitor to make a conscious choice between left and right (Pietropoli 1990, 95). That Scarpa interrupts the passage and requires a change in the direction of the visitor's path is not in itself remarkable, as he often structures entrance scenarios to gardens in this manner – the Fondazione Querini-Stampalia and the Museo di Castelvecchio being two obvious examples. What is significant here is the manner in which Scarpa provides codes of choice, signifying an asymmetry of value.

The drawing sheet is filled with marginal sketches of the interlocking ring and mandorla motif. Marginal drawings were, for Scarpa, a way of rethinking issues, indicating their importance and at times their lack of resolve. The interlocking rings and mandorla that Scarpa sketched into the margin of the section/elevation of the Brion propylaeum (ACS 70 129 300) frame a miniature landscape of poplar-like trees standing on an empty *prato*. This small and hastily-drawn sketch is important for a number of reasons. It shifts the meaning of the double rings away from that of an isolated and self-referential icon (Brusatin 1984, Pietropoli 1990) – an interpretation that permeates the literature on both Scarpa and the Brion sanctuary – to that of a frame. The constructed view of the enclosed garden, overlaid with the mandorla – a sign of the Virgin Mary, the *magna mater*, and by extension, the vulva – can be interpreted as doubly-gendered female, signifying both the garden-as-mother and the equally old association of the tomb-as-womb (Gimbutas 1989, 169-173.) The relation of the body of the Virgin and the enclosed garden underscores another of the Brion garden's important themes, the *hortus conclusus*. The conflation of the mandorla and the enclosed garden is a fundamental part of the Marian iconographical tradition associated with the "Song of Songs" (Comito, 1978; Daley 1986; Matter 1990, xxiv-xxv, Stewart 1966). The *hortus conclusus*, was an enduring garden-type in Scarpa's oeuvre. It was the model that Giuseppe Mazzariol prescribed for the Fondazione Querini-Stampalia garden; Scarpa explored the *hortus conclusus* throughout his career, including one of his last projects, the Villa Mateazzi-Chiesa, Ponte Alto, Vicenza, (1974-75).

Pietropoli intuits the mandorla at the entrance to be the doorway into the precinct. It is more window than doorway, however; its limited size and raised position, in concert with the water channel beyond, underscore that Scarpa did not intend for this threshold

to be crossed. The implicit prohibition against crossing the mandorla threshold reflects its roots in both ancient and Christian cultures. In addition to its iconographical traditions of female corporeality, sacrality, and the separation of the quotidian world from the realm of the “other,” the vertical mandorla is part of another pan-cultural tradition. This tradition recognizes the asymmetry of the left (associated with matter and gendered female) and the right (associated with spirit and gendered male) (Cirlot 1962, 194). Standing at the top of the stairs the visitor becomes part of the unfolding iconography of the enclave as one’s body is literally and figuratively oriented. Looking through the mandorla toward the “other” realm of the consecrated sanctuary (*camposanto*) to the east, one must again choose between left and right. Robert Hertz explains that, at sites of sacrality, of which Catholic burial grounds are a part, the body often becomes a kind of *gnomon*, a marker of solar orientation. By *orienting* the body to the east, “the parts of the body are assigned accordingly to the cardinal points.... The full sunlight of the south shines on our right side, while the sinister shade of the north is projected on our left (Hertz 1973, 20).”

Scarpa explored other aspects of the mandorla iconography in the Brion entrance, implying that he saw himself personally caught within the unfolding stories and histories of this place. In a transverse section of the propylaeum Scarpa represented himself facing the mandorla at the top of the stairs.³⁰ The view from Scarpa’s position in the section is of a simple elevated *prato*. While the elevated and walled *prato* suggests analogies with the tradition of Venetian private gardens, the superimposition of the mandorla icon onto this view prompts other, more personal meanings for Scarpa.³¹ In numerology the mandorla is associated with the number 11. While Scarpa’s personal association with this number has been much discussed in the literature, the role of the mandorla in this regard has yet to be recognized (Frasconi 1991). The mandorla’s numerical equivalence to the number 11 derives from the intersection of the two circles – one representing spirituality (signified by the number 1) and the other representing perfect unity (signified by the number 10).³² As if to underscore this numerical association, directly above Scarpa’s body in the drawing, he notes the dimension, “11 cm.”

Virtually all of the human figures in Scarpa’s many drawings of the mandorla window, including his own, are positioned facing east, tacitly signifying the role of the propylaeum in orienting the visitor. In an elevation study of the entrance Scarpa inscribes each of the circles with a female and male body respectively, ostensibly representing the unbroken union of Onoria and Giuseppe Brion and emphasizing the entrance’s gendered asymmetry. The left-hand stair in the Brion propylaeum – the one designed for “our bodies” and gendered female – leads to matter, to the bodies of the Brions beneath the arcosolium and to the direct pleasures of the garden as a *locus amoenus*, a site of direct physical pleasure. Scarpa imagined this part of the garden complex filled with children playing and women eating and sipping wine (Battisti 1972, 5; Scarpa 1979, 53). In Edmondo de Amicis’s travel book *Constantinopoli*,

cited earlier, Scarpa explained, “...I read that the women of Constantinople gladly take walks in the cemeteries there -- sometimes to picnic. The memory of these things left something in me (Scarpa 1979, 53).” The right-hand stair is the beginning of a very different and more difficult journey, physically and conceptually. It is a journey of the spirit to the island designated for private meditation. Here the visitor experiences the enclosed garden from afar, as a rationalized object of contemplation.

“*Spotare a destra...tutti vanno a destra.*”

Of three aedicular structures within the Brion enclave – the island pavilion, the funeral chapel, and the arcosolium – the island pavilion is the only one that encourages human occupation. Scarpa returned to the island often, even before the pavilion was constructed. He explained, “This is the only private [place in the garden] – all of the rest is for the public, for the playing of children. ...The pavilion I made for myself. I go there frequently and meditate. ...It is the only one of my works that I gladly come back to see.”⁶⁷

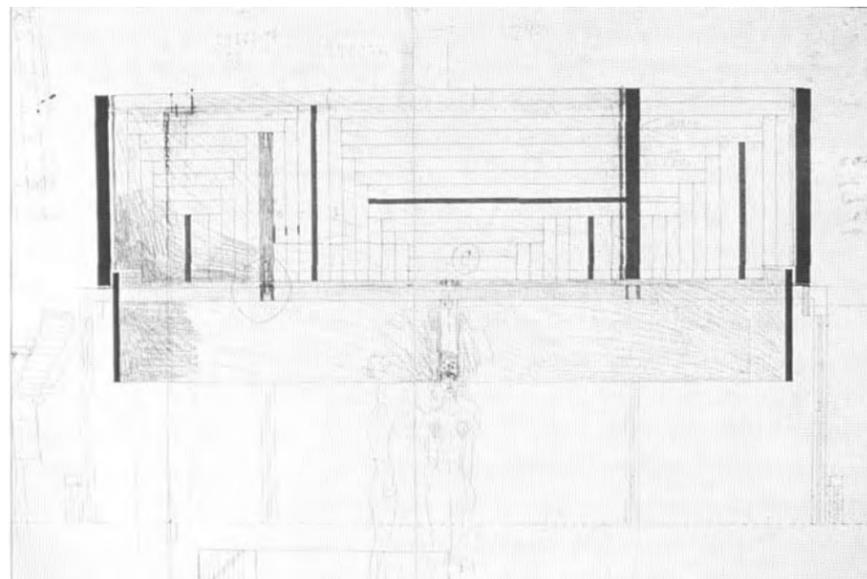
In the collection of more than 1,000 graphic documents for the Brion project in the Scarpa Archive in Trevignano di Montebelluna (CSA), there are a seemingly inordinate number of drawings of the water garden and island pavilion. Scarpa continued drawing studies of this part of the enclave long after their construction was complete, demonstrating his obsession with this place. In the *Memoria Causa*, the absence of any photographs taken from or of the island further demonstrates the degree to which Scarpa personally identified with this locus and his desire for it to remain private. Yet, it is among the most populated sites in his many drawings for the project. The reason that Scarpa’s drawings of the pavilion are so filled-up with bodies is directly implicated in the project’s scopic and somatic programs.

An elevation drawing of the pavilion helps explicate this point [Figure 4]. This drawing not only depicts the carefully delineated image of a future construction, but also looks back at the viewer in the guise of a female nude, casually sketched in an otherwise carefully delineated drawing. The pavilion consists of four attenuated composite columns, asymmetrically disposed about a platform supporting a box-like roof and fascia. Subtending the fascia is an *involucrum*, which in Latin signifies an “envelope” or “wrapper” covering the front of an object (Albertini and Bagnoli 1988, 220). This continuous panel is bifurcated by a slot; at the base of the slot is a pair of arcs creating a kind of viewfinder. In the drawing Scarpa aligns the head of the nude with the slot and viewfinder. The nude in the drawing consists of two superimposed bodies – with two sets of eyes, shoulders et cetera – representing a single body that is moving along the vertical axis of the slot and viewfinder.

From the vantage point of the nude, the view is of a simple *prato* enclosed by the canted perimeter wall and the propylaeum. The center of this enclosed garden view is the arcosolium. The combination of the walled *prato* and the central motif of a circular water element³³ are

15.6

Elevation study, pavilion, private island, Brion sanctuary, San Vito di Altivole. (Carlo Scarpa Archive, Trevignano di Montebelluna, Tobia and Afra Scarpa)



consistent with the iconographic tradition of the *hortus conclusus*. This vista from the island, however, would have been possible without the pavilion, its viewfinder, and the concrete seat/planter that Scarpa provides the visitor. In fact, the *involutrum* actually interferes with this vista. To gain an unobstructed view of the walled garden, visitors must adjust their eye levels, either by using the viewfinder, as does the nude in the elevation drawing, or by sitting, as do the corpulent nudes in Scarpa's other studies. Why then does Scarpa create a view of the garden from this locus by such elaborate means, only to obscure it?

The studied manner by which, in his design drawings, Scarpa directs one's view from the island indicates the importance of the views from the island and the manner in which they were to be apprehended. There are, in fact, two distinctly different views made possible from the island: the interior walled garden of the sanctuary, noted above, and the landscape beyond – one visible from a seated position and the other seen while standing at the viewfinder. In two section drawings Scarpa highlights the relation of the surrounding landscape to the enclosed garden by using the canted perimeter wall as a kind of surveyor's level. In one of these drawings (ACS 70 129 27) Scarpa represented himself, his eye aligned with the top of the wall and his gaze fixed on the distant landscape. During his frequent visits to the Brion construction site, Scarpa often expressed concerns about the height of the claustral wall: whether it would be high enough to efface the view of the adjacent agricultural fields and the incursion of post-war buildings in and around the town (Pietropoli interview 1997). Ennio Brion, the son of Giuseppe and Onoria Brion, confirms that had the family not objected to

Scarpa's original plans, the wall would have been still higher (Saito 1997, 152).

The placement and configuration of the wall surrounding the sanctuary is the most important architectural and landscape decision Scarpa made in the project. [Figure 5] It was the first construction completed at the site, enabling him to conceptualize and resolve many of the design issues of the garden and its pavilions (Saito 1997, 152). While virtually all of the discussions of the Brion project in the Scarpa literature tend to focus on what is contained *inside* its walls, the landscape *outside* the walls was equally important to Scarpa. Scarpa incorporated various devices throughout the garden complex to prompt the viewer to look beyond its walls, not in a general way, but to specific objects or places in the landscape. The island pavilion is the most conspicuous example of this practice.

The Veneto landscape that Scarpa desired was not the actual Veneto landscape which, by the late 1960s and early 1970s, had already been subjected to unchecked development. By constructing highly selective views of the Veneto landscape beyond the garden's wall, Scarpa prompted the visitor to make connections between foreground and background, culture and history, the Veneto as physical place and as idea. Without the "editing" effect of the walls that surround the Brion enclave, Scarpa could not have constructed the views he desired.

Unlike Scarpa's architectural restorations, however, his process of landscape instauration in the Brion project did not require the physical alteration of the surrounding landscape, rather it changed the manner in which the landscape is viewed. By enclosing the Brion enclave with a continuous wall and delimiting the two perspectival station points on the island – one

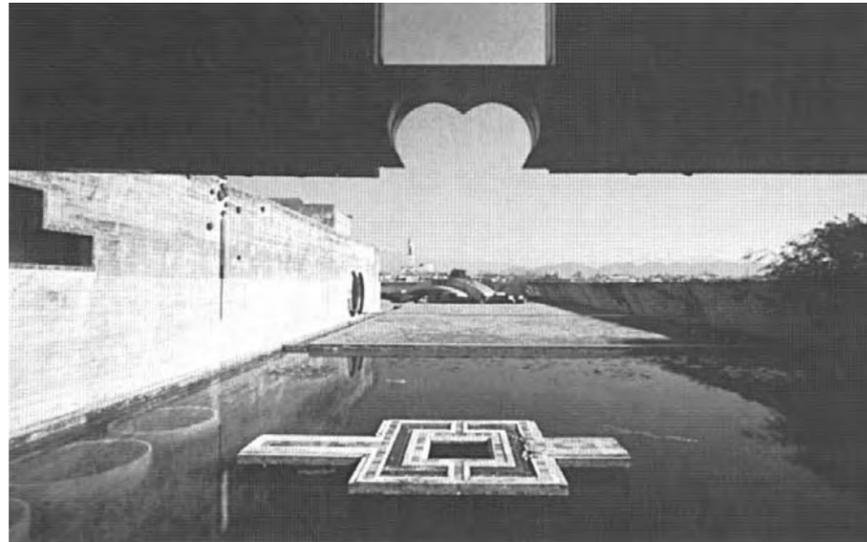


15.7

Claustral wall, Brion sanctuary, San Vito di Altivole. (Photo: Author)

15-8

View from sitting position, island pavilion, Brion sanctuary, San Vito di Altivole. (Photo: Author)



seated and the other standing – Scarpa reconstructed images of both a *hortus conclusus* and an idealized image of the Veneto landscape as a *locus amoenus*. One of the requisites of this kind of pastoral landscape – the site of sacred and profane love – is the absence of utilitarian and sometimes quotidian buildings of any kind (Rosand 1992, 162). Viewed from the concrete seat, the garden appears to be wrapped by a continuous wall. [Figure 6] Beyond the wall lies the distant Dolomites and a single tower – a view very similar to a Cézanne-inspired landscape that Scarpa drew forty years earlier, about the time he gave up on the idea of being a painter [Frontispiece].

To obtain the other primary view that Scarpa constructed from the island, one must move from a seated to a standing position, with knees slightly bent, looking through the binocular viewfinder (like the nude in the drawing). From this position alone one can align the horizontal bottom of the *involucrum* with the top of the claustral wall, deleting all of the surrounding landscape, save those objects isolated in the viewfinder [Figure 7]. One of these objects is, like the view framed by Scarpa’s addition to the Gipsoteca Canoviana, the *rocca* of Asolo.

A very similar view of Asolo appears in the background of the *Sleeping Venus*, begun by Giorgione and completed by Titian. In the painting, the hilltop *rocca* of Asolo and the castle of Queen Cornaro (Pignatti 1994, 248) are represented behind the nude and reclining Venus just as the mandorla-shaped mountains in Titian’s *Presentation* dominate the view behind the body of the Virgin Mary, enclosed in a mandorla of light. In the *Sleeping Venus*, the recumbent body of the nude seems to oscillate between an idealized goddess and an eroticized courtesan, between body-as-object and body-as-landscape, between a distant and unattainable paradise



15-9

View from standing position (through “viewfinder”), island pavilion, Brion sanctuary, San Vito di Altivole. (Photo: Author)

and a singularly sensual and attainable experience.

The views of the Veneto landscape from the island pavilion provoke a process of recovery, the whole of which has been forever lost, but the details of which persist, piece by piece, as if in a dream. In the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, one of the many texts with which Scarpa seemed preoccupied during the design of the Brion project, Poliphilo dreams that he and Polia arrive at the island together. Yet, the glass door and narrow passageway to the private island in the Brion sanctuary is wide enough to permit only one body to pass at a time. Following Scarpa’s prompts – “*spostare a destra...*” – one follows a somnabulatory path: one dreams alone and awakens, like Poliphilo, alone, but with the memory of a complex landscape in which both carnal and divine love are the object, and the viewing body is the subject.

Conclusion

The shift in bodily position encouraged by the prospects on the meditation island signifies far more than the pictorial reconstruction of oneiric or eroticized landscapes. The visitor’s apprehension of the Brion garden involves both the construction of specific views and the absence of others; it involves both a *conceptual* body and the *physical* body of the visitor. The movement indicated by the female nude in the elevation drawing, for example, recalls the kind of bending motion prompted at all of the critical thresholds in the Brion enclave. At the entrance to the island pavilion, however, the visitor enters upright and alone, through an opening in the *involucrum* that corresponds to human proportions. Yet, to obtain the prospect of the claustral garden and idealized pastoral landscape, visitors must reenact the bending motion one final time. Bowing to the level of the viewing device, or resting on the concrete seat, visitors adjust their bodies to the position prompted by the architecture to find the views

constructed by the architect.

Unlike the arcosolium, the funeral chapel and the family pavilion – all of which are thematically associated with death – the island pavilion is for the living. As if to signify this, Scarpa sketched a couple in the midst of coitus in the margin of one of his drawings of the pavilion. Although sexual climax is also a metaphor for death (*petit mort*), in Scarpa's drawings for this project one finds less a contemplation on death than a complex, layered study of the interaction of the living body with the lively art of building. Scarpa's drawings of bodies in the Brion project express the mimetic program of the garden architecture in the richly layered context of the Veneto's landscape and culture. His drawings for the island pavilion, the fortress-like perimeter wall, and the propylaeum indicate that the mechanics of vision and the construction of specific views are critical to the garden's perceptual program. More than simply representing the static image of vision at work, however, Scarpa's drawings are themselves viewing devices of a sort. In them one can see the architect at work, mimetically interpreting the form and movement of the human body in a culturally constructed landscape.

While Scarpa has fabricated these elaborate views prompting references to landscapes and bodies from 16th-century paintings, this should not be interpreted as a nostalgic attempt to construct a naïve or scenographic landscape. Scarpa does not attempt to connect the viewer directly and physically with these ideal images. It is only through our separation from them – thus by very modern means – that we become aware of them at all.

The Brion sanctuary ought not to be reduced to either a simple parody of Poliphilo and his lost Polia, Martial Canteral's garden with its weird and wonderful floating bodies, or the distant and obtuse images of Titian's courtesans laid out like the Dolomites made flesh. These are, in part, the various layers of meaning with which Scarpa worked towards more fundamental issues in this and his other projects. The Brion sanctuary is not about the *body-as-object* or the *body-as-other*; it is about how *our bodies*, not simply as sensing organs or viewing devices, but as sentient beings can fully engage in culturally specific constructs, vegetal and mineral, landscape and building. This is a lesson that, arguably, seems to have become peripheral in the practice of architecture during both Scarpa's lifetime and, perhaps, our own. It is an issue to which Scarpa constantly returned in his drawings and built works. By placing the sign of the mandorla, Scarpa's personal sign, at the navel of his garden-as-body, he wrote himself into the telling of this collection of stories in such a way that he constructed a labyrinth from which not even he could escape. Consequently, Scarpa's body is also here. It is a permanent part of these stories, buried in the margins of this place, like so many of the marginal drawings on his ponderous and much-pondered-over design studies. The Brion sanctuary is a teaching place; it reminds us of how one can engage more fully in a world that is constantly finding more efficient and enticing ways to deflect and distance the sentient body



15.10
Sleeping Venus, Titian. (© Gemaldegalerie, Dresden, from Kenneth Clark, *Landscape into Art*)

with visually consumable icons. The manner in which Scarpa prompts the visitor to engage in the Brion sanctuary at every turn, at every threshold, helps to resist the temptation to distance one's body from the experience of place.

Ennio Brion recounts that Scarpa claimed to be designing the Brion project even in his sleep (Saito 1997, 152), fulfilling Gio Ponti's aphorism that gardens should be based not on designs, but on dreams (Ponti 1957, 157-158). The Brion sanctuary demonstrates that it may be possible and even desirable to dissolve the distinction between the world we dream and the one in which we dwell, or, in the case of Scarpa and the Brion sanctuary, between desiring landscapes and landscapes of desire. It may be mere happenstance that, at the end of the circuit through the Accademia in Venice, one can view simultaneously, Jacobello Albergno's painting of a mandorla enclosing the body of God the father and Titian's *Presentation of the Virgin Mary* with its mandorla-shaped mountains. Or it may be yet another example of how body, landscape, and physical movement often combine in Scarpa's work to produce moments such as the view from the former *Albergo* of *Santa Maria della Carità* and the view from the island pavilion in the Brion enclave. These moments that Scarpa frames are windows into a human dimension of architectural production that intentionally obscures the distinction between bodies and landscape, or as Johannes Wilde explained, where "figure and surrounding are inseparable."

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(Footnotes)

¹ Citation adapted from the Lorna Maher translation. See Roswitha Stewering, “The Relationship between World, Landscape, and Polia in the Hypermotomachia Poliphili,” translated by Lorna Maher, Word and

Image, vol. 14, nos. 1 & 2 (January-June, 1998) 6. Emphasis added. Also see (Colonna 1968, 233-234).

² “Desire” for Scarpa was a concept and not simply a state of being. As a concept it was closely aligned with and influenced by surrealism and the erotic. The full story of this influence is outside the scope of this paper (Dodds 2000).

³ Numerous tombs bear the name Brion in the public cemetery of San Vito di Altivole, attesting to the family’s longstanding ties to this rural region. Brion was the founder of the Brion-Vega electronics company, a leading Italian post-war producer of consumer goods made to modern industrial design standards.

⁴ Scarpa’s and Ennio Brion’s stories regarding the acquisition of the site differ (Scarpa 1989, 17; Brion 1997, 151).

⁵ Scarpa claimed that allocating the cypress grove as a burial ground for local clergy was a way of assuaging the local criticism of the immodest scale of the private burial site(Scarpa 1989, 20). No local clergy have ever been interred there. For the symbolic use of plants in garden see (Seddon 1991). Roses in particular had a special significance for Scarpa and were used in a number of locations including in the “floating” labyrinth in the reflecting pool (Pietropoli interview, May 1997). The significance of the rose is associated with “the garden of Eros and he Paradise of Dante (Cirlot 1962, 263). A drawing of roses in the “floating” planter is one of the last sketches Scarpa made before leaving for Japan in November 1978 (Pietropoli interview, Rovigo, May 1997).

⁶ Scarpa’s use of “borrowed views” was largely influenced by his study of Chinese Classical gardens. Scarpa owned numerous books on oriental gardens including a copy of Sirén’s book on Chinese gardens (Sirén 1949). Sirén included a number of English translations of extracts from Yüan Yeh, the treatise on gardening from the Ming period in which the idea of “borrowed views” was introduced to Chinese garden literature.

⁷ Across its open and tree-lined space, one could see from the loggia a framed view of rural fields through a small break in the line of buildings that edge the slow moving water of the canalized Fiume Bacchiglione

⁸ “Ci vorrebbe …neppure un Dio inventerebbe una base Attica Greca, perché solo quella è bella. Tutto il resto sono diventate scorie, perfino quelle di Andrea Palladio (Scarpa 1978)!”

⁹ The landscape dimension of Scarpa’s architectural production is beyond the scope of this paper (Dodds 2000).

¹⁰ In the 16th-century it was far easier to see the Dolomites from Venice than it is today due to the manufactured haze of agriculture and industry. John Ruskin reportedly ended each day in Venice with a walk to the *Fondamenta Nuove* from which he watched the Dolomites reflect the last day’s light. Scarpa owned a number of Ruskin’s works, including *The Stones of Venice*, and often quoted Ruskin’s romantic observations of the city (Pietropoli interview, May 1997).

¹¹ “Viewing body,” is a term coined by Jonathan Crary to describe the mechanization of vision that occurred during the 19th-century in western Europe(Crary 1991, 73). Scarpa’s intention was the inverse of this – that is to engage the sentient body through both the construction of views and the manipulation of the body of the viewer.

¹² “No, non è vero, non è vero, io stesso mi confesso, continuo a insistere dicendo che avrei sufficiente ..la mia vita, un critico eventuale, uno studioso sul mio lavoro scoprisse le intenzioni che io ho sempre avuto: un’enorme volontà di essere dentro la tradizione, ma senza fare i capitelli e le colonne!” (Scarpa 1978)

¹³ Also complicit in this is the longstanding tradition of gendering both nature and Venice as feminine (Soper 1985; Tanner 1992).

¹⁴ Giorgione and Titian used female models who were ostensibly courtesans, underscoring the confluence of a feminized landscape and erotic desire (Soper 1995).

¹⁵ Also see (Reynolds 1961, 120-126). [1778]

¹⁶ Etienne-Louis Boullée, “Architecture, essai sur l’art,” in Helen Rosenau, Boullée & Visionary Architecture, translated by Sheila de Vallée (London: Academy Editions, 1976): 88

¹⁷ In the manner of the great connoisseur of painting, Giovanni Morelli, Scarpa, understood that to fully appreciate the authenticity of a work, it was necessary to study intensely its details. Morelli, a native of Verona, was a physician and anatomist who owned a collection of paintings in Bergamo, his adopted home (Wind 1964, 32-51). Morelli’s work as an adjudicator of the authenticity and attribution of paintings would have been well known to Scarpa, if for no other reason than it was Morelli who attributed the *Sleeping Venus* to Giorgione. Prior to this, it had been catalogued in the Dresden gallery as a copy of a (lost) painting by Titian executed by Sassoferrato (Wind, 1964, 38). Edgar Wind discusses this

in, *Art and Anarchy* (Wind 1964), an Italian translation of which Scarpa owned.

¹⁸ Bembo’s poem was yet another textual source for Giorgione’s and Titian’s landscapes (Lagerlöf 1990, 7).

¹⁹ Arrigo Rudi, interview, Verona, May, 1997. Perhaps the first painting that Scarpa saw from the Venetian School in which mandorla-shaped mountains dominate the background was Bartolomeo Montagna’s *La Vergine in trono con il Bambino e i Santi Giovanni, Bartolomeo, Fabiano e Sebastiano*. Scarpa may have known the painting as a young boy in Vicenza but certainly knew it later in life. The painting, formerly installed above the altar of the church of San Bartolomeo, it is now in the Museo Civico, Vicenza.

²⁰ See “Carlo Scarpa, Ampliamento della Gipsoteca Canoviana a Possagno (1956-57),” Casabella continuità (Number 222, 1958): 9-14. A photograph on page 11 shows the framed view of the rocca at Asolo that is no longer visible.

²¹ Although he often tried, Scarpa was never able to find another apartment in Asolo, due largely to the city’s popularity with wealthy expatriates, a tradition started by the British in the late 19th-century.

²² Aldo Businaro kept a separate apartment on the top floor of his villa for the use of the Scarpa’s. The vista from the balcony includes an unobstructed view of Monselice’s Monte Ricco (Businaro interview, April 1997).

²³ This text has been transcribed (and translated) directly from the recording of the lecture (Pietropoli collection, 1997). The author thanks Architetto Giorgio Galletti for assistance in the transcription.

²⁴ Scarpa owned French (Roussel 1965) and Italian language editions of *Locus Solus*. Implied references to *Locus Solus* appear throughout the Brion project, such as Scarpa’s desire to create a pool of water beneath the arcosolium so that the sarcophagi would seem to float in the liquid (Saito 1997, 152-153). Scarpa settled for covering the underside of the “bridge” with tiles in varying hues of blue, green, and yellow that simulate the effect of the reflection of water on the bridge’s underside. Other elements in the garden that refer to the playful aspect of Roussel’s garden are the glass door and the musical steps that lead to what was to have been the water-filled arcosolium. See Philippe Duboy (Duboy 1975) and Marco Frascari (Frascari 1985). Frascari reports that Scarpa wrote “locus solus” on a number of his design studies for the Brion project and confided that he often identified with the story’s protagonist (Frascari interview, via internet, January 2000).

²⁵ “MONUMENTI IN MEMORIAM IOSEPHI BRION AB HONORIA VXORE FILIISQVE FACTI HIS CARTIS CONTINENTVR IMAGINES (Scarpa 1977).”

²⁶ In *Mimesis as Make-Believe*, Kendall Walton explains that objects or views that act as “prompters” encourage one to “see” things that otherwise one would not have imagined (Walton 1990, 21-28).

²⁷ The photograph was taken by Guido Pietropoli (Pietropoli interview February 1999).

²⁸ The other entrance to the sanctuary, from the northwest, is coded as secondary, largely serving the enclave’s funereal program.

²⁹ See Stewering 1998, p. 6.

³⁰ Marco Frascari suggests that when Scarpa places himself in a drawing, he signifies the importance of the location (Frascari, 1987).

³¹ There are a number of key design elements that code the Brion garden as Venetian. Beyond the combination of walling and prato, the grillwork in the northeast corner is a typically Venetian device that is both decorative and permits air movement in the enclosure, something that is crucial to an enclosed garden in Venice. On a number of occasions Scarpa implicitly underscored the metaphorical association of the Brion enclave with the idea of Venice as a garden in the midst of the sea (Hunt 1981), variously referring to the surrounding fields as “un mare,” and “a great plane of water” (Pietropoli interview 1997; Scarpa 1979, 50).

³² Scarpa expressly used 11 (the sum of the number of characters in his name) and 5.5 as a proportional numbering system in the design of the Brion sanctuary as well as in other projects (Scarpa 1978, Frascari 1991, Frampton 1995, 312-314). C. G. Jung implicitly connects mountains and the mandorla shape with the union of 1 and 1 (11) and the alchemical tradition of the Jewish Maria Prophetissa in which upper and lower worlds unite (Jung 1968, 160)).

³³ Scarpa’s drawings and the manner in which he clad the underside of the arch in tiles the color of which simulates the reflective effects of water indicate that in Scarpa’s mind, the arcosolium was a water element. This explains why the source of the water in the reflecting pool emanates from the arcosolium.