



Yale University, School of Architecture

Process and Theme in the Work of Carlo Scarpa
Author(s): Giuseppe Zambonini
Source: *Perspecta*, Vol. 20 (1983), pp. 21-42
Published by: [The MIT Press](#) on behalf of *Perspecta*.
Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1567064>
Accessed: 10/06/2014 15:53

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Yale University, School of Architecture and The MIT Press are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Perspecta*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

Process and Theme in the Work of Carlo Scarpa



Cimitero Brion; San Vito di
Altivole, 1970–72.

... and then, one day,
these words with no sound
that we derived from you,
fed on weariness and silence,
will come to a brotherly heart
well seasoned with the salt of Greece.
Eugenio Montale

day of San Carlo, November 4th, their common name-day. However, the ceremony could not take place on that day because of student unrest in the school, so Scarpa proposed to wait until his return from Japan. He died five days before this new date.²

1

Aldo Businaro, Scarpa's client and travelling companion, recalls, during a December 1981 interview, Scarpa quoting to him the end of a lyric by Eugenio Montale, *We Never Know* . . . , after which Scarpa also added a comment.

When my time comes, cover me with these words, because I am a man of Byzantium who came to Venice by way of Greece.¹

Carlo Scarpa

Another episode is the lawsuit brought against him for illegally practising the profession of architecture, the culmination of a campaign of denigration and persecution caused by the increasing attention given to his artistic activity and particularly triggered by his winning of the 1956 Olivetti Prize for architecture. Scarpa was eventually absolved after nine years of humiliation and pain in which both the judicial system and the profession were forced to redefine the distinction between technical and artistic activities.³

2

From a December 1981 interview with Arrigo Rudi, Architect, who was a former student, teaching assistant and later collaborator with Scarpa on the design of the Banca Popolare di Verona which he completed after Scarpa's death.

In the winter of 1978, Carlo Scarpa died at the age of seventy two in Sendai, Japan, following an accidental fall from a hotel staircase. His departure left an emptiness not only among the many generations of architects whom he trained in Venice, but also in the professional world in which he played a unique role.

3

"Materiali su Carlo Scarpa," *Architetti Verona*, No. 4/5, February 1980, pp. 20–33.

Neither schooled nor licensed as an architect, he maintained an aristocratic detachment from the common praxis of profession. Although in 1926 he received the diploma of Professor of Architectural Drawing from the Accademia di Belle Arti of Venice, he became an assistant at the Istituto Universitario di Architettura without ever submitting himself to either formal education or exams.

Five years after his death, Carlo Scarpa is now finally internationally recognized as a true master whose genius and labor provides unlimited material for study. His unconventional methods of making space in relation to culture and society gave impetus to the construction of highly complex architectural forms. In this article the relationship between the production process, (design and construction) and some of the essential themes which are inseparably linked in Scarpa's built work will be investigated.

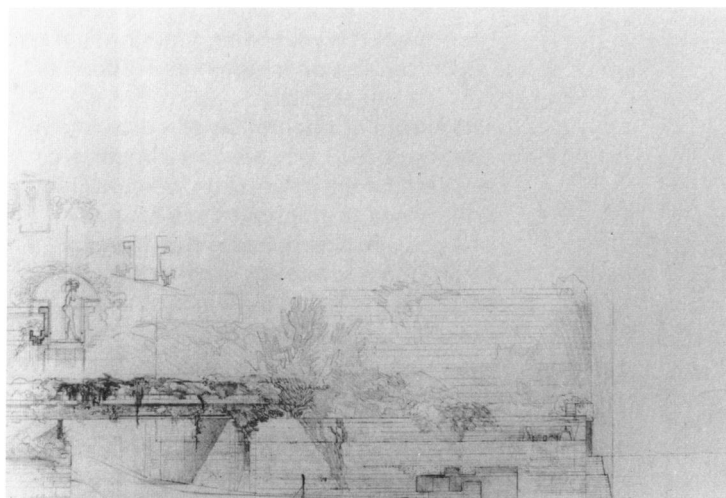
His distance from the ideological debates of the sixties and his proud individualism made him either enthusiastically supported or coldly rejected. He was destined to be treated with suspicion and dismissed as an outsider from the general debate while he was alive, and then acclaimed as a timeless master after his death.

An essential part of the production process is the act of drawing, as a search for line quality which embodies the solution of functional and technical problems. His drawings, exceptionally captivating to the viewer, are endless episodes of exploration of his own mind and memory; but are never more than instruments of production.

Two highly uncommon episodes mark his relationship to both the academic and professional worlds. Although his career as a professor reached its zenith when he became the Director of the IUAV for a short time, he never received the doctorate degree, *ad honoris causa*, which was long due him and which he was to receive upon his return from Japan. No one had the courage to propose an *ad honorem*, or a *post-mortem* degree since, considering the institution's reluctance to do it when he was alive, it could have been interpreted as a mockery after his death. Ironically, the ceremony did not occur prior to his departure due to one of his typical gentlemanly acts. Answering a request by Carlo Aymonino, Director of the IUAV, to set a date for the ceremony, he chose the

Scarpa's details are too often misinterpreted as exercises in virtuosity partially because of the artificiality of current architectural aesthetics which can isolate image from purpose therefore reversing the process of cause and effect. The complexity of his work is the product of a deep understanding of materials, their elaboration into artifacts and the capacity to reinvent them by extrapolating the work of a few craftsmen with whom he had a lifelong relationship.

His *venetianitas* (Venetian heritage) is the polarity which allows a tense participation with rich and foreign references intended



1
Zentner House addition;
Zurich, 1964-68. Drawing of a
street elevation.

6
Sergio Los, *Carlo Scarpa, Architetto Poeta* (Venice: Cluva, 1967), p. 17.

4
Manfredo Tafuri, "Cultura e Fantasia di Carlo Scarpa," *Paese Sera*, December 3, 1978.

5
Tafuri, *Paese Sera*.

7
Los, *Carlo Scarpa*, p. 17.

as instruments of meditation and occasions for invention. Manfredo Tafuri has observed that, ". . . from Venice, Scarpa derives a perverse dialectic between celebration of form and the scattering of its parts, between the will to represent and the evanescence of the represented, between the research of certainties and the awareness of their relativity. . . ."4 The enormous influence of the work of Frank Lloyd Wright that the young Scarpa avidly studied from books has been extensively pointed out (figure 1). Tafuri writes:

The elective affinity between Wright and Scarpa rests on a common relish for play; rich of prophetic valence for the first, more hermetic but not less elusive for the second. Play is also a shield to the overflowing of autobiography. Playing, the artisan decomposes his language only to deceive the spectator, to drag him into a labyrinthic universe of signs of which the difficulty of their deciphering is softened by a misleading hedonism.⁵

Scarpa's hedonism is not only self-celebration and autobiography, but also the claim for ironic and critical notations in which neither the client nor the passerby is spared. Hovering above his hieratic gestures is a sort of private pleasure, a mysterious behavior in which secrecy is the final trait of the selfish artist.

This article also investigates the production of meaning in which the selection of essential themes integrates other artistic expressions which Scarpa measured by his Venetian sensitivity and his precise knowledge of its tradition.

"I want to see, therefore I draw."⁶

Discussion of an idea and its drawing were for Carlo Scarpa simultaneous operations of conception and verification of it. He was open to accepting an idea proposed by a collaborator, reserving the right to demonstrate that either it could not be developed or that he could work on it and give it back totally reinvented because of his capacity of penetrating towards its deepest layers to understand its beginning, its embryo, so that he could make it his own again and transfer it into something different than what was proposed.

Drawing was always a projection of a program to be developed into construction; it never became an end in itself; even his most magnificent drawings were the instruments of knowledge.

Surveying would allow understanding of a form repeating the steps of its first creator. Design process is becoming aware of reality both in the stating of the problem and in its solution. Each solution is not an idea contained by a form, the form itself is an idea. The thinking of solutions is the thinking of form.⁷

Thinking of solutions in architecture can only be a process composed of images, which, initially produced by intuition, must eventually be organized in sequence and compared. Scarpa explained the process to his students during a lecture in Venice:

I want to see things, I don't trust anything else. I place things in front

8
Los, *Carlo Scarpa*, p. 17.

of me, on the paper, so I can see them. I want to see, therefore I draw. I can see an image only if I draw it.⁸

The choice of orientation of a drawing in relation to his body becomes important, as it will be the orientation which will be maintained throughout the execution of a project. Scarpa faces the drawing as though it is already architecture, with certain parts to his right and others to his left.

To each phase of the design process correspond not only a scale but a technique. Massing studies and the initial planning occur with the use of charcoal on large sheets of very heavy paper which are pinned to a wood board, moistened and then allowed to dry. This is none other than the traditional Beaux Arts technique of the *stretcher*. Large gestures of the hand, which sometimes bring a knowledge that the mind might eventually recognize, create a sign of extreme synthesis and concentration. The charcoal can be easily brushed away with the hand thus allowing for fast change and metamorphosis of the drawing. (figure 2). Increasingly harder grades of pencil line will mark the evolution of the process in a meticulous optical evolution while colored pencils are used to codify sometimes complex space representations where not only what is *seen* is shown, but also what is at the back of the observer, as well as what is beyond the object represented. This method allows for control over the total dynamics of the space and explains the wealth of solutions in alignment, penetration, layering and dialectic juxtaposition of Scarpa's spatial elements. When a decision is reached and a com-

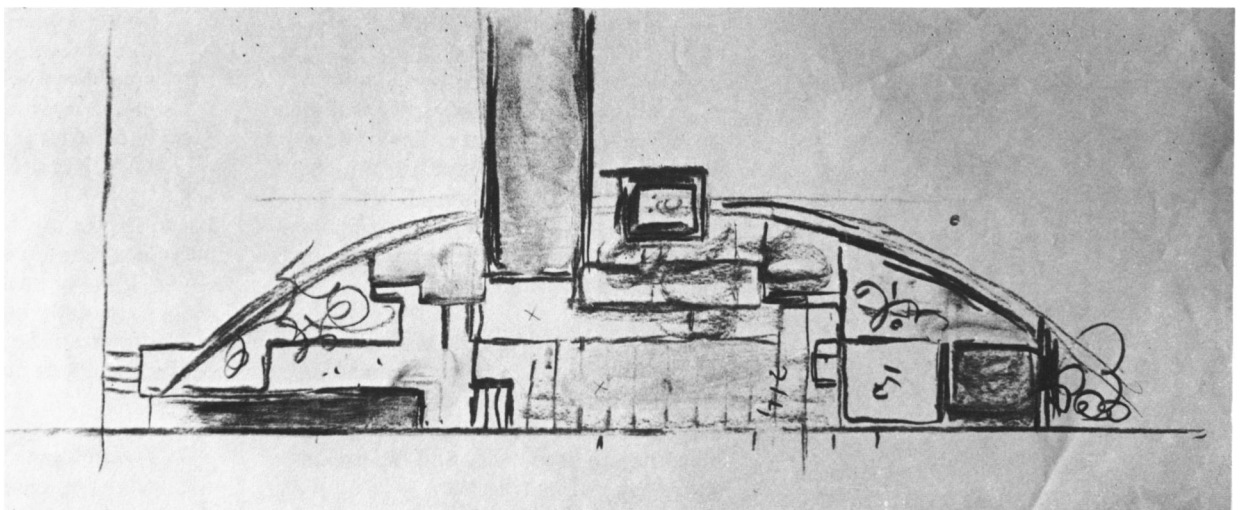
mitment is transferred to the paper, Scarpa uses a line of Indian ink, diluted with water, so as not to disturb the softness of the pencil line. Watercolor and washes are often added to indicate sections, saturate a plane or even to white-out an area so that he can add to it more layers of study (figure 3). The original *cartoni*, which Scarpa used to call the cardboard flats, are the basis for hundreds of additional drawings which found constant and safe reference in the cardboards. This material allows for infinite erasing and re-drawing of plans, elevations and sections without losing sight of those previously conquered. In the same visual and physical field different solutions are tested in an endless permutation. The drawing becomes the history of the project and a diary of emotions and first sensations where an interior reality perceived immediately evolves through the drawing into the constructed event.

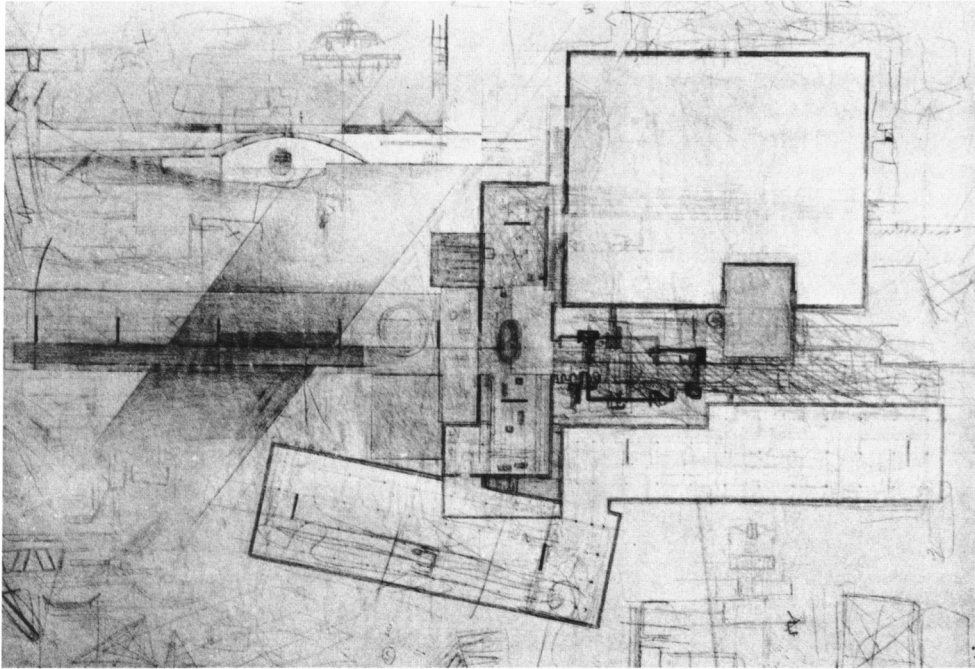
In Scarpa's architectural production the relationships between the whole and the parts and the relationship between craftsmanship and draftsmanship allow a direct substantiating in *corpore vivi* of the identity of the process of perception and production, that is, the union of the construction with the construing (figures 4, 5).⁹

It is through drawing that every figure-producing detail and joint is isolated and determined in a system of codes which goes back to projects executed years before. Former projects are used as texts for endless future work in which the same element is reinvented and given new and multiple significations.

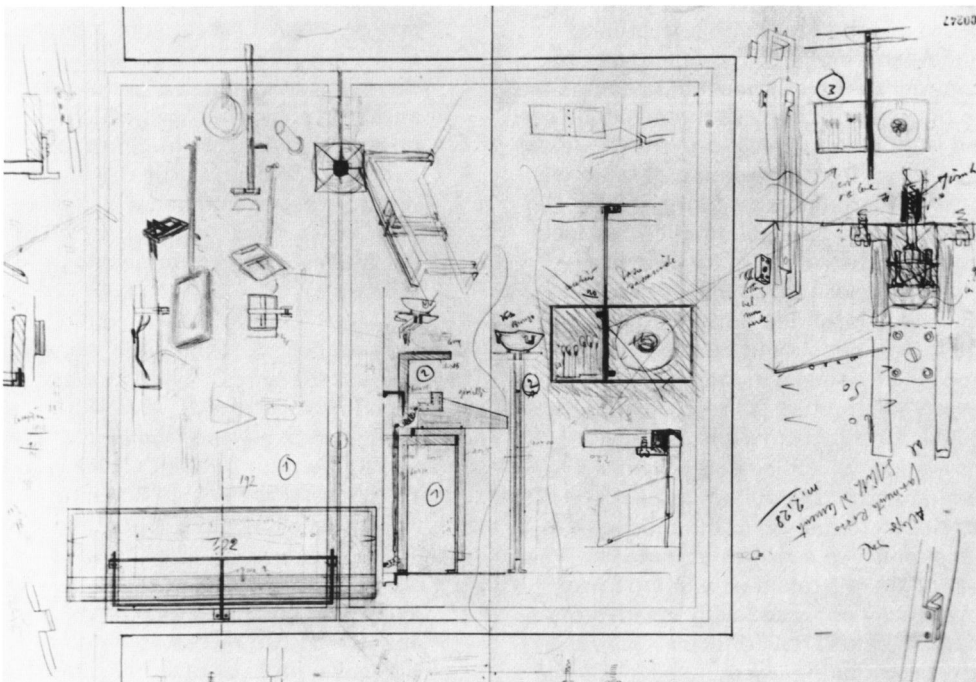
9
Marco Frascari, "The Tell-the-Tale Detail," to be published in *Via 7* (Cambridge: MIT Press).

2
Banca Popolare di Verona: 1973-78. Sketch for the exedra-garden.





3
Plan and elevation study for
the Italian Pavilion at the 31st
Venice Biennale; 1962-63.
Colored pencils and tempera
on ozalid paper.



5
Museo Civico di Castelvecchio;
Longobard bronze basin.



4
Museo Civico di Castelvecchio;
Verona, 1964. Sacello.
Supports for the exhibits found
in Longobard tombs. Colored
pencils on paper.

12
Bruno Zevi, "Un Piranesi Nato nel'900," *L'Espresso*,
January 15, 1981, p. 143.

13
Marco Frascari, "Façade Design, an Ancient Wisdom
of Italians," to be published in *Diados* 6.

10
Carlo Luigi Ragghianti, "La Crosera de Piazza di Carlo
Scarpa," *Zodiac* 4, p. 147.

11
Louis I. Kahn, "Louis Kahn at Rice," *Rice Publications*
No. 4, 1965.

14
Sergio Bettini, "L'Architettura di Carlo Scarpa,"
Zodiac 6, 1960, pp. 175, 187.

All of Scarpa's drawings belong to any of the infinite positions between technical notation and rendering. A drawing might mimic a construction technique and a user behavior, at the same time providing a foresight in the destiny of the object represented, which humanizes it before its realization at full scale and reveals its aging, its becoming in a transcendental time leap. This is the basis for an expression in which:

The understanding of the work of art is an indefinite process, which continuously develops and enriches its own capacity, it is never exhausted because eternal is the flow of life and knowledge of creation.¹⁰

"Ornament is the adoration of the joint."¹¹

An easy criticism, if not a superficial one, of Scarpa's built work is the apparent absence of a unifying structure, at least of a kind that can be communicated and explained. It is true that to understand his spaces one is required to take infinite spatial-temporal steps to repeat and reconstruct all the moments of invention and the discovery of endless themes to be carried from plan to elevation, from building to building, from the joining of materials to the joining of spaces. If there is in Scarpa's work an ideal of unity, that ideal should not be searched for in the perceived composition of the structure, which would tend to be constantly lost and found, but should be sought in the process or perhaps in the *attitude*. The perceived structure is therefore merely a pretext for a *cognitive one*, a structure of knowledge, which instead provides an understanding of the dynamics of space, of its relation to nature, of the mechanical and expressive qualities of material. This may begin to explain why Scarpa was never really obsessed with the idea of completion and how difficult it is to establish at what point any of his work can be understood as *complete* even to the most knowledgeable and attentive observer.

. . . he would not start from a general set-up to focus on structural joints and mouldings, he would reverse the process, attacking with ferocious inventiveness and extraordinary tension of energy each and every detail, in order to make them signifying, in the certainty that from their dialogue and interlacement it

would spontaneously spring the message of the whole.¹²

It has been pointed out that it is in Scarpa's drawings, where the events or episodes emerge in their pregnancy, that one should look for his spirit. Marco Frascari reported that Scarpa followed the practice of inspecting his buildings at night with a flashlight during the time of their construction to verify visually the execution and expression of details in the contrast of light and shadow and that the same technique was used by another Veneto architect, Piranesi. Piranesi, using the light of a candle, would single out *the expression of the fragments*, that is, the details.¹³ The framing of the beam of light would be equivalent to a sheet of drawing paper and again the detail would be placed in a more lifelong development of themes rather than in a limited figural context.

His drawings . . . of an exceptional strength and delicacy, especially for an architect, are full of a repeated and steady research of such episodes: graphic research of a Piranesian kind, which leads form to a degree of quality just short of its realization as architecture, which is never a mirror of them. Since, becoming architecture, the drawings assume responsibilities which in *ancient* architecture were entrusted to the totality of their compositive structure.¹⁴

The cause and effect relationship between the parts and the whole still remains to be established in architecture. A valid juxtaposition to the traditional belief that the plan is the generator in architecture is presented by Marco Frascari when he says that the detail has the role of the generator.

What are the elements of architecture which can be manipulated to achieve a process of signification? A human being who perceives, thinks and conceives undergoes a sequence of processes where the built environment is construed in order to be constructed. Architectural detailing is the result of a process in which there is no taking into account how a house is built, but rather how it is conceived, although, most of the time the two processes are iconic. The architectural detailing is based on a technological set

15
Frascati, Via 7.



6
Palazzo Querini Stampalia;
Venice, 1961-63. Garden
corner detail. Concrete and
white marble.

16
Frascati, Via 7.

7
Front courtyard of Il Palazzetto;
concrete and brick.

8
Roof of the Ottolenghi House;
concrete and brick.



of norms which govern the production of parts, or, rather, the joining of parts, that is, a technique (figure 6).¹⁵

Frascati follows this with a more specific reference to Carlo Scarpa's work:

... construction and *construing* of architecture are both in the detail. Elusive in a traditional dimensional definition, the architectural detail can be defined as the union of construction, the result of *logos* of *teckné*, with *construing*, the result of the *teckné* of *logos*. The *teckné* of the *logos* becomes the manner of production of the detailed design and *logos* of the *teckné*, which is the expression of the Venetian craftsmanship, becomes the dialectical counterpart in the physical generation of the details.¹⁶

Some of Scarpa's details provide a microcosm of formal decisions in which the solution of a specific problem becomes the occasion for a process of reflection over its subject matter and ends up furnishing the user with a more valuable, permanent and poetic insight than what the problem could ever have suggested. In this way we can speak of detailing as joinery, narration, discovery, all of which are a critical approach to history and reveal a creative process of form making, from idea to drawing to object.

In any case, no matter how one decides to begin an analysis of Scarpa's work, inevitably one finds himself involved in a very laborious process, the process of finding and reconstructing all the threads which make up all the implicit and explicit relationships between parts. It is in the tech-

nological discovery that one should search for the key to the solutions of Scarpa's linguistic operations, defining, in this specific case, technology as a selection of solutions to static and decorative problems given in the Veneto hinterland by local craftsmen through the centuries and layered in the customs and culture of the region itself.

Form being before anything else a system of relationships, the attempt of summing up its components, reinvestigating the different levels at which the components interact and how far the interaction is conducted to finally perform a construct of meanings, becomes a way of studying form itself. It is undeniable that the power of Scarpa's work of being text, is not only transferred and evolved from project to project, but applicable to more universal, and commonly sought, architectural design instruments such as scale, proportion, light and textures, or more enigmatic ones such as space-temporality and collective memory.

The merging of two different elements into one plastic event can be suggested by comparing the solutions for the courtyard of a 17th Century villa, the il Palazzetto in Monselice, Padova, (1974-75), for Scarpa's friend, Aldo Businaro, and the roof for the Ottolenghi House in Bardolino, Verona, (1975), completed after Scarpa's death by the architect, Pino Tommasi. The two solutions are almost identical; a series of planes, creased like folded and unfolded paper, of common brick set into concrete. Round platforms placed in the intersections of these creases in the courtyard, become the extrusion of the overscaled columns in the house (figures 7, 8).

9
Cimitero Brion; San Vito di
Altivole, 1970-72. Holywater
font. Carrara marble and
polished brass.



17
William R. Lethaby, *Architecture, Mysticism and
Myth* (London: Persival, 1981). p. 21.

18
Zevi, *L'Espresso*, p. 145.

19
Rudi, interview.

In the introduction to his book, *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth*, William R. Lethaby defines invention as, ". . . a new combination of those images, that have previously gathered and deposited in the memory: nothing comes from nothing. He (the architect) who has laid up no materials can produce no combinations."¹⁷ Scarpa's memory includes the entire artistic production in Europe between the World Wars—Mondrian, Miro, De Stijl—to which he makes constant visual reference, and the work of Frank Lloyd Wright from which he also derived inspiration.

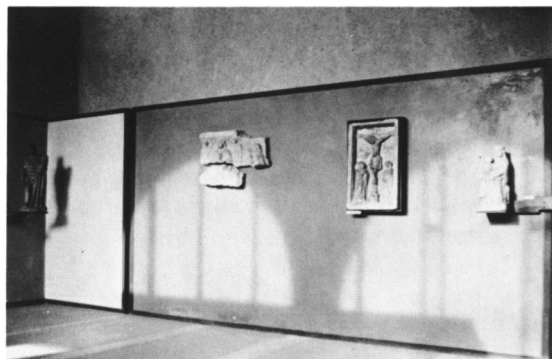
Much more can be derived from Scarpa's *venetianitas* than the exploitation of traditional techniques or of rich and exotic imagery. His production of one of a kind details is, ". . . born in the pleasure of designing which casts aside any bitterness to grant the joy of the trade, of direct and lyrical contact with materials, wood or marble, metal or water (figure 9)."¹⁸

To begin to point out Scarpa's capacity for the integration in one event, not only of knowledge, history and construction techniques, but also of the human potential of his collaborators, we should look at the evolution of color in his typical plaster work. The exquisitely Venetian plastering is a technique in which ingenuity and skill play equal roles and comes from a tradition of which the origin has been lost in time. Scarpa's plaster work has reached the age of plastics without giving up the glossy beauty of a surface in which color is mixed in one body with the plaster to obtain a texture and a light quality that are functions of the tool used to trowel it to a mirror finish and of the ability and eye of the craftsman who uses it. Until

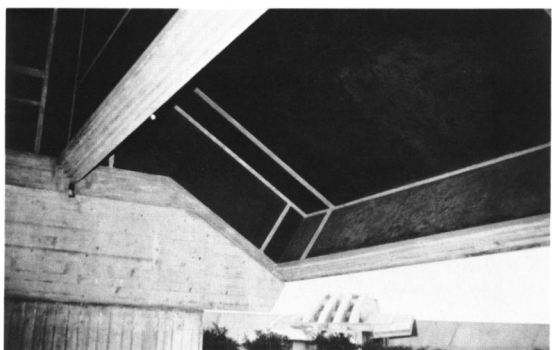
recently, in the renovation of the entrance of the Palazzo Querini Stampalia in Venice, (1961–63), in the interiors of the Museo Civico di Castelvechio di Verona, (1964) and the Cimitero Brion in San Vito di Altivole (1970–72), the colors were inspired by strong earth tones: reds to remember the ground brick powder mixed with the Venetian stucco exteriors (figure 10), blacks to juxtapose depth to the concrete structure framing (figure 11). In the addition to the Banca Popolare di Verona (figure 12), (1973–78), however, the plaster work is marked by a very different influence: all the samples prepared by his lifetime friend and executor of plaster work, Mario De Luigi, were derived from a book on the painter, Mark Rothko. De Luigi, coming from a family of painters, lived his entire life in the same formal climate as Scarpa. The intention, in the willingness to evolve a color character which was imbedded in both of these Venetian men's hearts, was to find, like Rothko, a density, a thickness, a depth beyond the surface of the plaster. These results are achieved without question in the purples, greens and blues of the Banca's surfaces.

There was no great or small painter that Scarpa did not know. He saw Rothko at the Biennale and at Palazzo Grassi. Scarpa was a devourer of books of images, for which he would invest a great deal of money. On this subject he was very stimulating to his students; he would explain how to read a book, not only turn the pages, but to meditate, how to really look and how to make notes. His interlocutors were in the entire histories of architecture, sculpture and painting. The fact that today, in a time of ideological crisis in architecture, one looks at Scarpa, is because of his pragmatism, his experimentalism and the density of his references, which are devoid of cliché and matured in his own experience.¹⁹

It should also be known that the kind of creative relationship that Scarpa developed over the years with each one of his tradesmen and his curiosity for any technical operation will prompt him to require the disassembling of a machine just to understand in depth whether a technological apparatus could have been used for different applications and results than those routinely accepted. Scarpa had a great ability to stimulate and intrigue



10



11

10
Museo Civico di Castelvecchio;
concrete and steel support
panel with white and red
plaster.

11
Cimitero Brion; interior of the
tomb for relatives.

12
Banca Popolare di Verona;
staircase. Steel and blue
plaster.



12

20

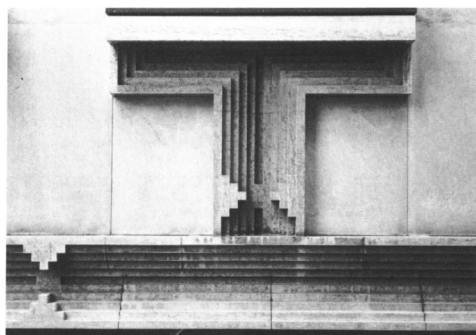
Louis I. Kahn in "Carlo Scarpa," a catalog published by the *Accademia Olimpica* for the occasion of the exhibition of the work of Carlo Scarpa, Vicenza, 1974, colophon.

collaborators, instill in them more confidence in their capacity, better understanding of their own tools and their human potential to finally obtain superior motivation, techniques and quality. This was the typical rapport he developed with the three major trades: marble, steel and woodworkers. It is not by accident that Scarpa's stonework techniques are identical to those used by the gothic builders to erect the most complex façades. Each piece of stone is adjusted and laid out in a horizontal plane and is numbered and transferred to its final position in the façade only after there is absolute certainty that the entire system is precisely fitted and all joints are worked out. Once we accept and justify the lengthy and painstaking process of assembly, it might be surprising to find out how easily Scarpa would accept the extension of the traditional manual dexterity of the craftsman by the use of sophisticated machine techniques. The overscaled stone mouldings of the Banca's façade, similar to those in cast concrete of the Brion Cem-

etry, are here executed mostly by machines (figures 13, 14). Where the machine has to be stopped because, for instance, it cannot cut into a square corner, the stonecutter will intervene and not only complete the machine's work but will also sand and refinish by hand the entire work to bring back the sensitive surface of a handcut stone.

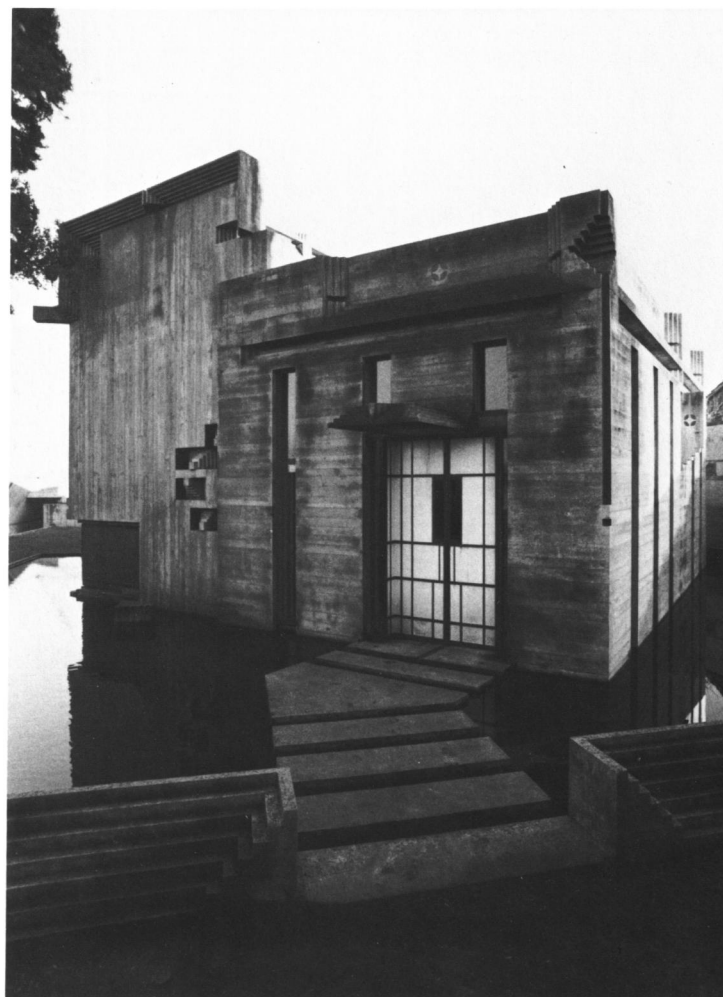
"Design consults nature to give presence to the elements."²⁰

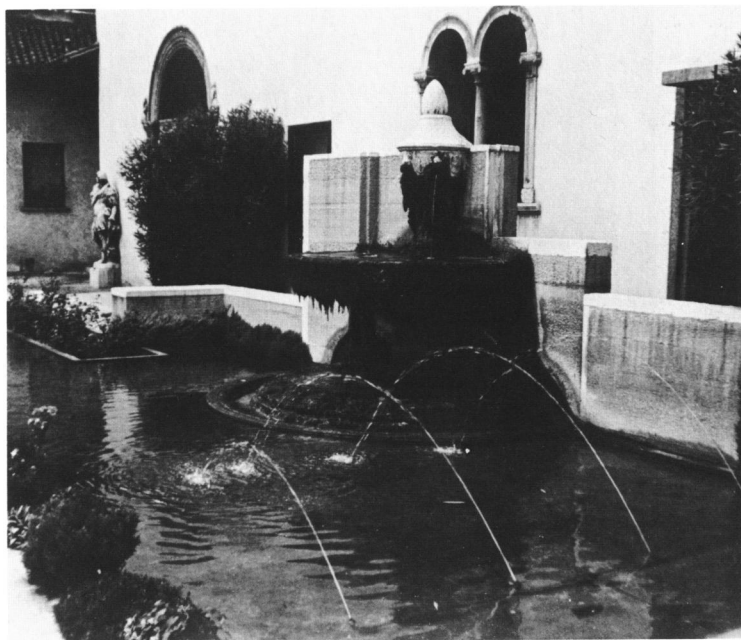
Water as an expressive natural system is, for Carlo Scarpa, more than a pretext for poetic and organic architecture. Water becomes an essential theme used to carry and develop reinvented functions and to manipulate the organization of space. As the theme confronts different historical and contextual situations in each project, a meaning is produced, and meaning inevitably points to the value of appropriateness.



13
Banca Popolare di Verona;
facade detail. Botticino marble.

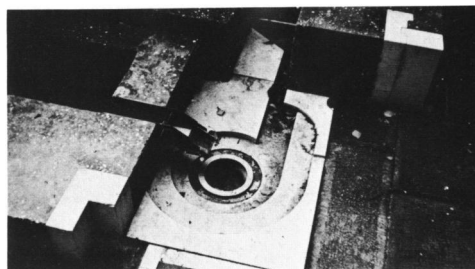
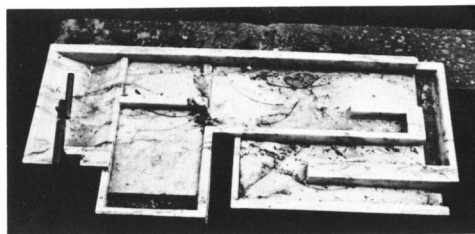
14
Cimitero Brion; elevation of the
chapel.





16

17



18

16
Museo Civico di Castelvecchio;
courtyard fountain.17
Palazzo Querini Stampalia;
detail of the garden water
source. Carved marble.18
Palazzo Querini Stampalia;
detail of fountain drain. Carved
marble.

21
Massimo Scolari, "Considerazioni e Aforismi sul disegno," *Rassegna 9*, March 1982, p. 83.

A construction can be called architecture when it pertains to the truth. What truth is, is difficult to establish: mountains, water and sun are true.²¹

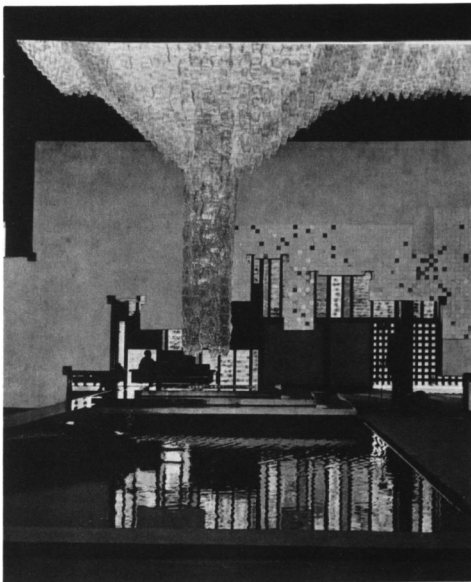
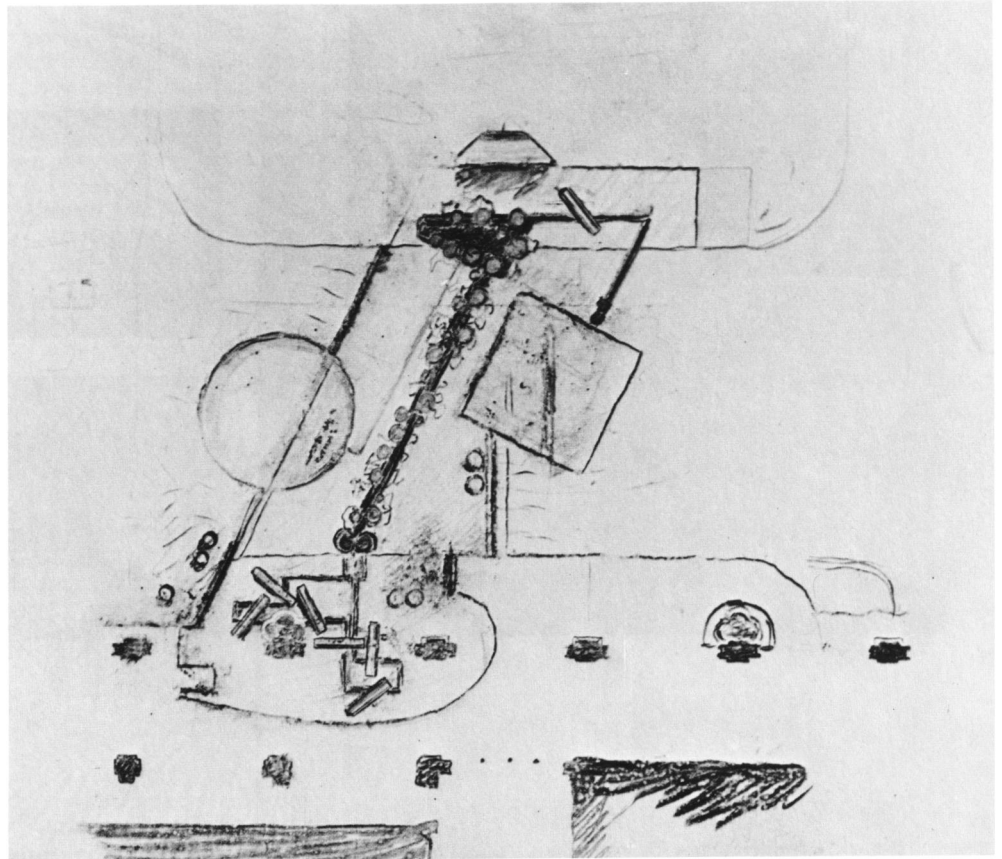
ble and concrete steps going down to the damp and inhospitable outer field (figure 15).

A tension is created by the theme of water in its relation to tradition which leads to additional themes recurrent in Scarpa's work such as the dialectic between pre-existent conditions and new work, between structural support and the exhibition of an object and the evolution of a construction material subjected to new interpretation. These themes find an even stronger expression in the courtyard of the Museum of Castelvecchio. Water is exhibited as a medium of life, a fountain for the thirsty and a magnificent complex in which a medieval street fountain is grafted in a concrete wall providing a background to a shallow pool in which sound, goldfish and flowering plants create an episode of serenity as they explain the natural vital cycle (figure 16). In the garden of the Querini Stampalia, water is used again as a counterpoint to the treatment of the ground floor of the Palazzo. Its source is a small labyrinth carved in marble which suggests the pain of its forced birth (figure 17). It is then channeled through a long trough parallel to the Rio which extends almost the entire length of the garden. It then passes beneath a stone lion that faces the source, and finally disappears into a drain which is magnificently expressive of the idea of vortex (figure 18).

15
Palazzo Querini Stampalia; first
floor. Detail of the protected
walkway.

Water is the medium and the condition for Venice's historical and economical survival through the centuries. The *acqua alta*, or high tide, becomes each November a fastidious counterpoint to the city's life but at the same time reveals in full the true nature of each façade by reflecting under an overcast sky, the symmetry and eurythmy of the windows, arches and balconies. Venice, with its colors attenuated by low light, makes more visible its order of textures, line and mass as reflected by still water. In the restoration of the Palazzo Querini Stampalia, the traditional winter condition of the tidal flooding of the first floor is dealt with a typical Venetian tolerance. Water is allowed to flow through intricate iron gates from the adjacent Rio Santa Maria Formosa. We also witness a typical Scarpa solution: the floor is suddenly disassociated from the walls, it becomes a dry tray of stone-capped concrete with its own boundaries which the visitor would not want to violate in fear of losing protection from the unfriendly water. As he creates the principle, Scarpa adds the exception: if one wants to deliberately trespass the uplifted edge of this field, he will find delicately detailed mar-

19
Studies for the monument to
the victims of a Fascist
bombing; Brescia, 1974-75.
Charcoal and colored pencils
on tracing paper.



20
Veneto Pavilion at the
Italia '61 exhibit; Turin, 1961.
Central pool.

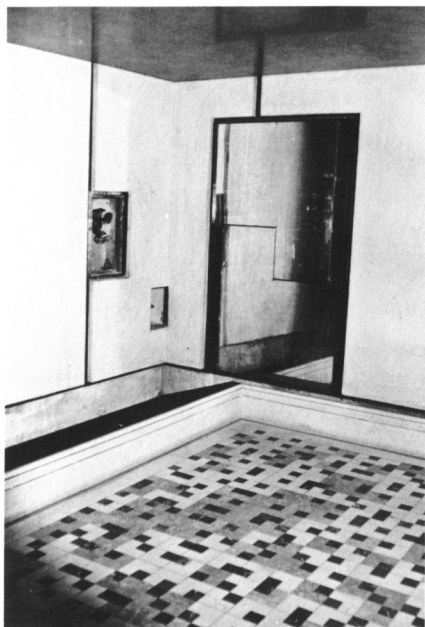
Scarpa gives water a tragic symbolism in the project for a monument to the victims of a 1974 fascist bombing in the Piazza della Loggia in Brescia. In the first solution, water connects a series of truncated columns placed where the bodies were found. Water visibly runs on a bronze trough placed under the Piazza's paving and opens up into a trapezoidal pool close to the position of the victim who was thrown the farthest (figure 19). By moving in a path made of the orthogonal changes of direction, water tends to re-compose the bodies, as represented by columns, from their scattered positions and pull them close to the one at greatest distance. In a successive re-elaboration, less emotional and more meditative, the position of each body is marked by a furrow in the pavement through which water can be seen in motion. The column of the portico arches, torn apart by the explosion, remains an asymmetrical focus of the composition with the laceration in the stone covered with gold leaf as a permanent record of the flash of the explosion.

In the design for the unbuilt new entrance to the IUAV, (1966), Scarpa constructs an absolutely original behavior encouraging people to look at the door. The door is an

ancient portal disconnected from the building. Having discarded the idea of using the door as an entrance because it was too monumental, Scarpa laid the stone piers and arch in a corner of the courtyard inside a pool of water. In this way, water reminds us of the transparency which is consonant to the idea of door.²²

And finally, the theme of water, air and color to which Scarpa is totally attuned is central to the design for the Veneto Pavillion, part of the regional exhibit for the National Italia-61 Centennial Celebration in Turin. The theme assigned to the Veneto region could not have been more appropriate: *The Sense of Color and the Government of Waters*. Scarpa integrates these two natural aspects of his region and creates an environment loaded with emotion, organized around an impluvium and a pool where color and vibrating light interact with water and find their climax in an everchanging play with a section of sky allowed to participate with its full range of daily changes. The central pool, not only multiplies reflections from the chandelier to the entire space, but collects and reveals its outer boundaries of polychromed vertical mosaics (figure 20).

22
Los, *Carlo Scarpa*, p. 58.



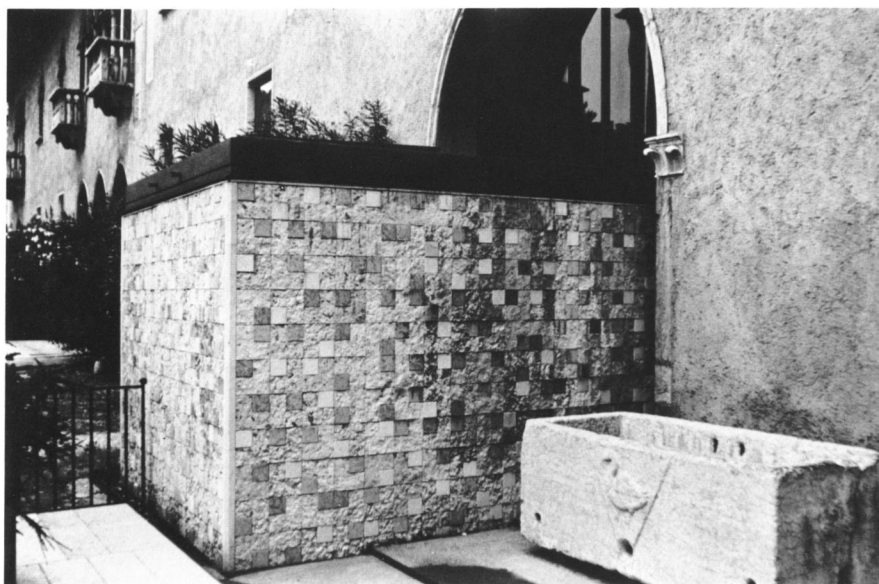
21
Palazzo Querini Stampalia;
entrance floor detail.
Polychromed marble.

The appropriateness of a theme or even the question of what is theme in Carlo Scarpa's work can be cross-referenced to other issues such as the problem of context, his attitude towards tradition and his reinterpretation of history. No matter where one decides to begin an analysis of the work, he will inevitably end up with the task of following and decoding all the interrelationships of Scarpa's formal components especially when they become occasions for development in successive projects (figures 21–23). There is a continuity which is not too difficult to follow in the many experiences in which Scarpa deals with restoration, additions and reuse. Some major episodes are: the project for the Gipsoteca Canoviana in Possagno, Treviso, (1956); the project for the Olivetti Showroom at the Procuratie Vecchie, San Marco, Venice, (1957); and the Querini Stampalia Foundation. These episodes and others all prepare and announce the work done at Castelvecchio. A common characteristic in all of these projects is Scarpa's capacity to select a few topical moments in which to reveal the individual essence of each project as expressed in an inventive, totally fresh solution. To the Possagno project belongs the

surprising simplicity of a window cut into a ceiling dihedron so that light washes the three planes of adjoining walls and ceiling in addition to softly illuminating the white gypsum statues placed into equally white rooms (figure 24). In the Olivetti Showroom there is a complete redefinition of the idea of interior and exterior and its spatial and visual relationship to Piazza San Marco through the Sottoportico, but the crucial condition is the sculpture by Alberto Viani (figure 25).

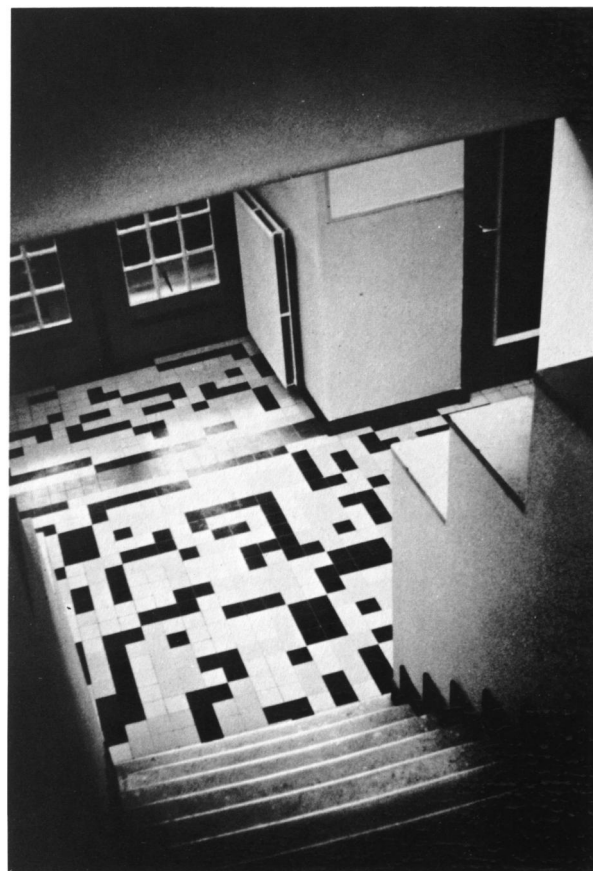
Among the few things that Scarpa told me in presenting his architecture of the Olivetti Showroom is this: that he made it as an environment for the Viani sculpture. It is true and it is not true: or better, the Viani sculpture was to him necessary, and that sculpture only, and the architect in choosing it comprehensively as an indispensable component of his formal elaboration, empowered it, exalted it with a sincere and profound homage from artist to artist, which is very rare, and it helps to impose the exceptional human climate in which the artistic work was thought and developed.²³

23
Regghianti, *Zodiac 4*, pp. 131-132.



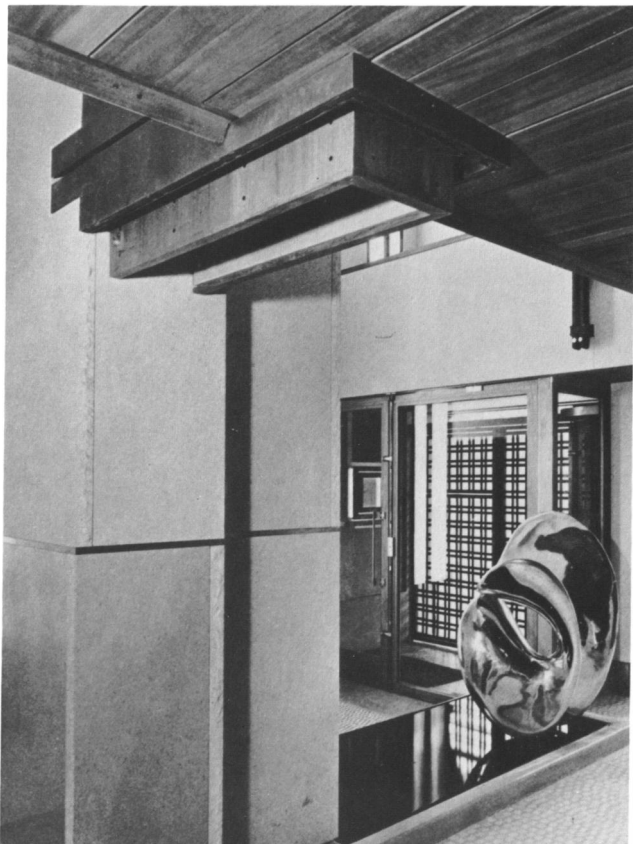
22
Museo Civico di Castelvecchio;
Sacello. Verona Red marble.

23
Theo van Doesburg; De Vonk
Residence, 1917. Design for a
tile floor.





24
Gipsoteca Canoviana in
Possagno, 1956-57. Window
detail.



25
Olivetti Shop; Venice, 1957.
Showroom with sculpture by
Alberto Viani.

27
Banca Popolare di Verona; plan
of the office level.

28
Museo Civico di Castelvecchio;
the monument to Cangrande
della Scala.

24
Frascari, *Diadalo* 6.



26
Banca Popolare di Verona;
view from the Lamberti Tower.

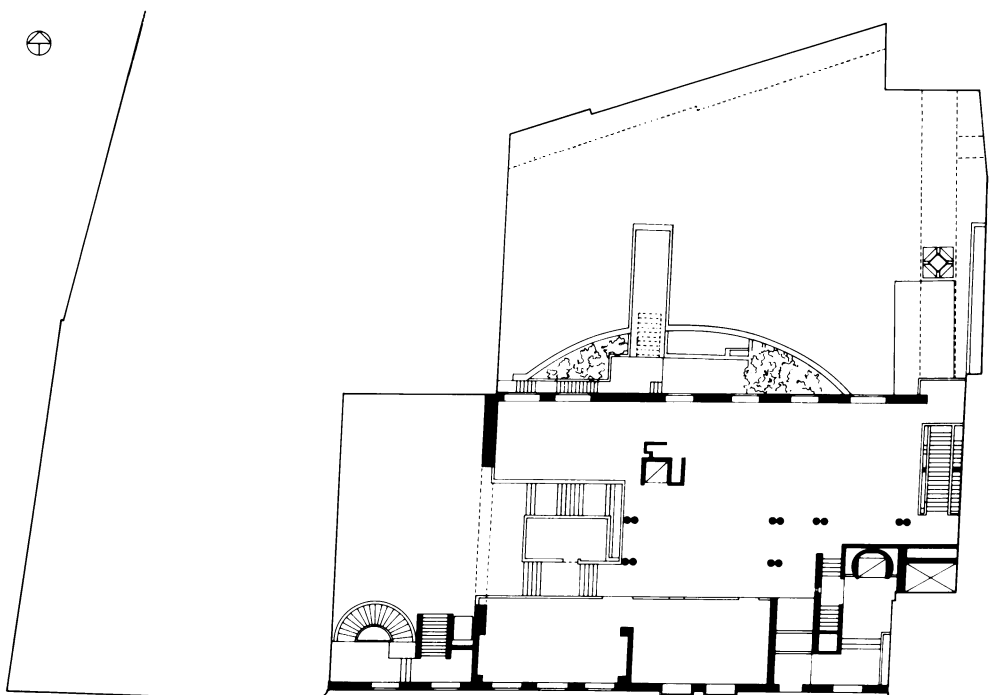
In Castelvechio Scarpa found a fictitious historical context marked by previous restorations characterized by picturesque style imitations. The building demanded strong reactions which caused, under Scarpa's direction, an almost total gutting of the building and its recomposition.

From the Brion Cemetery on, Scarpa begins to develop a far more abstract attitude, a maturation of more internalized facts that almost border on a meditation about architecture. From now on each solution becomes entirely his own by creating demanding questions to which he is the only one who can give an answer. There is an obstinate interest in solving deeper and deeper a whole series of questions carried from previous projects. In the Banca Popolare di Verona, Scarpa found a huge spatial void, after demolition of the pre-existing building, right in the middle of a tightly packed Roman grid (figure 26). Plan form and façade are in this building totally disjointed. Looking for a critically demanding constraint to work against, Scarpa decided to pick up the one degree and a half difference in the orthogonality to the square of the building to the left and carry it throughout the new construction. This eighty-eight and a half degree angle is carried out in every corner, in every cut stone, in every horizontal grid (figure 27). The façade is

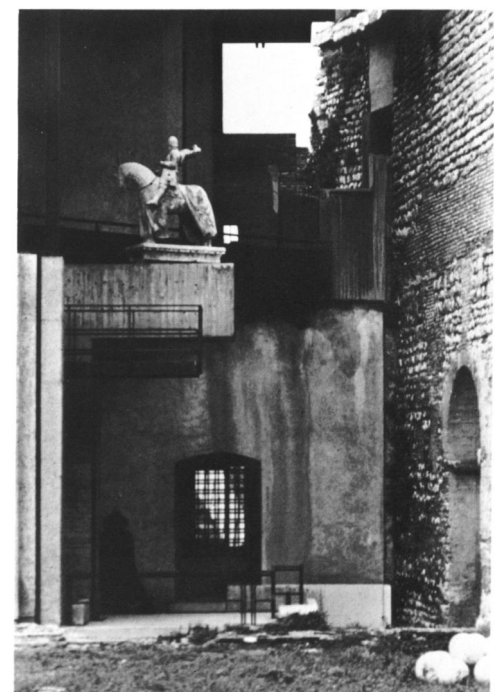
disjointed in two planes, one to the piazza and one to the interior.

In examining the elements of Italian architecture one is likely to observe how the use of structural elements for decorative purposes becomes predominant in the making of building façades. This architectural feature is so prevailing that in many cases a second façade is generated and it stands as screen in front of the base façade.²⁴

Scarpa had already tested the concept at Castelvechio. The separation of the façade from the body of the building, like a *cartilage* or a skin that can be perforated independently from its interiors, also allows for complex episodes of conjunction between sections of the same building. To provide a stage for the equestrian monument of Cangrande della Scala, Scarpa creates a void which makes us aware of the Adige River on one side and the seeming incompleteness of the side of the museum on the other. The statue is the suture of the museum to the medieval wall, the center of a rotational space in which roof, windows and doors, the courtyard and the wall are in tension with each other longing to be recomposed (figure 28).



27



28

25
Rudi, interview.

The denunciation of all the parts and their critical connections does not only reveal the refinement of an architect who interprets history and makes manifest all the phases of his intervention as layering and growing of parts, one over another, but is also an exquisitely modern intention.²⁵

In the façade of the Banca Popolare the strategy of creating interruptions and voids is again applied as a series of spatial inventions each time the building must be joined to neighboring walls. Examples of these joints are: a rupture to the *palazzetto* to the left (figure 29), a terrace to the right, an extraordinary play of a receding wall which frees a steel and glass staircase and the invention of a steel frame bridge supported at only one point with an inner wood skin (figure 30).

Scarpa, sitting at sundown at the Caffè Florian in Piazza San Marco, looked up at the frieze of Sansovino's Procuratie Nuove and suddenly realized that the *ovuli* were reversed as opposed to the position which he always thought they were. Only in that reversed position would they take up a pink and blue coloration at that particular time of day; the entire frieze would gleam with color. He understood that a building could become almost magical, thanks to an architectural artifice of that kind. That revelation served the solution of the mosaics placed between the flanges of the I-beam (figure 31). Instead of letting the sun provoke the color, Scarpa literally uses the bright color of the glass tiles. The detail is therefore not an expedient but a conscious, fresh and appropriate solution. This episode not only proves Scarpa's capacity to be open to unexpected events, but also the modesty of the man who would possibly justify an execution mistake by criticizing his own design process. If the object is designed well, it will be executed well; if the object turns out imperfect, perhaps that reveals gaps during the design phase or lack of definition in the problem itself.²⁶

Already in Castelvecchio, in solving the framing and glazing of all gothic windows and doors, Scarpa negated the existing symmetry of each opening and devised a compositive system in which fixed glazing and operable windows find a geometry of their own, a modern one reflected

26
From a December 1981 interview with Guido Pietropoli, Architect, who was a former student, teaching assistant and collaborator for the design of the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy of the University of Venice.

An error was made during the construction of the façade in the treatment of the horizontal I-beam of the tripartite façade. Scarpa, who used to spend unlimited time on all sites and maintained a creative and direct relationship with the building under construction, always took involuntary mistakes of the tradesmen as a chance for finding remedies which were at times more significant than the original solutions. Guido Pietropoli, a former Scarpa student, teaching assistant and collaborator for the design of the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy of the University of Venice, remembers how Carlo

29
Banca Popolare di Verona;
façade detail.

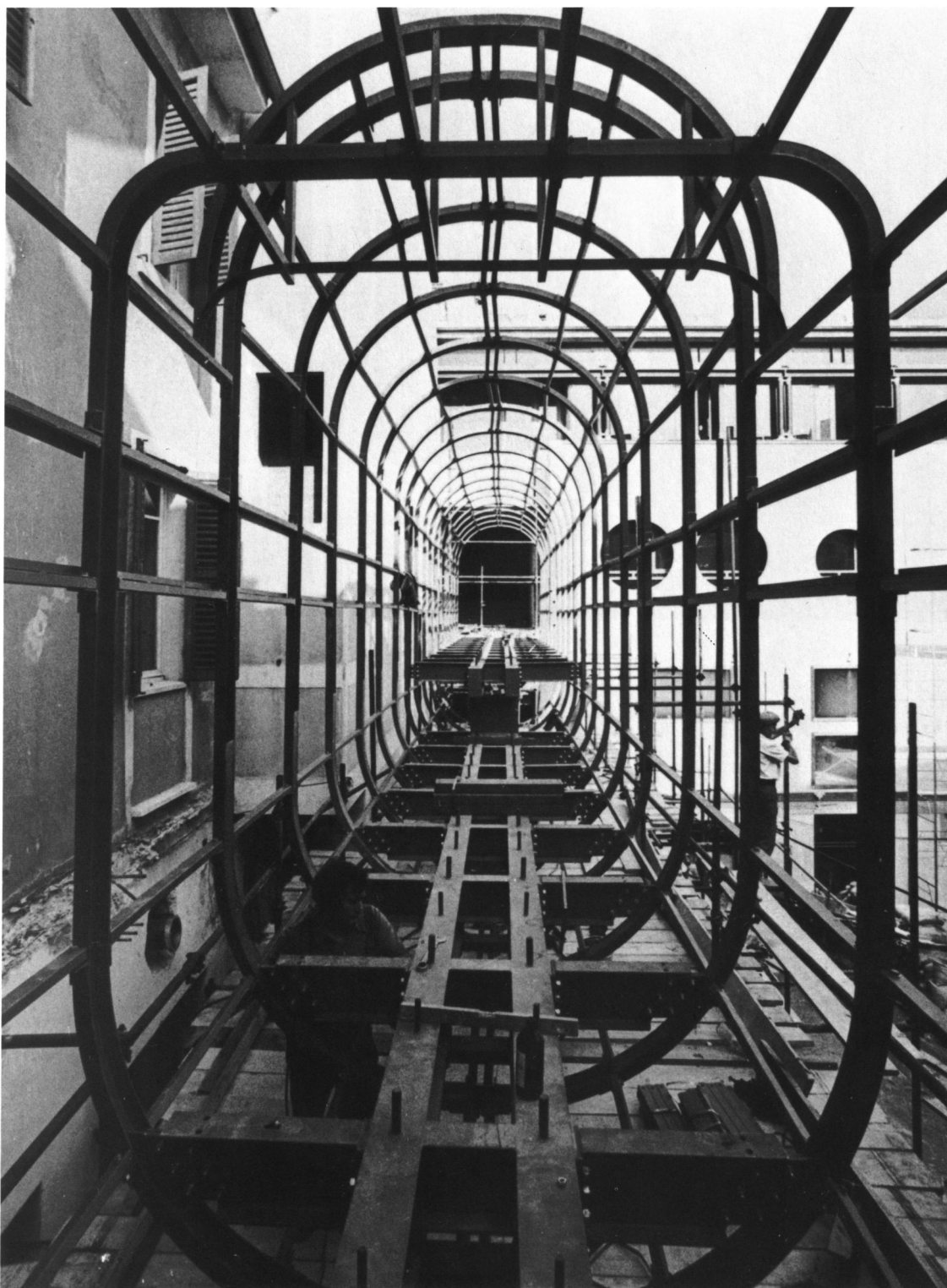


29

31
Banca Popolare di Verona;
façade detail.



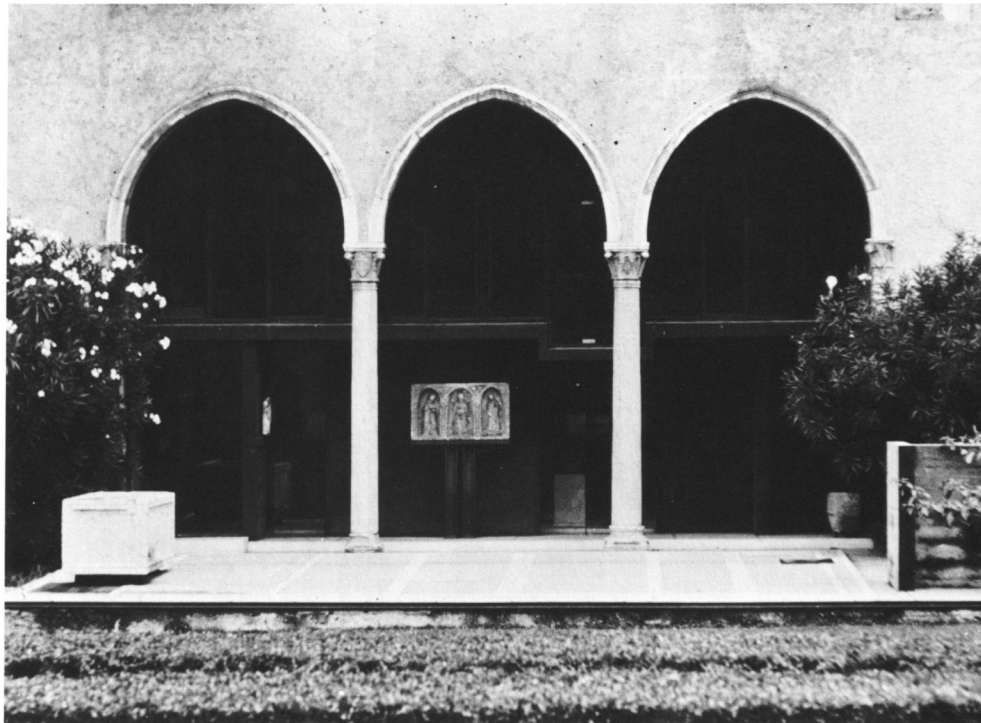
31



30
Banca Popolare di Verona: the
bridge under construction.



33



32

27
Businaro, interview.

28
From a December 1981 interview with Doctor Flavio Pavan, Professor of Psychoanalysis at the University of Pavia.

on the visual culture of our century which necessitates the disassociation between the inner and outer planes of the wall. The juxtaposition of the passive gothic geometry and the active one of the new interior framing tends to reveal either one of the two systems as predominant to the other, whether observed from inside or outside the building. From the courtyard the new framing quietly stands back while the viewer on the inside will perceive the old stonework encased as an exhibit just like an artifact in the museum (figure 32, 33). In the Banca Popolare the apparently round windows take up by association and analogy the role of the gothic fenestration of Castelvecchio. The privilege of all new construction provides Scarpa with an occasion to utilize his complex knowledge as a Venetian architect along with his experience in the design and handling of stone in relation to water. He gives pulsation to each round opening by splitting it at the vertical axis and by spacing away the two semicircles. This process is made legible by the interposition of an 11 centimeter wide gutter element the purpose of which is to eliminate at a lower level rainwater collected between cartilage and glazing (figure 34, 35). The bi-centered oval is the product of a slow maturation of several intuitions, references and former solutions. Scarpa's image, initially derived from the deformation and vibration one can observe in the

shape of the rising or setting sun, or the organic complexity of the egg, so much investigated by Paul Klee, also follows Scarpa's long standing concept of avoiding joints and seams in regions of a form where the form itself would be divided so as to make visible its obvious components. For example, an arch is never cut where it meets the piers, but always above or below the impost according to a sense of geometry in which construction and image are elegantly and dialectically juxtaposed.

"I am a man of Byzantium who came to Venice by way of Greece."²⁷

The narration provided by a sequence of spaces produces possible constructs which endlessly verify Scarpa's first intuition. One of the most powerful and emotionally involving of these sequences is the entrance-hall-pool-pavillion in the Brion Cemetery. Once past the threshold, in the dimness of the vestibule, the symbol of the two linked rings is silhouetted against the light of the exterior (figure 36). The two linked rings create abstractly the absolute symbol, or the symbol of the symbol; the Greek root of it means to tie together and the two circles are made to perfectly represent this action. "They also signify fecundity by delineating in the common area the female genital compressed by two breasts."²⁸

32
Museo Civico di Castelvecchio;
portal detail, exterior.

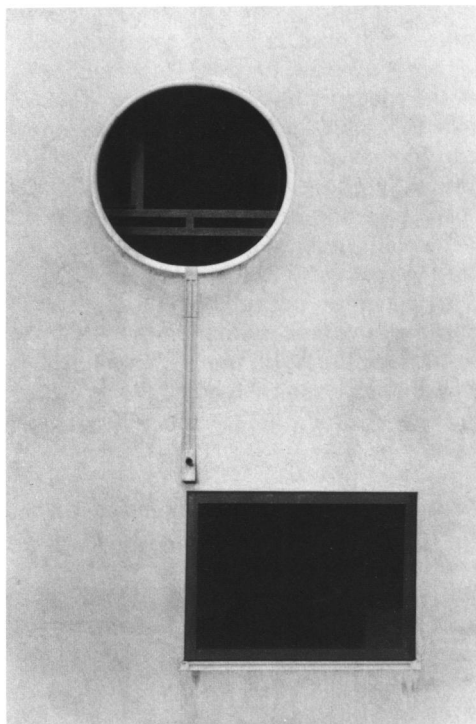
33
Museo Civico di Castelvecchio;
portal detail, interior.

34
Banca Popolare d Verona;
window detail, exterior.

35
Banca Popolare di Verona;
window detail, interior.

36
Cimitero Brion; view of the
vestibule.

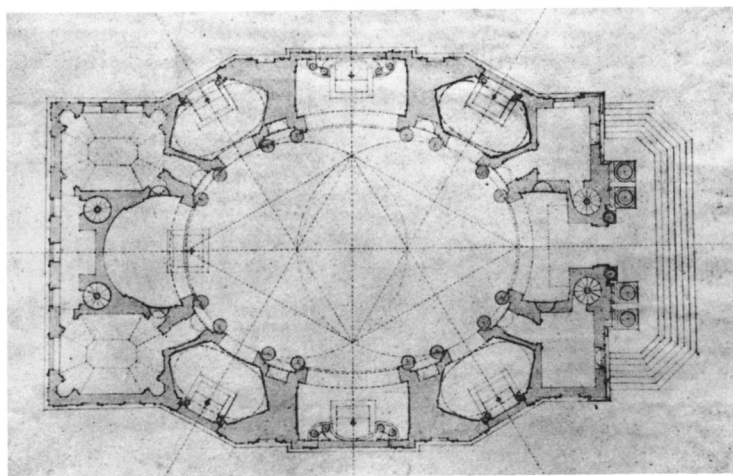
37
Borromini; study for a church
plan.



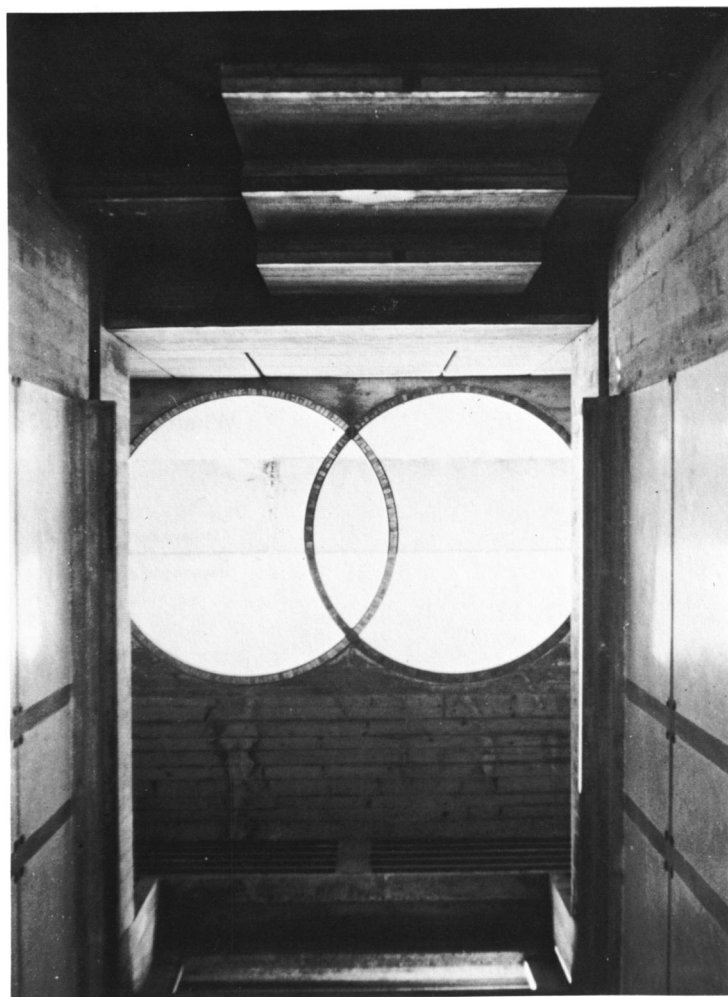
34



35



37



36

29

From a December 1981 interview with Walter Rossetto, Architect, who was a former student and collaborator with Scarpa on the Banca Popolare di Verona project.

The suggestion is of a window and the scale is of a door. In reality, the opening is neither a window, because it faces onto an unstructured field of grass, nor a door, since the actual entry is either to the right or to the left of the aperture. As a mathematical symbol, infinity, it has a front and a back by being defined within the plane of the wall. On the vestibule side, pink glass tiles in the left ring intersect with blue tiles in the right ring; on the other side, the pink tiles remain on the left and the blue on the right, thereby the right-left relationship is maintained allowing each ring at the same time to contain both colors.

The image of the intersecting rings is not new in the Brion Cemetery. It was already used in the Gavina Shop in Bologna, (1961–63), as the main element in the façade. We see it again in the Banca Popolare in Verona as a brass detail in the steel work. Geometric constructions such as the two intersecting rings, although initially a product of intuition, are not left by Scarpa to be improvised or randomly used. Only after the symbol had been used in the Brion Cemetery, visitors began to become aware that a traditional wedding ring such as those worn by peasants in the countryside of the Veneto region can actually be separated into two halves if abruptly dropped on a marble table. Years later, Scarpa found a geometric construction attributed to Borromini that explains the intrinsic relationship of the elliptical plan of an unbuilt church (figure 37). It is surprising how the same figure can assume meanings so diverse, conceptually unrelated, but nevertheless totally consonant in their context. When asked by Walter Rossetto, Scarpa's

youngest collaborator of his last days, if the two intersecting rings had any special meaning to him, Scarpa replied enigmatically: "It is a leit-motiv of my life."²⁹

If we choose the path to the right upon facing the two rings, we are stopped by a heavy glass door which must be pushed down until it completely disappears beneath the floor level. The door is actually submerged in a subterranean chamber placed in the path of the water which feeds the pool. One's entire body must participate in the effort necessary to lower the door. At that moment, an extraordinary suggestion is expressed,

The body is collected in tension to gain way by overcoming a diaphragm, that is, the dynamic image of a penetration, of a reverse childbirth, where the body takes a fetal position, aspiring to re-enter the mother's womb. The pool which contains the pavillion is therefore a motherly place, and the pavillion a place of fetal floating.³⁰

The submerging of the glass door yields a sound produced by a steel cable held taut in a constellation of pulleys (figure 38). The sound is amplified by the hallway itself, a thin concrete box open at both ends.

It is the sound of a counterrevolution of celestial spheres, put in motion by a desire moving in the opposite direction to their natural order; it is an upsidedown wail, it is the solemn and deep sound of the Om which precedes meditation.³¹

30

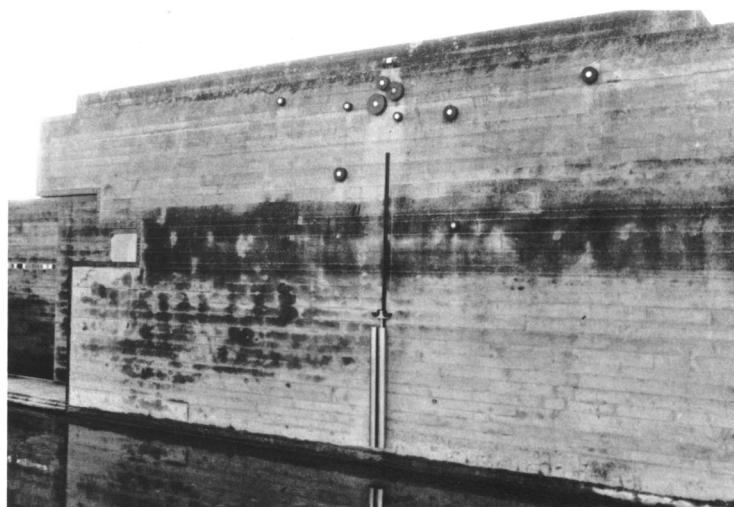
Pavan, interview.

31

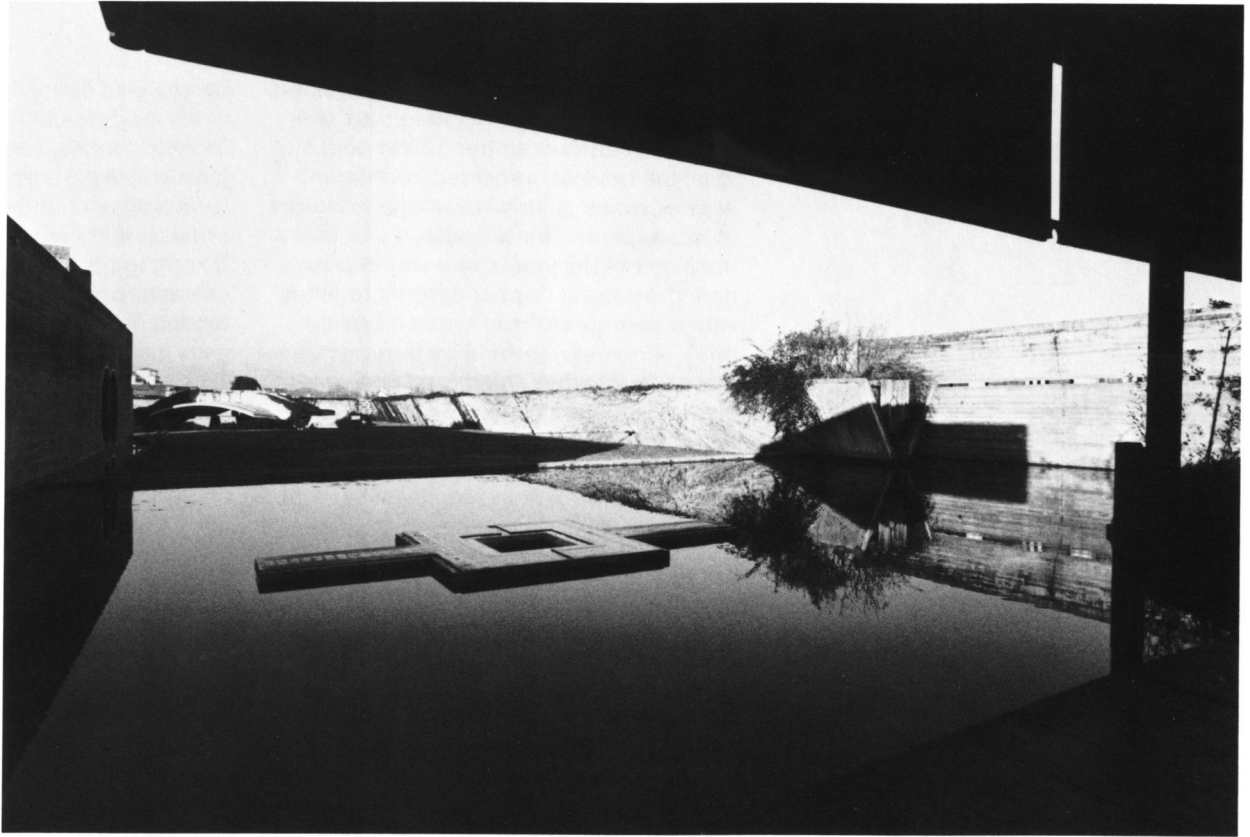
Pavan, interview.

38

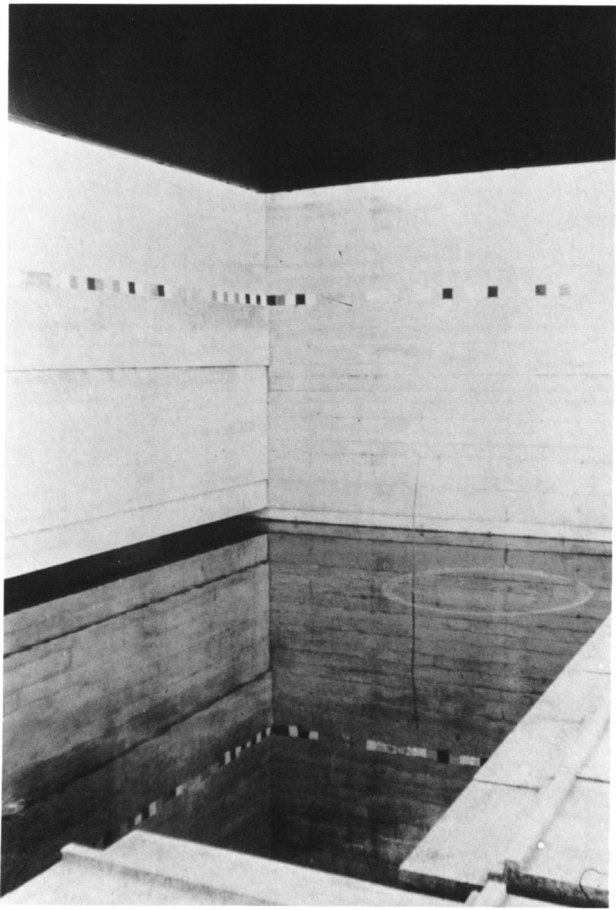
Cimitero Brion; detail of the counterweights for the lowering of a glass door.



40
Cimitero Brion; view of the
main tomb from the pavilion.



39
Cimitero Brion; view of the
pool from the pavilion.



33
Pavan, interview.

The pavillion protects the act of withdrawing to meditate where a person is in search of his natural origin, as the source of truth. If one stands in an erect position, the horizon is totally excluded thus concentrating one's attention to the pool and to all the objects immersed at different depths, which clearly reveal the existence of two separate worlds, above and below the plane of the water. In a sitting position, the natural horizon returns together with a second artificial horizon behind one's shoulders, formed by innumerable glass tiles of white, black, gold, silver and colored shades cast in the concrete, "... a horizontal plot of an internal story (figures 39–41)."³² The water in the pool originates from a silent spring near the tomb of the couple.

32
Pavan, interview.

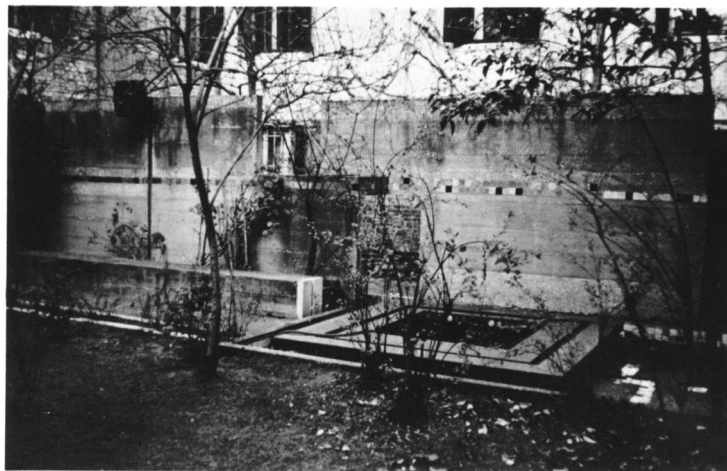
34
Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), p. 215.

From the place of death is born the river which ascends upstream the current of vital time and feeds the

lake which protects the enigma of birth.³³

Scarpa was defined by Sergio Los, one of his longtime teaching assistants, as *architetto-poeta*. Los maintains that a linguistic interpretation of architecture allows a distinction between poetry and prose, and if many works of Rationalism belong to prose, Scarpa's expression is characterized by poetry. Poetry is here intended as an accent placed on the message itself, since the architecture of Carlo Scarpa is concentrated on language. By making a space habitable, Scarpa brings to architectural consciousness an original and irreproducible behavior.

Poetry is what really lets us dwell. But through what do we attain to a dwelling place? Through building. Poetic creation, which lets us dwell, is a kind of building.³⁴



41
Palazzo Querini Stampalia;
detail of the garden.