"Some books are to be tasted, others swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested."
Sir Francis Bacon

**Introduction** [slide 1]

In the mid 1980s Italo Calvino gave the Eliot Norton Lectures at Harvard University. In his third talk on “Quickness” he explained, “I do not wish to say that quickness is a value in itself. Narrative time can also be delaying, cyclic, or motionless. In any case, a story is an operation carried out on the length of time involved, an enchantment that acts on the passing of time, either contracting or dilating it.” Umberto Eco, a decade later, referenced Calvino in the third of his own lectures at Harvard entitled “Lingering in the Woods.” In that essay, Eco described a number of temporal strategies employed by various authors that explore the pleasures of lingering.

In this short talk, I will show that such temporal tactics described by Eco and Calvino share uncanny similarities to the museum projects of Carlo Scarpa. It is my wager that a careful traveler to Scarpa’s work will inevitably linger. I discuss two museum projects in particular—the extension to the Canova Museum in Possagno and the renovation of the Castellvecchio, in Verona—in which Scarpa intentionally offers disruptions in the uniform nature of processional time through the work. Indeed, Scarpa’s work is full of delays, distractions, and redirections that, if followed, present enchanting experiences, not unlike those described by Calvino and Eco in their own work. Thus, I hope to demonstrate that the similarities between architecture and narrative are not only topical, thematic, or even spatial, but temporal as well.
1. Narrative Time

Stories have the ability to situate one self in another time and place. “Once upon a time,” or “It was a dark and stormy night,” indicate that the story is not here and now but rather then and there. A potentially distinct temporal space opens up when one does the same with a book. Joyce and Proust, to name only two, have explored such temporal spaces in their wonderful and provocative work. Indeed, much ink has been spilled on the relationship between temporality and narrative discourse; too much in fact to explore in a presentation such as this. Rather than a general comparison of approaches, I will look to Umberto Eco’s discussion of narrative time to develop a framework through which I will then analyze Carlo Scarpa’s approach to museum design.

Eco, building on the work of Paul Ricoeur, named three variations of time found in fiction: [slide 2] story time, discourse time and reading time. Story time is the amount of time that takes place in a story. Jules Verne’s Around the World in Eighty Days, for example, takes eighty days of story time (actually eighty-one for Phileas Fogg as he travelled eastward). This can also be referred to as the plot. Discourse time, also known as narrative time, is the time needed to tell the story of those eighty days in the balloon. Reading time is simply how long it takes one to read the text.

Dialogue may align discourse and reading times, but the three times are rarely synchronized. This lack of correspondence implies that the author may indeed employ various temporal tactics that serve to make the act writing and reading more than the simple transmission and reception of events. Each of the times may be paced differently and for various affect. Foreshadowing plays with discourse time and reading time by giving the reader a hint of what they will soon read. Story time may take less than discourse time and, in effect, stretch out our experience of time. Remember Proust’s madeleine. The relation between story time and discourse time often affects our reading time. Description, tone, number of words, and pacing can affect this. Reading the machine-gun like staccato of a hardboiled novel by Mickey Spillane has a different pace than, for example, the odd droning of a Don DeLillo novel. An author may offer an abundance of detail or a mass of particulars that are less a representational device than a strategy for slowing down or
speeding up the reader. Eco refers to this as hallucinatory time and the work of Robbe-Grillet may be seen as an example. He also mentions circumnavigational time in which the author adjusts points of view in both time and space. Here, time can be varied through detail, complexity of reference, or a variety of paths. The work of Calvino and Borges offers such an approach. Typically an author employs a combination of these strategies. In the lectures on lingering mentioned above, Eco describes and dissects *Sylvie* by Gerard de Nerval and shows that the author does indeed utilize a variety of tactics to tell the story. After Eco’s analysis it is clear that the manner in which the story is told is as important as what the story is. In *Sylvie*, for example, a typical reader will most likely get lost in the remembrances and flash-forwards. These digressions, however, are key to the story.

This analysis implies that there are more and less appropriate ways to read a story. Eco recognizes the open nature of any work, but this does not mean that the reader is free to interpret at will or find any meaning in a given text, but rather that the reader observe the rules of the game. Eco describes a model reader. I quote, “I call the model reader—a sort of ideal type whom the text not only foresees as a collaborator but also tries to create.” (Eco p.9 Walks) In a way, the reader then becomes part of the text. There is also an important balance between the model reader and the model author. Again, I quote from Eco, “The model author, on the other hand, is a voice that speaks to us affectionately (or imperiously, or slyly) that wants us beside it. The voice is manifest as a narrative strategy, as a set of instructions which is given to us step by step and which we have to follow when we decide to act as the model reader.” (p. 15)

I will now introduce two museums by Carlo Scarpa and show how similar temporal narrative strategies are indeed present in the work. Scarpa’s intentions are difficult to uncover as he did not often speak about his work and wrote even less, we can, however, as model readers, attempt to make a close reading to uncover the instructions for reading the spaces. [slide 3]
2. Carlo Scarpa

Carlo Scarpa in writing the epitaph for his own tombstone, described himself as “a Man of Byzantium who came to Venice by way of Greece.” This seems to imply that Scarpa was a traveler, however he rarely left the Veneto and indeed much of his work is rooted there. He was born in Venice in 1906 to an elementary school teacher and a dressmaker. In 1926 he passed with full marks from the Academy of Fine Arts and began teaching architectural drawing at the Istituto Universario d’Architettua di Venezia (IUAV) where he would teach, in various capacities, throughout his life. Although careful monographs exist, Scarpa’s oeuvre is difficult to comprehend. Much of his work was temporary, partial, or has been renovated beyond recognition. Scarpa’s work is typically noted for an obsessive relationship with materials and craft, an extreme attention to detail, and a focus on the fragment. Kahn and Wright are influences on the work, but so to is Scarpa’s interest in Japanese culture. Often noted is the timelessness of the work. One critic notes that Scarpa creates work that is meant to “elude time.” (a+u 14). Other critics note the “Proustian” nature of the work without fully developing what this might mean.

During the late twenties and thirties, when Scarpa was just beginning, Italy saw the rise of fascism especially in the north and there was not much work for a young architect. Most scholarship points to this and describes how the social and economic conditions led him into the collaboration with the well-known glassmaker Paolo Venini. His designs for Venini, some of which are still in production, redefined ways of working with glass. While this is certainly an important influence in Scarpa’s work, it should also be noted that at this time he also began to develop relationships with many important artists in the Veneto at this time and did find work designing exhibitions. All told, Scarpa designed at least sixty exhibitions and many of his most well known commissions were for museums. Later in his life he reflected on the importance of museum work. [slide 4] I quote:

I have a great passion for works of art, as you know. I have always taken the trouble to learn, to know, to understand, and, it seems to me, to have a real critical awareness. I would not be able to write, to produce a critical article; but I have a lively sense of critical values and how they move me. Indeed, I would rather, on the whole build museums than skyscrapers – though logic may say otherwise. Since the former may be perhaps creative, while the latter requires one to adapt and subordinate oneself to things as they are. Carlo Scarpa (1978) [slide 5]
This creative and critical approach guided the work of many exhibition spaces. I show two examples in which Scarpa is seemingly more concerned with the nature and consequently the location of each piece rather than the room as a whole. This approach, begun in a series of exhibitions was more fully developed in his museum designs. [slide 6]

3. **Canova Plaster Museum**

Begun in 1955 to commemorate the 200th anniversary of Canova’s birth, the project houses Canova’s plaster casts and study models used in the fabrication of the larger marbles. Scarpa’s project is an extension to the existing museum designed by Giuseppe Segusini between 1831-1836 that houses the full size Canova sculptures. [slide 7, 8] The original proposal was to relocate all of the work. Though he was not required to do so in the extension, Scarpa decided to keep the existing and the differences are marked. [slide 9] The first thing a visitor notices in the original gallery is the severe axis. All of the pieces, except one at the conclusion of the axis, [slide 10] are mirrored on either side of the gallery. Each is placed on a pedestal of similar height. Each is spaced evenly apart. Each is to be viewed frontally. One can imagine that Segusini intended that one view the work in a linear manner, pausing at each piece for a similar amount of time before moving on to the next. [slide 11] Standing at the entry of the older museum and looking to one’s right, a visitor encounters a markedly different approach to museum display. [slide 12]

Entering into the gallery a visitor is greeted by a collage of fragments. In the distance, a bust, slightly pulled off the wall is framed by a figure seated but looking away, but set at a height in which you notice the sculpture’s footwear first. To the right and much lower is another sculpture. You are, however, looking at the side of the piece [slide 13] and to view the front of the work requires that you circumnavigate the piece. In doing so, you also see the front of two other pieces, though at different heights. [slide 14] Once around the work, and in your peripheral vision, one begins to see the full length of the second gallery. To view each piece in the gallery requires an active looking at various heights, scales, and indeed a mix of times. In a rare television interview, Scarpa described his approach. I quote, “By paying close attention to how one arranges a plastic object, whether it be sculpture or painting, it is possible to intensify certain qualities of the work.”
The second gallery follows the existing topography, sloping down slightly. Again, the visitor is greeted with a collage, this time framed by a full height glass wall over a small pool of water. [slide 15] The conclusion of which is the famous study of the three graces. [slide 16] A set of long, low, shallow stairs leads the visitor down one side of the gallery. The scale of the work in the second gallery is even more varied and at each landing one is tempted to linger around a piece or perhaps look back. At this point, the visitor also begins to notice the care and craft displayed in the vitrines, also designed by Scarpa to hold the smaller and more delicate pieces. The three spaces, the entry, the first and second gallery, are each scaled and lit differently and also offer a surprisingly varied set of experiences for such a limited space. [slide 17]

A comparison between the two approaches is telling. Relating back to Eco’s discourse, the story time of each gallery is similar, that is, a series of sculptural pieces displayed for viewing. The narrative time, however, is quite different. Segusini’s gallery is much more temporally consistent. He organizes the work in a uniform manner in plan, section, and even elevation. Although the visitor is free to linger, it is completely their responsibility to do so. Scarpa’s approach is much more temporally varied – a garden of forking paths. He adjusts the organization in plan, section, elevation, and even type of object to set up an interesting conversation between pieces. [slide 18]

4. Renovation to the Castelvecchio

The next project I will discuss is the renovation to the Castelvecchio. The site is a complex layering that dates back to a 12th c communal wall, the Castelvecchio proper, built by the Scaligeri family. It was altered in the 19th century for use as a military barracks. In 1924 the building was transformed into a civic museum to house a mix of sculpture and painting from the 12th through 19th c. [slide 19] The architect, Ferdinando Forlati plastered a historicist “Venetian Gothic” façade over the interior of the courtyard. By the time Scarpa was involved, a good portion had been destroyed in the bombings of WW2 but the façade remained. Scarpa’s renovation began in 1956 as the design of a temporary exhibition (da Altichiero a Pisanello), continued to include a structural shoring of walls and finally the reorganization of the entire collection that occupied Scarpa for at least an additional twenty years. [slide 20]
Scarpa begins the museum experience just as one walks through the 12th c. gate. [slide 21, 22] One of the first design moves was to place the Cangrande to the far left of the courtyard where it is somewhat precariously raised up on an exterior platform. [slide 23] Arguably the most symbolic piece in the collection, the Cangrande becomes the keeper and guardsman of the museum and, indeed, this is how Scarpa referred to it. [slide 24] In counterpoint to the Cangrande is the actual entry, located on the right side of the façade. Scarpa moved the entry from the center of the façade to the far right. [slide 25] A double row of hedges, [slide 26] however, forces the visitor from a direct route to the entry. The axially of the hedges foreshadows that of the galleries. [slide 27] One makes a quick right and then left, goes past and around a small fountain, and finally, enters into the museum. The entry half wall directs the visitor to the museum and away from the exit stair descending from the second level. [slide 28] The entry is certainly intended to slow the pace of the visitor prior to entering the museum and also to offer a variety of perspectives. Indeed, George Dodds in his own analysis of the garden notes that the visitor makes no less than seven changes of direction and even more changes in elevation prior to entering into the museum. [slide 29]

Once in the museum the visitor is on axis with an enfilade that cuts through five galleries on the lower level. [slide 30] The organization of the floor was given and rather than deconstruct the centuries old building, Scarpa chose to leave it. [slide 31] In each of the rooms, however, Scarpa organizes each piece in very particular ways. Work is placed so that one rarely confronts sculpture frontally. Nor is one able to walk into a room and quickly survey all of the work at once. Work is placed at differing heights and even in the floor. One enters and might notice the fall of a fabric in the light, set against another color, or perhaps the profile of a sculpture framed in the next room. [slide 32,33] One’s interaction with the work is temporally varied and not equidistant; in a way it is more dance than wandering. [slide 34] One can see this in an early sketch showing a visitor’s movement through each room. [slide 35]

At the end of the first floor of galleries, one emerges outside and under the Cangrande statue, crosses a moat (unearthed during construction) and enters into another series of galleries. [slide 36, 37] A visitor now sees the Cangrande closer than from the entry, but
partially and from below. [slide 38] In the next series of galleries, as with the sculpture, paintings are pulled off of the wall and placed on easels, almost as if the artist was simply taking a break. By this positioning one begins to notice the frame more and the back of the painting (rarely ever seen) is now available for view. Continuing through the gallery, one is led back outside and over a bridge. [slide 39] The Cangrande is now seen at the same level, but from behind. One then enters into the next row of galleries and can, if one dares, [slide 40] go back outside to inspect the sculpture frontally and [slide 41] in much more detail. [slide 42]

From the drawings we can see that Scarpa intended that the Cangrande be viewed from a number of positions and over time. Not one view is privileged, but rather the visitor’s experience combines to form his or her own whole. Essential is that the experience of the work unfolds and occurs in time. [slide 43] The second floor galleries mimic the organization of the first but Scarpa moves the circulation to the exterior wall alongside the river. At the conclusion of the galleries is a stair back down the entry and one is again confronted by the one-point perspective of the first floor galleries. [slide 44]

The renovation to the Castelvecchio is interesting in that multiple times exist. To refer back to Eco’s classifications, the story time is not unlike many civic museums. The narrative time, however, the time it takes to tell the story operates at a number of levels. From the multiple views of the Cangrande, to the collaged planning of the art, and even the severe axial organization of rooms allows a visitor to walk quickly through the museum, or to linger around a detail. While I am not prepared to claim a normative museum design, rooms designed according to chronological, typological, stylistic, or other taxonometric interests, it does seem that Scarpa is proposing something other. In both the extension to the Canova gallery and the renovation of the Castelvecchio, Scarpa proposes an interaction with art that is inherently temporal. It is active and engaged but also allows one to slow down, linger, and perhaps take inferential walk. [slide 45]

The level of detail is indeed hallucinatory.
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Carlo Scarpa (1978)
Restoration of the Castelvechio
Verona, 1956...