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What spaces do to us Architecture and the pathic¹

Abstract

This paper explores the “pathic” dimension of architectural experience – how designed spaces affect us emotionally and corporeally. It posits that while spatial experience is often fluid, specific “architectural frames” can stabilize atmospheric conditions, making affective outcomes more predictable. Through choreographed movement, controlled thresholds, and sensory filtering, such frames orchestrate a visitor’s encounter, cultivating particular moods. The Brion Memorial by Carlo Scarpa serves as a primary case study, demonstrating how layered enclosures and meticulous sequencing guide the subject into a meditative, temporally suspended state. The analysis argues that this deliberate framing allows architecture to exert an authoritative influence on our felt experience, moving from fleeting atmospheres toward a more persistent emotional “climate”.

Keywords

Architecture, Affective space, Pathicity, Carlo Scarpa, Brion mausoleum

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Architectural spaces are an exemplary observation point for the unfolding of pathos. We are largely subjected to their influence: “what spaces do to us” is not just a catchphrase, since our experience of the ambient environment is to a good extent determined by how this has been manipulated over time². We are not strictly speaking of deliberate architectural actions, rather of a much broader field of interventions, many of which are spontaneous in nature, unreflective, as ongoing and accumulating anthropological adaptive mechanisms. Through these, subjects and communities model and transform their habitat to improve it – whatever “improvement” may signify in this context. These transformative actions can be accurately planned, or totally improvised; their traces can be legible or remain cloaked beneath a sedimentation of incremental and intersecting layers, almost to form an archaeological stratification of human interventions. In addition, all this is combined with the influence of natural events and non-human agencies. While these cannot be strictly considered to fall within a definition of what architecture is, they nevertheless form part of that vast and inextricable coalition of forces shaping our inhabited environment.

The “mechanisms of adaptation” which individual subjects and communities enact to come to terms with the surrounding environment are of various types. Some happen through the physical manipulation of objects and, more in general, with the material making and transforming of the environment (Ingold 2000: 42). Other processes are less bound to materiality, and speak more of the affective nature of our spatial experience. We can, for example, observe how we move around, through and in these environments, bearing in mind that motion is hardly ever the simple displacement from A to B. Movement almost invariably produces some form of emotional repercussion, no matter how slight and latent this can be (Forlè 2013). Our style of motion, the gestures we perform, the bodily postures we adopt when moving through a space are tell-tale of the relationship we establish with the environment, thus speaking of both what the space “does to us” and, in turn, of how we engage with the space in a dialectic way, manipulating it to suit our material or emotional needs.

Quite obviously, the nature and quality of this relationship is something that is difficult to pin down, since it hinges on a two-pole nexus that

² The title of this paper refers to Jürgen Hasse’s 2013 book *Was Räume mit uns machen – und wir mit Ihnen*, which addresses the experiential dimension of architecture and urban space.

is always “in becoming”: the ambient environment on one side, with its situational manifestation, and the inhabiting subjects on the other, with their contingent, embodied and affective disposition (De Matteis 2021: 78). The encounter between these two leads to the emergence of that atmospheric sensation that we can call “space”.

For architects, this endless fluctuation can be frustrating, since it hinders them from having a clear and fully reliable expectation of what it will be like to dwell in a space that is designed and built in a certain way. Once completed, the architecture will “do something” to the subjects that inhabit it: what exactly it will do, however, cannot be foretold with any certainty – at most, we could argue, with a greater or lesser degree of statistical accuracy. Personally, I could comment that this “blurred” nature of architectural space, the impossibility of it fully determining the spatial experience of subjects, is indeed a welcome deliverance from an otherwise oppressive determinism from which architectural theories often seem to suffer. That a space imagined, designed and built for joy and celebration can unexpectedly turn into a scene of terror can obviously be quite unnerving for an architect who is pouring every drop of creative energy into a project, but it also attests to the unavoidable vitality and unpredictability of inhabited spaces. Architects can design (with some reliability) the material scaffolding of physical space, but the experience that will there unfold, with the atmospheres that will take over those environments, what the spaces will do to the pathically exposed subjects, largely lies beyond reach.

Metaphorically, we can imagine this framed condition of some architectures as that of the medieval *hortus conclusus*, a walled garden where the pleasantries of Eden could be mimicked, resisting against the oddities and perversions of the wider and uncontrollable world beyond the enclosure. Here, the “maker” can exert full control over the feelings of the inhabitants, creating a secluded space that mirrors the subjects’ constrained affectivity.

After this preamble, we must nevertheless observe that some specific conditions where the relationship between architecture and architectural experience is tighter. In these instances, while the subjects’ experience is never fully forecastable, it can be nevertheless narrowed down to a more controllable condition. We could call this “architectural framing”, i.e. those occurrences where architectural spaces become narrowly defined, where motion is accurately orchestrated, where every aspect of the material substance of building is accounted for beforehand. Here, the subject’s response remains within a certain controlled range: clearly, no de-

signer can define the mood and corporeal disposition of a subject who enters a given space, but the usually broad scope of responses can remain within a certain emotional gamut.

This kind of framing, which relies on a “strong” architectural project, often happens in those situations where either the subjects’ movement, or the emotional dimension, or both, need to remain under control. This control exerted over the inhabiting subjects can be of a manyfold nature: control over how they move through and use a building – think, for example, of the rigidly defined flows of movement within an airport, which builds a properly typified architectural experience – or over the affective modulation of subjects. There are some spaces where, once we enter, we are expected to feel in a certain way: for example, many of those where our health is taken care of – hospitals, clinics, doctors’ offices, etc. – where the affective affordance we receive is usually one of mellow neutrality, as a means of counterbalancing the anxiety embedded in the medical procedure or in the uncertainty concerning our health. Places of consumption, from restaurants to shopping centers, are often designed to attune us to a relaxing atmosphere devoid of emotional spikes, where we can freely engage in those pleasurable activities that allow us to release both endorphins and money from our pockets. Theme parks, on the other hand, are designed to excite us, helping us enjoy the surge of adrenalin that keeps us active and positive. As we will see below, religious spaces, with their intrinsic connection to ritual as a practice of repetition, are clearly a part of this ensemble of tightly orchestrated architectural experiences.

What many of these architectural conditions have in common is their framing: while they are not necessarily interior spaces, they are usually surrounded by a clear enclosure – a boundary which, once crossed, introduces us into a specialized segment of the environment. It is a segment where conditions change, where situations are controlled and often typical, where a specific narrative is presented and embedded in the architecture, and where we recognize a certain spatial affordance that invites us to move and to be moved in a certain way. Variations in our emotional response can obviously still occur – I can enter a hospital to visit a terminally ill patient or a newborn baby; I can be in a theme park with the excitement and energy of one who has just arrived, or with the desire to go home and rest after I have been there all day. These architectural framed spaces can be interior, or at least “interiorized”, which means that their atmospheric containment is allowed by the presence of some form of boundary. This boundary can typically be the architectural enclosure –

walls and roof that “shut” the natural environment outside of the building, leading to the emergence of an artificial and separated atmosphere, to be understood in the double acceptance of microclimate and of spatialized emotions³. But the enclosure can also lack a distinct materiality, a recognizable threshold: linear extensions – consider for example a pilgrimage route – can also encapsulate an interiorized condition, where the frame is provided by the prolonged experience of motion. Finally, the framing can also be time-related, as in the case of those religious rituals where the cyclic recurrence of a sacred event provides a form of temporary boundary in some specific locations (De Matteis 2018).

Some peculiar cases, in this sense, display how atmospheric conditions can be – or at least are expected to be – manipulated at will: Eero Saarinen’s MIT Chapel in Cambridge, for example, is “timed” to host Christian, Muslim and Jewish practice depending on a tight schedule, which is neatly displayed on a sign posted at the entrance. A direct correlation between the differing rituals, with their gestures, postures and sonic character can be expected to modulate the affective atmosphere emerging there. On the same note, in the Palestinian city of Hebron/Al Khalil, the Cave of the Patriarchs or Ibrahimi Mosque hosts Jewish and Muslim rituals in two separate spaces, but on some key days of the year either religion is allowed to occupy the entire building, affording a temporary atmosphere of ritual (Finkelman *et al.* 2018).

In one way or another, the portion of environment that is separated through a frame, be it material or not, becomes pacified, as (unwanted) emotions remain outside of the door. It is the definition that Schmitz attributes to the practices of dwelling, which indeed focuses on the need to have an enclosure wherein affects can be tamed (Schmitz 2023: 42). This “emotional curation”, alongside a choreographed orchestration of movement, is what ensures the stability of architectural experience: it is as if a certain emotion was “installed” here, available for anyone to encounter. This emotional occupation of space is collective, and can be experienced by anyone present, as when the stadium is full and the cheering crowd raptures me into a fanatical ecstasy. Yet in such tightly defined conditions, this emotional event can also be articulated over time, and I can encounter an atmosphere on a given day in a certain place, while someone else

³ We refer here to the acceptance of atmosphere as a spatialized emotion, as postulated by Hermann Schmitz’s *New Phenomenology* (1969, 2019, 2023), Gernot Böhme’s *New Aesthetics* (2001, 2017a, 2017b) and Tonino Griffero’s *Pathic Aesthetics* (2014, 2019, 2024).

might come across it on the next day, while I'm not there to perceive it any longer. It is a situation that becomes stabilized – as when the fleet-iness of clouds is blocked by the topography of mountains – thereby escaping from the contingent arbitrariness and unpredictability of atmospheric events.

In these “framed” architectural settings, spaces can thus “do things to us”, fully exhibiting the pathic side of the experience of space at different levels – and these spatialized affects can be intentionally located there, as if building the stage-set upon which their appearance becomes more likely (Böhme 2013). The baseline is the orchestration of our movement in terms of displacement, but above that we can experience an alteration in the quality of movement, as sensed at the felt-body level. By maneuvering perceptions and sensations, our emotional responses are thus triggered. Finally, this can give rise to an atmosphere that remains almost “hinged” to the architectural conditions that are established. While not permanent or fixed – affective atmospheres are by their very definition fleeting – they can become somehow more stabilized within the architectural frame, as if the enclosure could ensure that they do not escape the boundaries, trapping them inside. We could almost consider this as a transition from the momentary and unpredictable presence of an atmosphere to the persistence of a climate, which remains rather stable over the long period, affording some form of predictability of the atmospheric occurrences we may come to expect. In these circumstances, the pathic dimension of architecture becomes something over which a designer can exert more determinacy, at least partially subtracting the experience of space from the arbitrariness of situationality.

1. *Carlo Scarpa: The Brion Memorial*

To exemplify the pathic dimension of architectural space, describing how design techniques and intuitions can orient the subject's experience and the atmospheres that emerge in a “framed” environment, I will turn to a celebrated building, Carlo Scarpa's Brion Memorial in the town of San Vito d'Altivole. Much has been written about this unique architecture, which certainly counts among the most striking complexes realized during the 20th century by an undisputed master (Dal Co 1984; Dodds 2002; Frascari 1987; Frediani 2015; Guidi, Frongia 2011; Macaione 2017; McCarter 2021; Ros Campos, Verdejo Gimeno, Juan Ferruses 2025; Zanchettin 2005).

A very brief history of the site: Giuseppe Brion, together with his wife Onorina, was the founder of Brionvega, an electronics company which in the 1950s and 1960s ranked among the most iconic design brands during the years of the Italian postwar economic “boom”. Brionvega television sets, radios and turntables, often designed by celebrated architects such as Zanuso, Castiglioni and Albin, contributed to establishing a world-wide name for Italian design. While the eventual decline of the electronics industry in Italy from the 1970s onwards led to the closure of the company, its classic devices, updated with contemporary technology, are still produced today as collector’s items.

Giuseppe Brion died unexpectedly in 1968, and his wife called Carlo Scarpa, a long-time friend of the family, to design a mausoleum. While the initial idea was to build it in Milano, where the Brion had long lived and where the company was based, Scarpa suggested to shift the project to San Vito d’Altivole, the entrepreneur’s native town, located in the plain just by the Alpine foothills south of Asolo. The family acquired a plot of land adjacent to the existing village cemetery, which is surrounded by tall walls.



Fig. 1. Aerial view of the Brion Mausoleum. (C) Google Maps



Fig. 2. The pool with the perimeter walls, looking towards the mountains

The family mausoleum is an L-shaped addition to the North and East sides of the rectangular cemetery, in turn shielded by inclined concrete walls. It took Carlo Scarpa nearly a decade to design and complete the structure, a project to which he always confessed being particularly attached. Indeed, after the architect's sudden death in 1978, he was buried in a narrow strip of terrain wedged between the old cemetery and the addition he had designed.

The Brion mausoleum is indeed not an ordinary cemetery, but rather something more like a memorial garden, a sort of "machine for the mourning process" (Pietropoli, Schultz 2022: 39). The actual burial of Giuseppe and Onorina Brion occupies a sunken "arcosolium" located at the intersection of the two wings, and additional tombs of other family members are positioned beneath a shelter tucked against the perimetral wall. The two terminals of the wings respectively host the funerary chapel, which being open to the public represents the family's "gift" to the community, and the meditation pavilion, a diminutive shrine accessible only through a "floating" walkway crossing an ornamental pool.

The refined architectural detailing of the mausoleum epitomizes Scarpa's style, with rich ornamentations, an exquisite design of each individual element, and a trove of minute inventions that render its unique character. My personal experience and description of this building is based on many visits over the last three decades, which have occurred in

different seasons and atmospheric conditions, allowing me to appreciate the monument's varying interaction with the sky and the surrounding landscape. In addition, while during my first visits I saw the Brion memorial in a strongly weathered condition, the recently completed restoration process has also allowed me to witness it in a more pristine state.

The Brion memorial is, indeed, a strong architectural frame, established to create specific conditions in its internal space, filtering out many potential influences that the observer experiences once inside. The framing, however, is not a simple material device, rather a concentric system of exclusions that begins even before one reaches the gate of the mausoleum. The village of San Vito lies in a flat expanse, where the only relevant feature of the landscape is the Asolo foothills, about 5 km north of the mausoleum. While these serve as a distant horizon for the visitor's gaze, they are perceived as remote and not accessible from the low-lying location of the cemetery. All other buildings surrounding the mausoleum are no less than 150 m away and rather low, with the sole exception of the village church belltower, which hovers just above the perimeter wall. In itself, the location of the Brion memorial sets it apart from the broader territory, in a zone of exclusion, isolated amidst the agricultural landscape.

The second layer of frames is provided by the architectural enclosure. The perimeter wall itself, with its steep angle, provides a fortress-like appearance, setting the mausoleum distinctly apart from the surrounding landscape. Penetrating the interior is not entirely effortless: if one passes through the funerary chapel, he is greeted by a pool of water that must be crossed by way of a floating causeway. The chapel itself entirely cloaks the visibility of the garden space, which is only revealed after traversing the tiny chapel.

The other entrance takes place through the propylaea located within the earlier cemetery, an elaborate concrete portal that leads the visitor towards the slightly elevated plateau hosting the mausoleum's main structures. In both cases, access to the Brion memorial is controlled and clearly signaled, marking a threshold that is both architectural and psychological.



Fig. 3. The entrance from the old cemetery through the propylaea

A third, less tangible system of frames can be found scattered across the mausoleum: while the perimeter wall and the entrances are clearly laid out, these additional frames are less apparent, and one only becomes aware of them through a slow, meticulous exploration of each of the many niches, nooks, and corners that the mausoleum conceals. Through a dense system of diaphragms, vision is continually modulated, oriented, partially blocked, demanding a re-negotiation of sight and movement on the side of the visitor. There is no doubt that this design strategy, at which Scarpa excels, is the descendant of picturesque landscaping, where the subject's vision and motion is modulated to identify varieties of views, alternatively opening and closing the perspective. The way the built masses present themselves to the oncoming viewer is equally tell-tale of the architect's intention of creating an ever-moving visual condition: we hardly ever meet them frontally, most likely at a 45° angle, so that gaining control of the full elevations inevitably requires a displacement.

As a further, implicit tribute to picturesque gardening traditions, it may be fitting to consider the manipulated, perforated, almost "eroded" and partially submerged volumes that constitute the Brion memorial as artificial ruins, similar those found in Romantic gardens, placed there to evoke a melancholic atmosphere.



Fig. 4. The funerary chapel: an artificial ruin emerging from water

The three-way framing of the memorial – the agricultural landscape isolating the complex, the perimetral wall shutting out most of the nearby village buildings, the creation of multiple, pre-established points of view – are all techniques by means of which Scarpa institutes an “architectural domain” over the atmospheres that emerge here. There is, we could say, a two-way filtering: the filtering-out of unwanted spatial agents that might interfere with a certain mood that the architect is evoking – for example, the distant skyline of an ordinary suburbanized town, or even the patchwork-like, prosaic arrangement of the old village cemetery; on the other side, the filtering-in of a dense network of spatial dynamics, many of which are based on visual cues, that arrange and rearrange the movement and vision of the subjects.

2. A choreographed movement

The way this mausoleum becomes, for the observer, a true arena of the pathic occurs in two distinct yet closely related ways. There is indeed little freedom of movement that is left to the visitor, as Scarpa decides to make you move in a certain way. One can decide to trespass from the paved walk-

ways onto the trimmed lawn, but is not really encouraged to do so, unless he wishes to contemplate the scattered architectural masses from a non-canonical position. While this attitude is quite common in 20th century architecture, and many of Scarpa's designs organize movement in distinctive, often very theatrical ways (Frascari 1989), the techniques he adopts are usually subtler than those applied by most of his contemporaries: they are less based on the manipulation of physical objects, but rather leverage on the corporeal drives that descend from spatial gestures and suggestions of movement (De Matteis 2019).



Fig. 5. The “arcosolium”, burial of Giuseppe and Onorina Brion

The second factor derives from the gradual accumulation of these movements and dynamics, which add up to a ritual form comprising a sequence of spatial events. These slowly invite the subject to settle into a particular mood, which one cannot but track to being deliberately afforded by the architecture itself. In these two senses, this space *does things to us*: it makes us move in precise ways, and in this gradual movement “charges” us with affective cues, which eventually accumulate to lead to the emergence of a certain atmosphere.

As is the case with many spaces dedicated to the sacred, ritual plays a key role in the spatial construction. The Brion memorial can hardly be defined a religious place, since there are few evident signs of its belonging to Catholic faith. On the other hand, cues from other religious traditions

– especially Far Eastern⁴ – appear merged within the perimeter of the mausoleum: the meditation shrine, the pool of water, the arch-shaped burial.



Fig. 6. The rings framing the view from the propylaea entrance

Ritual comes into play here in terms of the accurately orchestrated movement, which leads the visitor to move along pre-established routes, and being exposed to precisely selected visual canvases, framed by the architectural elements Scarpa installs along the way. It is further reinforced by the need to perform gestures that are required to interact with the architecture: climbing stairs, turning to follow narrow passageways, ducking beneath low cornices to enter or exit from framed enclosures, sitting on benches to gain a view over the water.

The result of this articulated orchestration of movement, of the calibrated definition of views and exclusions, is more than just a form of displacement, or of a clearly outlined affective affordance. Something deeper is at stake here, and what the visitor experiences is a subtle, gradual “takeover” of the space over one’s disposition. There is no clear mo-

⁴ Scarpa’s had a notorious fascination for Japanese architecture, which unfolded fully during the final years of life, the period during which he worked in San Vito and travelled extensively to Asia (Pierconti 2007).

ment where this happens, no evident threshold – certainly not the monumental portal that leads one into the memorial garden. Yet what occurs is that after some time ambulating through the mausoleum, encountering countless minute spatial events and finely crafted details that both reveal and conceal a sophisticated conception of decoration and geometry, one suddenly “awakens” to the realization that his mood has shifted, becoming more distended. There are no brash waves of emotion here, rather thin ripples that permeate the subject’s felt body, eventually bringing him to resonate with the architectural ambiance.



Fig. 7. The meditation pavilion on the pool

There is something peculiar about the timing over which this realization occurs. One would expect, as is the case with many celebrated buildings, that the very moment of entering a space is that when the “a-ha” event is triggered, the threshold of the prototypical “ingressive atmosphere”, as Griffero defines it (2014: 130). Counterintuitively, this is not what happens here, although the mausoleum’s main entrance from the old cemetery, with its two intersecting rings, is one of the most iconic objects in 20th century architecture, one that nearly every architect – and even many more than just architects – know without having ever seen in reality. As a proper picturesque garden, the mausoleum’s inner structure is only revealed gradually, as one explores it, adding piece after piece.

Beyond the two deeply symbolic intersecting rings, in fact, the visitor's gaze is denied, as it is blocked against the blank and rather featureless perimetral wall. But both left and right the visitor is invited further, as the floating meditation pavilion and the arcosolium burial can be glimpsed but not entirely seen, as is the water pool that both visually and olfactorily makes its presence felt. This game of hide-and-seek continues throughout the complex, as the entirety of the garden's space cannot be dominated from any single visual point, and the countless niches, blind corners and pockets woven into the fragmented architectural ensemble demand an unceasing exploration. To see the tomb of Scarpa, for example, one has to find a passageway that is not altogether evident, or squeeze through a thin slit in the concrete wall that separates the old and new cemeteries. The lack of unimpeded vision denies frontality and monumentality, while offering the visitor protection from the other's gaze, a variety of hiding corners, and the promise of intimacy.

3. Atmospheres of time

The power of an architectural complex like the Brion memorial is not, as it may seem, limited to contingent events, to the atmosphere that emerges "here and now". I have said that here the spatialized emotions become "stabilized" through the adoption of an architectural frame, making their emergence more likely, if not entirely predictable. This frame can therefore be described as establishing a "climatic heterotopia" (Diaconu 2024: 179), but in an architectural version: a greenhouse, for example, is an enclosed space wherein a certain heterotopic climate is stabilized – a climate different from what you can find just outside the thin glass partition. We go to the greenhouse because a special atmosphere can be found there: exotic plants grow, we can experience more sunlight than in the rest of the house, and the room's temperature will be different from both outside and inside – milder than that of a cold winter day, cooler than that of an overheated domestic interior. In other words, it can make us experience the pleasant chill of spring or the cozy autumn dusk in mid-winter: an artificial climate, but also a heterotopic atmosphere, differing from what you can find elsewhere.

It is this very ability of an architectural frame, such as a greenhouse, that may draw us towards it: that of subjecting ourselves to its spatial authority, to its atmospheric power. It is a sense of "pathic" that eschews the primary understanding of what Hermann Schmitz (2019: 43) defines

“spontaneous life experiences”: as whatever happens to the subject without his having deliberately planned it. The experience of such framed architectural spaces is ambiguous in this sense, since I may have planned to go there – a visit to the Brion memorial requires me to reach it, since it is not on the road to anywhere else – but once I am there, I have no power over the atmospheres that are framed within its heterotopic space. The situation is both construed and spontaneous, as part of a longer process culminating in the pathic experience of the visit to the memorial garden and its climactic moment of sudden feeling of presence.

Something more may be at play here, another route through which architectural space affects us. There are, undeniably, places where our perception of the passage of time becomes somehow transformed, in a way that is difficult to describe, but that is nevertheless very evident. We could claim that in places such as these our “atmospheric” perception of time changes: not that our watches stop ticking, not that the sun halts its path along the sky, but some form of fixity sets in, as if we were suspended outside of the vitalistic feeling of motion that ordinary life experience affords us. The Brion mausoleum possesses this powerful quality, which it shares – perhaps predictably – with other sacred places, some of which dedicated to memorializing death. We could argue that in these very specific architectural settings, time is not properly materialized, but in some way acquires a sensible form, one that we can apprehend through a peripheral corporeal perception, which we can never entirely bring into full focus. It is as when we see something moving rapidly in the corner of an eye: we are precisely aware that there was something moving there, but we are unsure about what it is.

How this “sensation of time” emerges is difficult to describe. The relationship between architectural space and time has long been an unresolved issue in architectural theory (Leatherbarrow 2021; Nute 2024). Many authors ultimately point towards some buildings’ ability of acting as chronographs, by capturing and showcasing the movement of the sun – architecture as an inhabitable sundial. This is however a conception that reduces time to a geometric function and attempts to materialize it, no matter how fascinating the visual results can sometimes be. But in a place as the Brion memorial, this hardly seems to be the case: the buildings’ fragmented forms, and the continuous denial of sharp edges through the recurring ziggurat ornamental motive evokes a soft quality of light, rather than the sharp, projected shadows characteristic of “chronographic” architectures. It also responds more closely to the typical quality of natural light in the Veneto agrarian landscape.

The Brion memorial modulates our perception of time in a different way. It is not primarily visual, nor are there visual metaphors implied. Neither is it a matter of form, of a symbolic-archetypal connection between specific shapes and time – e.g. the pyramid or stepped pyramid, the cube – primary forms that are ancestrally associated with an idea of timelessness, of metaphysical fixity. The perception of time one has here is atmospheric, in the sense that we feel affected by it, despite the impossibility of reducing it to a specific anchoring point. We are able of recognizing that the spatial sensation we encounter there is temporal through intuition, since it has some connection with the sense of stillness and repose that pervades the mausoleum.

The architectural framing of this complex contributes to this sensation of immobility, by shutting out of much movement, noise, and perception of vitality. The visitor to the mausoleum is left largely alone, isolated from the rest of the world, in direct contact only with the architecture, the sky, the subtle sensorial cues from the garden – the water, the rustling of plants in the wind – and the distant panorama of the mountains to the North, towards which the main axis of the mausoleum is oriented. The architectural framing thus extracts the building from the vitality and flow of everyday life, a first ingredient of the temporal heterotopia that the mausoleum engenders.

But looking further, I believe that part of the suspended temporal perception of the Brion memorial also leads us back to a notion of climatic modulation, of how architectural spaces can sometimes condense and harbor climatic heterotopias. What attracts us to a greenhouse, we can observe, is not merely its distinctive temperature: it is rather its ability of establishing and “preserving” a certain atmosphere, which here (perhaps more than in any other understanding) refers both to the naturalistic and phenomenological meaning of the word. We pathically expose ourselves to this distinctive climate, allowing the architecture to “do things to us”. Equally, in an architectural ensemble, a “stabilized” atmospheric sensation can orient the visitor towards a certain mood, establishing a sort of experiential framework wherein spatialized emotions are likely to manifest themselves.

As climate and atmosphere are connected by a form of proximity, despite one being more stable, the other fleeting, we can perhaps describe the space of the Brion memorial as having a climate, a framework for spatial events that can emerge there. Yet this framework is largely artificial, and, unlike climate, only partially affected by the natural cycle of seasons. In the memorial garden, the climate that is stabilized is one of soft still-

ness, of reduced motion, of muffled sounds: all spatial and sensorial qualities that we may associate with winter weather, particularly with its reflective, introspective dimension (De Matteis 2022). Quite fittingly, the space of the mausoleum is turned inwards, sidelining the exuberant vitality of spring and summer, evoking the melancholy emotions of a dry, cold climate (Bowring 2008: 74).

Buildings sometimes have the ability of producing a climatic heterotopia that affords the experiencing subject more than just a warm or cold feeling: it trespasses into the broader field of how climate modulates our moods, establishing a foundation for how we feel, and of how and to what extent we resonate with the atmospheres we encounter (Borriello 2024). This consideration may help us explain that “a-ha moment” that we typically experience in a place as the Brion memorial, when we realize that the space’s authoritative power has taken hold of us. And the atmosphere that this architecture most powerfully materializes is an atmosphere of time: a temporal heterotopia, where time just acts differently from elsewhere.

Time is a strange and unique element of our perceptual world, since we can sense its presence and motion only indirectly. The movement of the sun across the sky, mirrored in the shadows crawling along a wall, is a symptom of its progress. We can also sense time through the traces that it produces through weathering, in the patina it inscribes on any physical object. But what we are speaking of here is an atmospheric presence of time as a mass that occupies space, becoming perceptible, affects us no matter how open or resistant we can be to its authority. The architectural frame contributes to its stable presence, making sure that we encounter it time and again, at every visit. It is a perception of time that is not linear-chronological, rather bound to the cyclic-recurring return of typical situations. Just like the seasonal change in the natural atmosphere offers us varying modulations of mood – the winter gloom and the springtime excitement – so we come to expect, from certain spaces, the ability to present us with an affective climate that is unchanging, or at least more stable than in the broader environment. In spaces such as the Brion mausoleum, with its architectural program of memorialization, it becomes its primary quality.

4. Conclusion: there is little escaping

I would like to conclude on a personal note, as my own experience of the Brion memorial could serve to render the intensity and pervasiveness of the pathic dimension as it unfolds within its enclosure. I have been aware of this place's existence for over thirty years, since it is part of the "bread-and-butter" of architectural education, especially in Italy. My first visit to the building took place in 1997, when I was about halfway through my studies, and since then I have returned at least five more times. I have thoroughly read most of what has been written on the building, from the 1970s criticism that desperately attempted to frame the memorial in a linguistic model, to more recent authors that focus on the corporeal and phenomenal dimension of its architecture. I have seen the mausoleum portrayed in independent Italian films – Francesco Sossai's recent *Le città di pianura* (*The last one for the road*) – and in Hollywood blockbusters – Denis Villeneuve's *Dune II*, where the Brion memorial is no less than the abode of the galactic emperor. All this is to say that I am no novice to the place, and that the experience I make of it is influenced by much of my personal biography and culture. When I visit the memorial, surprise does not play a significant role in my experience, since I know rather exactly what to expect. Anticipation is on the other hand a key factor, given that I know that I will be exposed to a strong and pleasant spatial experience, the reason why I keep returning to the place whenever I have the occasion. My academic knowledge of the memorial allows me to "crack the code" of many of Scarpa's mysterious design features, although some remain utterly inexplicable. In my relationship to this architecture, in addition, there is inevitably also a form of reverential respect, since Scarpa was – at least according to my judgment – one of three or four most talented architects of the past one-hundred years, whose work "bewitches" visitors with powerful atmospheres. Yet despite – or perhaps because of – this rather intense relationship with the memorial, not one of immediate familiarity but nevertheless structured over time and through an in-depth knowledge of its inner workings, there is an authoritative power embedded in its space that captures me each time I visit it. There is no way – at least none that I know of – that one can escape this power: it is there even if you cannot be caught off-guard, even if you are aware of the architectural techniques and devices that allow this atmosphere to emerge. Through design, it seems, it is possible to open the Pandora's box of spatialized emotions, letting these loose: but there is no evident way of performing the opposite movement, capturing or taming these spatial

forces once they are “in the wild”, since they resist being dispelled by the explanatory power of rationalization (Griffero 2014: 62).

The pathic in architecture emerges from this dual condition: on one hand, the impossibility of avoiding these agent forces, no matter how experienced or knowledgeable we can claim to be. On the other, the powerful drive that leads us to seek exposure to them, returning to the places where we have encountered them. Once we expose ourselves to these spaces, we relinquish control over what happens to us: in the perception of a segment of the world, in the feelings that we corporeally experience, and even in our embodied sensation of time.

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