

Lodoli's Lessons, or *lo cunto de li cunti*

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The symbolic potential of architecture is obvious to both educators and students. In spite of this, the realization of a truly meaningful architecture has been obfuscated within the immense amount of building activity. We live in a world where even the most mundane action, like recycling paper, implies a global importance—yet the possibility that one's actions may actually affect change often seems unrealistic. In spite of this seeming contradiction I will begin this paper with the wager that meaningful architecture is both possible and even essential. We then must ask; what is the responsibility of a professional architect? Is it ethical to rely on the delusional belief that an architect is the keeper of some sort of technical expertise, or is an intuitive and artistic genius? Is s/he simply the conductor within the symphony of building trades? What other modes of action might be possible? Essential to these questions is the role of education in the development of a professional architect.

How do we educate students of architecture—students of a profession that we understand to be an essentially symbolic action? The dichotomy between architectural education and professional practice only highlights the failure of the institutionalized distinction between the model of the Beaux-Arts and that of the Technical Institute. It is my position that seeds of a more appropriate modern architectural education may be found in the Veneto of the eighteenth century. A careful investigation into this time offers a critique of, as well as radical departure from, current strategies of architectural pedagogy—thereby providing an approach that informs the perceived gap between architectural practice and professional education.

Venetian architectural education in the eighteenth century may be characterized in part by an ambivalence between the application of an instrumental theory and the theory itself. In other words, when it came time to build something the craftsmen were still intuitively

correct. Though the system of guilds was still quite strong, it was in the early part of the century that architectural education was revived at the university in Padova and various Academies. However, it is not until the end of the century that the Reformatore (the governing board that decided and implemented changes in the academic culture of Venice) named Domenico Cerato as the first professor of practical architecture.¹ Any further attempts to formalize architectural education would have to wait until the unification of Italy seventy years later.

It is in this atmosphere that Carlo Lodoli began to offer classes in architectural rhetoric to young Venetians. His classes were given within the context of an overall reform within the Veneto aimed at outdated teaching methods and subjects. Lodoli's peripatetic scuola di conversazione was held within his garden where he had collected strange architectural fragments and on walks through the city. Lodoli's teaching approach was not necessarily professional—he did not instruct his students in the methods of drawing or construction techniques. Rather, he offered his students fables. In this short essay I would like to specifically discuss Lodoli's understanding of analogy in relation to his dialectical pedagogy.

Carlo Lodoli exists as a footnote in most major history books of modern architecture. He is typically noted for his influence on the Venetian neo-Classical tradition or as an early prophet of functionalism. The issue of influence is always present, as none of his writings have survived. Any writing he may have done throughout his life was left to rot under a leaking roof in the Piombe. His built work amounts to a few windowsills and possibly a corridor at the San Francesco della Vigna. Born Venice in 1690, he was educated as a Franciscan and traveled throughout the peninsula until he returned to Venice in 1720 as a well-respected tutor. There, Lodoli began his school for young patricians who

were guaranteed an education by the state regardless of their often-precarious financial situation. He was the Censor of Books for Venice between 1730-36 and it was in this capacity that he was first introduced to the writings of Giambattista Vico. He was plagued through his life by various illnesses, including elephantitis, recurring ulcers, and a mild form of leprosy. He sought out natural remedies for his conditions and was known to prescribe to the Pythagorean diet avoiding meat, beans, and wine. He died in Padua in 1761.

As none of Lodoli's writings survive, the typical route to his thought is through his students. Most modern scholarship recognizes Andrea Memmo as the most faithful student.² Memmo presented Lodoli's theory of architecture in at least two texts. The first, the *Elementi d'Architettura Lodoliana*, was printed in 1787. It was then reprinted in 1834 with a second book and the *Riflessioni*—a debate between Andrea Memmo and Pietro Zaguri on the relative merits of Lodoli. The text is quite long and strangely written. It proposes new norms of architecture, while critiquing most everyone that has ever called himself or herself an architect, especially Vitruvius. The text also contains an outline for a treatise on architecture that Memmo claims Lodoli gave to him. Essential to this outline is the metaphoric relation between function and representation. Thus, Lodoli is often referred to as the precursor to the modern dictum "form follows function". Memmo also describes an organic architecture— noted by many historians as being the first architect to name architecture in this way.³ Its length and abundance of topics makes the *Elementi* the usual source for Lodolian scholarship.

The other text published by Memmo in 1787 is the *Apologhi Immaginati*. As the title indicates it is a collection of fables. It is essential for this study as it offers not only Lodoli's theoretical position, but more importantly it is a record of Lodoli's lessons. The word *apologhi* may be translated into English as the plural of *apologue*—a synonym for fable and a short story usually involving animals and containing a moral. It can also be understood as a defense. Most famously, perhaps, by Plato who named Socrates' final testament before being put to death, and his most autobiographical dialogue, with the same title. The Socratic connection is important. Lodoli is named as "perhaps the Socratic architect" in the frontispiece of the *Apologhi*. This isn't so much due to his lack of writing, as many modern scholars are quick to point out. Rather, the name derives from his difficult character, his desire to form a new Republic, and probably due to his interest in young men. Each of these claims was credited to him in the eighteenth century. In the introduction to the *Apologhi*, Memmo states that Lodoli was a great

admirer of Socrates and wished to imitate him. Indeed, Socrates is the main character in a number of the fables.

There are fifty-six fables within the *Apologhi*.⁴ Memmo begins the introduction by apologizing for not being able to remember all of them. He does not wish to demonstrate the usefulness of the stories, as this seems quite obvious to him. This is true because, as Memmo notes, they "are founded on well-understood analogy and directed towards practical use." He continues to explain their importance; "they make intelligence easier and they purify the heart." Lodoli is not interested in simply proposing moral tales. Rather, "the apologues were given to offer new learning directions for the entire architecture profession. They are particularly moral and spoken in a common sense way, prosaically dictating philosophic fantasy, picturesque, and poetic."⁵ It is clear that the stories were pedagogical and intended for action.

This first story, "the Story of the Story," begins with the description of a time when reigning Saturn had flown from earth and the father of men and of Gods wished to return them to the gentle manner of good custom. To do this he named a subordinate deity, called the *Apologue*, who was needed to heal the nauseating wounds of corruption. However this subordinate deity needed help. The *Apologue* was given *Analogy* as an indivisible guide and companion. He told the *Apologue* that *Analogy*, acting like a veil, would lend to him the implements he would need. They both then descended into the world following the solar rays.

The *Apologue*, who resembled a hermaphrodite though neither human nor animal, acted as an auctioneer. Each of the self-propelling animals was to pass in front of him to assure and understand each of their qualities. Only the Ass did not conform, walking four paces forward and then three back wards. Though he was late, the *Apologue* did not want to discourage him, saying; 'You believe that I do not recognize you even from afar, and that I do not know your innumerable merits? I know that you are connected to the generous war-horses and others not too dissimilar and more vigorous. As we know from Roman history, some lascivious Empress has traveled accompanied by a vast number of your nourishing females only to dive each morning into their milk. Your patience exceeds that of the most illuminate philosophers; you are content with little and you are obedient to your owner.' The *Apologue* wished to continue, but the Ass did not trust what he was hearing. Lodoli concluded by telling us that "the evidence itself of these things pronounced with skill and sweetness is not enough to enlighten those who resemble the Ass. It is good to know from

the beginning, that it is not wise to waste one's time with them because they need large sticks or a good rope rather than pure Apologues to be led to reason."⁶

In his description of Poetic Logic, Vico explains "'Logic' comes from logos, whose first and proper meaning was fabula, fable, which carried over into Italian as favella, speech."⁷ Fables were created by all of the vulgar peoples—the children of the human race—whose imagination was as robust as their reasoning was weak. It is children who "build huts, hitch mice to little wagons, play odds and evens, and ride on a great hobbyhorse of a stick."⁸ Their language is a fabulous language that recognizes all things to be endowed with life. Vico names the first corollary concerning this poetic logic as metaphor. Vico tells us that every metaphor is a "fable in brief and the fables in their origin were true and severe narrations, whence mythos, was defined as vera narratio."⁹ It is precisely this logic that allows us to understand fables.

Lodoli's fables are filled with three types of characters. The first, the animals, are characteristic of certain qualities. For example a donkey is ignorant and an eagle is noble. These are quite common to the genre of fable and Lodoli included the typical cast: frogs, flies, geese, bears, pigs, snails, turkeys, and donkeys. The last two are Lodoli's favorite and appear frequently. The next type of character common to Lodoli's fables refers to Roman and Greek Philosophers and Gods. These represent an action within a historical account. For example in one story Lodoli describes the events surrounding the conspiracy of Catiline. Persius, Juvenal, Socrates and his wife, Pliny, and Jove are some of those included. The final group of characters includes various professions and is representative of different social positions. These include a smith, a nun, a Governor, a Prince, an Ambassador, a ballet dancer, and even a few gondolieri.

Typical of fables there is a pedagogic intention that is necessarily analogical. We are, for example, told of the actions of a donkey and a horse. Though we don't necessarily understand the stories literally (we know the story is not only about a donkey or a horse), we may choose put ourselves in the place of the animals and either act donkey-like, or eagle-like. This ability to act ethically relies upon our imaginative capacity to understand ourselves both within the context of the story and in our own situation. An important distinction between Lodoli's fables and the tradition of fable telling is that Lodoli interweaves historical events within the conventions of the genre. As such Socrates can talk to a snail and Catiline's conspiracy can be discovered in a conver-

sation between Trebonio and the seeds of a pomegranate.

Lodoli's interest in history is not uncommon for the eighteenth century. It is important therefore to distinguish Lodoli's approach from that of his contemporaries. Many people were doing important work in the burgeoning field of archaeology. Giovanni Poleni, Scipione Maffei, Ludovico Muratori, and J. J. Winckelmann, though diverse in their views, were looking to the inscriptions on stones and to the faces of medals to prove a certain history. Lodoli's references, rather than archeological, were strictly literary. Even within the *Elementi* the recent archeological discoveries were mentioned only to support his position and never to define it. Further, his look back was not nostalgic. He did not attempting to recover, or even describe a primitive model to imitate. Lodoli was critical of the blind imitation of precedent. In the *Elementi* Memmo described a situation in which Lodoli was asked to comment on a recent construction by Giorgio Massari. Lodoli mocked Massari's obvious references to Palladio. Massari responded by claiming that it was easy for Lodoli to say such things, as he (Lodoli) did not actually build. Massari continued by explaining that he (Massari) had a family to feed and if he didn't take the job someone else would. Lodoli responded by asking Massari to name a district in any city in which there were prostitutes. He then asked if it were still possible for a woman to live there decently. The answer is obvious; the fact that prostitution exists does not mean that all women must prostitute themselves. Nor should we, as architects, prostitute ourselves to clients.

However, Lodoli does not shun all relation to the past. He is quite aware of the tradition he is continuing. In the introduction to the *Apologhi* Memmo claimed that Lodoli wished to imitate Phaedrus—clearly many of the stories come from this source. The *Pentamerone* (1630) by Giambattista Basile, often considered to be the first collection of Italian folktales, begins with a story called "Lo Cunto de li Cunti" (the Tale of the Tales). Lodoli also begins his collection with a fable entitled the "L'Apologo dell'Apologo" (the Story of the Story). The reference here seems obvious, though the stories are completely different. There are other references within the naming of certain tales, and also within the stock characters usually employed in fables.

It is clear that knowledge of history and tradition, for Lodoli, has to do with orienting action, and should not be understood only for itself. Lodoli describes this in the story of "the Graceful Hunter" in which a young Knight meets an elegantly dressed grand Prince who is carrying a Spanish harquebus. The Prince is invited to hunt with

the Knight. The lead hunter immediately recognizes that, although the Prince may have a beautiful weapon, he is too uncoordinated to use it. Lodoli laments; "oh how many scholars who have a beautiful appearance, overburden their memory with erudition, and are quick to form mathematic equations, and Politicians also, when invited to act in the world of commerce, don't know where to begin and remain humiliated quite often exactly when they make their biggest effort to show off."¹⁰

The analogy here is obvious; a big, overly ornate gun, and the inability to hunt is similar to the overly erudite scholar, full of facts though unable to act. It is easy to understand the analogy but Lodoli stretched it further. There is an early dialogue by Plato (*Laches*) that features a very similar situation. In the Platonic dialogue the discussion involves the correct way to teach virtue. The example given is of a young warrior who is armed with an unwieldy gun that fails to fire in the heat of battle. Interestingly the gun is named *sophisma* (knowledge). There is a historical dimension to the truth offered by the analogy.

History may act as a guide to our making. Another story, "The Young Nun and her Mother," describes a young nun who continually asks her mother for the ingredients to make *ciambelle*. The mother agrees until she is sick of eating the same cakes and asks her daughter to make different ones. The young nun tried, but after several attempts had to return to her mother because she reverted to her old habits. Lodoli warns us that without genius we may be similarly tricked into our old habits. Importantly, the young nun looks to her old mother to be able to break with her habits. In other words, she looks to her mother, one we might expect to be stuck in her old ways, to make a break with the past. It is important to recognize that, though Lodoli wishes to break with habit, he still looks to the past to find new norms.

The fables refer to a context, yet are separate from it. It is clear to us all that the story is never simply about the action of a donkey, or even of Socrates. The fable becomes critical when understood within a conversation. This highlights the situational context that the stories were given in. Memmo reports that one of the problems in attempting to write down the stories is that they were always given in the context of a situation. The same story would be told differently depending on the situation and with whom Lodoli was speaking. Rather than fixed norms or laws, the specific context of the telling determined both how the fables were narrated and also their meaning.

Therefore we may say that Lodoli's approach to architectural pedagogy, and I would include making in general, is analogical in at least three ways. The first is historical; this describes how we relate to historical event. Within the *Lodolian* the characters include the snail but also Socrates. The next is traditional; this is how we refigure or re-tell our tradition. The final is situational; this refiguration occurs in a specific situation and it is in this context that it may become critical and lead to appropriate action.

This analogical understanding does have limits. We still need judgment to decide what is truthful. An example may be found in the discussion of materials. Lodoli looked to history to understand the relative merits of wood and stone construction. He praised the Roman tradition over the Greek, as he believed the Greeks imitated a wood construction in stone. This judgment is based on what Lodoli terms the *indole*—the inherent nature—of the material. Prior to Louis Kahn by nearly two hundred years, Lodoli recognizes that there are certain characteristics inherent in materials. These characteristics are not based upon tradition or habit. Rather, they are understood through use, through action. One builds a wall differently in stone than in wood. Lodoli describes this condition through a story about an ass that wished to be a butterfly and wrapped himself up in a cocoon. When spring arrived the ass emerged from the cocoon as a turkey.

It is my wager that Lodoli proposes a very early understanding of hermeneutics as architectural discourse¹¹ as developed in the latter half of the twentieth century by Paul Ricoeur and Hans-George Gadamer. It is within the dialectic of distancing and appropriation that we may more fully understand ourselves and act in an appropriate manner. In the end it is difficult to claim a direct application of Lodoli's pedagogical approach to architectural education in general. As I have stated earlier, he did not provide us with a prescriptive method to follow. Lodoli's *Lessons* cannot simply be reduced to information, given in a causal relation between intention and action. Rather, they are situational, constantly shifting and demanding of the reader / student to make a claim and project where they stand with respect to our historical condition.

I would like to conclude by telling just one more story—"the New College or the Pseudo Professors." The story describes the most forward thinking and progressive college. Every aspect was thought out to promote learning. Above all the school would be run so efficiently that those in charge could make a nice profit. Once classes began, however, the parents recognized that their children were coming home dirty. They went

straight to the principle to complain. He defended himself by showing the account books that revealed a normal amount of soap being used. The children continued arriving home dirty. Finally, the principle decided to watch the students wash themselves. Instead of using the soap to wash themselves, the youngest students used the soap to blow bubbles, the middle-school students were playing bocce with the balls of soap, and the eldest students were throwing the pieces of soap at each other's heads.

Lodoli concludes that quite far from using the soap for good discipline, or to wipe away the dirt of ignorance, the young ones make sonnets and songs—the true bubbles of youth. The middle-aged scholars play with academic discourse translating it from one language to another, commenting on old works, and mixing some new truths in with old ones. The eldest scholars, amongst whom Lodoli notes are many are theologians, unfortunately write with biting criticism and abuse only to throw heavy works at each other's heads. If we doubt this Lodoli, can offer examples. I am sure we are able to cite a few of our own.

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NOTES

- ¹ Cerato's Pubblica Scuola di Architettura was founded at La Specola in 1771. See Giulio Brunetta, *Gli Inizi dell'Insegnamento Pubblico dell'Architettura a Padova e Venezia*. (Padova, 1976).
² See Also: Francesco Algarotti, *Saggio Sopra l'Architettura*. (Bologna 1756), Francesco Milizia, *Principi di Architettura Civili di Francesco Milizia*. (Bassano, 1785), Zaccharia Sceriman *I Viaggi di Enrico Wanton* (1764).
³ Joseph Rykwert *The First Moderns* (Cambridge, MIT Press, 1980) p.336 n.115.
⁴ The collection has never been fully translated into English, and no modern Italian Edition exists. Thomas Roscoe in *The Italian Novelists translated two stories into English*. (London, Frederick Warne and Co, 1825). Joanne Paul, "Of Substantiating Nature", translated seven others. (Unpublished Thesis. McGill Univ., 1995). I have completed a working translation of the text. All translations are my own.
⁵ Andrea Memmo, *Apologhi Immaginati* (1786), p.6.
⁶ Andrea Memmo, *Apologhi Immaginati* (1786), p.14.
⁷ Giambattista Vico, *New Science*. tr. Fisch/Bergin (Ithaca, New York, 1962.), §401.
⁸ Giambattista Vico *On the Most ancient wisdom of the Italians*. tr. L.M. Palmer (Cornell University Press, 1990) p102. Vico is quoting Horace *Satire* 3,II, 247-8.
⁹ Giambattista Vico, *New Science*. tr. Fisch/Bergin (Ithaca, New York, 1962.), §403-4.
¹⁰ Andrea Memmo *Apologhi Immaginati* (1786), p.20.
¹¹ I owe this naming to my teacher Alberto Pérez-Gómez.