

Dentro e Fuori: Inside and Out

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My family and I stood before the gate as we waited in line for tickets. As we got closer to the entrance, I noticed the sign posted on the ticket window to my left. The sun was beating down on me, and the huge leaves of the trees above only provided minimal coverage. Still trying to catch my breath from the hike to the site, I tried to focus on the words on the sign: “VILLA DEL BALBIANELLO: One of the most beautiful and romantic villas of Lake Como, a green promontory rich in vegetation, the remains of a medieval Franciscan monastery and a beautiful eighteenth-century lodge surrounded by a park of rare beauty” (Fondo Ambiente Italiano). I struggled to grasp the meaning of these words. My feet hurt. I could feel the start of a headache pressing against my skull.

As my family and I trucked through the gravel path between the gates of the entrance, I took in the foliage, the sky, the people. I heard a guided tour in Italian starting behind us. I felt lost. We kept walking. It was a short walk to reach the main site of the villa, and we finally saw it as we walked over a small hill and were greeted by statues that took longful gazes across the site. We made our way down, admiring the crystal clear blue waters of the lake and the incredible shapes and sizes of plants above and below us. I was still exhausted, hungry, trying to stay in the moment but finding myself jumping ahead to later that day, or behind to whether or not I took a good enough picture of the

entrance.

A typical Italian summer day on Lake Como, and people from all over were sharing this space. Breaking from the crowd, I landed near the most picturesque point of the villa, a banister overlooking the left “leg” of the lake, onto the nearby towns of Casate and Vergonese. It was in this spot that Anakin and Padmé had traveled to celebrate their honeymoon in *Star Wars: Episode II - Attack of the Clones*. Pretty cool to stand where they stood. I pushed away the intrusion. I remembered the sign from the entrance, “...the remains of a medieval Franciscan monastery...” and imagined this site hundreds of years earlier. I would assume that the foundations would be similar, with differing styles and materials used to build the exterior walls and archways, depending on the time period and its inevitable influences.

Standing in this spot called forth from my mind the movie *Call Me By Your Name*, which was filmed mostly in a town south of Lake Como called Moscazzano. The movie, based on the novel by André Aciman, follows 17-year-old Elio Perlman during the summer of 1983, in which he develops a close relationship with his father’s summer student, Oliver. Aciman, the author of a number of other works, including *Enigma Variations*, *Out of Egypt*, and *Eight White Nights*, studied at Harvard University and is a professor of literary theory at the Graduate Center of City University

of New York. In *Call Me By Your Name*, Elio deals with the feelings around growing up and seeking independence, while also fighting against a never before experienced longing for his father's guest. Eventually the two give in to their feelings for each other, and experience a sense of connectedness and unity incapable of being replaced. The name of the story, *Call Me By Your Name*, comes from Oliver telling Elio: "Call me by your name and I'll call you by mine" (Aciman 134). One's name represents the culmination of one's identities. To achieve the level of intimacy that Elio and Oliver had, to the point where they would call each other by the other's name, merged the gap between them, effectively fusing their separate "buildings" into one.

The beauty of this story, both the cinematography of the movie and the intriguing language of the novel, left me pondering the ideas it contained for months. Being in Northern Italy in the summer, with the sound of insects buzzing, people lounging and chatting in groups, faint Italian music drifting from a nearby radio, brought forth from the depths of my conscience a metaphor from the novel called the "San Clemente Syndrome."

The Basilica of San Clemente in Rome was once a refuge for persecuted Christians, then was the home of the Roman consul Titus Flavius Clemens before being burned down, then became an underground pagan temple, on top of which two Christian churches were built, one being today's basilica (Aciman 192). Aciman states, "Like the subconscious, like love, like memory, like time itself, like every single one of us, the [Basilica of San Clemente] is built on the ruins of subsequent restorations, there is no rock bottom, there is no first anything, no last anything, just layers and secret passageways and interlocking chambers..." (Aciman 192). We as humans are just as complex as the oldest and most historical buildings. Buildings are burned, destroyed, laid to rest, as it is determined what should belong there. As architecture is a

construct created for and by humans, it reveals parts of ourselves that we often ignore. The parts that lie within us are the parts that Aciman compares to the unseen passageways and chambers that are hidden deep beneath even the most recognizable landmarks.

Rarely do we grasp the little things. As humans we are programmed by nature to search for the big details, possible threats, overall view, and fail to look deeper into the crevices of life. Our lives often feel in fast-motion, trying to balance school, jobs, hobbies, friends, and practically everything in between. We rush from place to place, from person to person, often only approaching the exterior, for we do not have the time nor patience to explore beneath.

Self-reflection may seem to be most convenient during the minutes spent wasting away under a hot shower, but it's surprising how much one can find when time is dedicated to it elsewhere. Judging from the disorganized nature of my brain as I entered Villa del Balbianello, I expected the whole day to go that way. There haven't been many times where I've felt fully immersed in where I am. This moment, surprisingly, turned out to be one of them. As I reflect on this moment in time, this tiny "chamber" within my memories, I remember feeling my feet on the ground, my hands on the banister looking out on the lake, my eyes straining against the sunlight that reflected off the water. The air smelled of moss, freshwater, and faint limoncello that drifted from the soda bottle in my dad's hands. There was no other time that I had felt more myself, and more grounded in nature. It was like all aspects were coming together, everything was making sense. I was making sense. Paying attention to the small details of the villa, trying to fathom how it's changed over time, was like looking into myself.

I had struggled more the past year than I had in my life. I had missed over a month of school

during a time when I thought my anxiety would never get better. Just six months prior, I remember feeling myself slowly slipping deeper and deeper, clawing at the floor as it was pulled from under me. During semester one of my senior year, I went from missing one class a week to missing over 20 consecutive days of school after just a couple of months. I would wake up and have panic attacks just by the thought of leaving—my life had been upended, and even the simplest things, like eating breakfast, had become stressors. I could feel myself losing sight of my own foundations, including who I was and the things that were most important to me.

It took months of persistence, but I finally felt myself feeling more like me: I returned to school after the new year, played a season of varsity tennis, graduated. Now, standing at Villa del Balbianello in Italy, feeling the ground and the warm air as it filled my lungs, everything made sense and was finally feeling like my life, rather than one I was watching through a film camera. All the work I had done to better myself and my life—the restorations of my own site, like this Italian peninsula, like the Basilica of San Clemente—was finally seeming to be worth it.

When you visit a place like this, you rarely know what to expect. I had come to the villa for the views, the pictures, the opportunity to say that I stood where Anakin and Padmé stood. “Object-related authenticity focuses on the viewpoint that authenticity is related primarily to toured objects... the arts, crafts, cuisine, and cultural activities that tourists encounter during travel can all be described as either authentic or inauthentic” (Lin & Liu 2136-2137). My family’s somewhat “shallow” reasons for paying to visit the villa was centered on the exterior—what the site physically holds. So in some senses, this experience was authentic, for the reason that we saw what we had taken a boat across the lake to see. Yet, for me, “authentic” Villa del Balbianello extended beyond the object-related exterior, deeper

into the meaningful connections this site helped to foster within myself. It was in this place that I finally realized how far I have come, but also how much more I have yet to discover.

From the outside, object-related view of authenticity, the Basilica of San Clemente or Villa del Balbianello, would both appear to outsiders as being uniform, almost two-dimensional. We see what is in front of us. That’s how we’ve learned. Only with effort and changing our gaze like the lenses of glasses can we see what truly lies within—a narrative that can also be used when viewing other people and their identities, or ourselves and our own.

Jillian Rickly-Boyd, who works under the Department of Geography at Indiana University, states, “Such a perspective on place also considers how and why our bodies are put into motion, emotion, and the context of embodiment, which can, therefore, often further insight into notions of existential authenticity” (Rickly-Boyd 681). Existential authenticity, a focus on the self and greater being over time or place, takes the concept of authenticity to a more intrapersonal level—the level which I was able to reach on that Italian summer day. Judging a place or person based only on the exterior walls is a shortcoming that many of us succumb to. Only through looking into history and its depths can true authenticity be achieved, and the things that we can learn when we do so extend beyond time and place.

As we undergo restorations to ourselves, getting rid of things that don’t work, adding ones that do, we begin to see the formations of our most important identities. “Who Am I?”—a question that we often ask when finding our place in the world, trying to figure out where we fit in as we struggle to feel seen. “Here that self of childhood, derived from significant identifications with important others, must, during adolescence, give way to a self,

based upon, yet transcending those foundations, to create a new whole greater than the sum of its parts” (Ferrer-Wreder & Kroger 8).

The main quest that fills much of our lives, and in some cases, all of them, is the discovery of the layers that lie within, and the pursuit to build upon them. Overlooking Lake Como, reflecting on its history as well as my own, feeling whole and warm and a part of the world, I could only just begin to see myself coming forward—the sum of my parts fusing as one, after learning to build upwards from my past struggles instead of demolishing them. The pillars of my building are my roles as a daughter, sister, friend, student, piano player, and tennis player. Everyone’s list—everyone’s building and its subsequent restorations—will look different. Adolescence is the golden era for self-discovery, and “Nature has cunning ways of finding our weakest spot” (Aciman 224). All of our experiences are there to help us grow in one way or another.

As I’m writing this, I’m sitting in the Center for Community Dining Center at the University of Colorado Boulder. The wind is drifting through the trees as my gaze wanders out the window to people walking below. The cafeteria is full of conversation. I hear people talking in another language behind me—could it be Arabic? I push away the intrusions. Part of Hallett Hall is framed in the window to my right, so I start to analyze its elements: red-tiled roof, even windows, jagged bricks. The same as every other building on campus. CU Boulder is idolized for its architectural uniformity, after all. As I finish my hibiscus tea and return my mug to the dish rack, I head out the doors back to Smith Hall. Walking under the bridge, I notice Kittredge Central Hall straight ahead of me, and can see more details of the building as I approach closer. I realize that these structures, made to look uniform, are anything but so. Each brick laid to form the walls is slightly different—varying in width, length, color,

and texture. From afar, it all looks consistent. Only looking close was I able to realize the individuality of the building and the separate parts that sum to its whole.

Is the most authentic view of campus seen from above (the one we all see in pictures), or from close enough to the buildings to see every detail? Like looking into ourselves, like me from the recent past at Villa del Balbianello, or me from the not so recent past reading about the Basilica of San Clemente, only from a close-up, interior gaze can authentic understandings be reached. An eagle’s eye view of CU’s campus simply does not provide a full account of what it’s like to live and work here, as the classes (at least the ones I’ve taken so far) have not been held in the sky. One can only see from close up that no two buildings are identical, nor, comparatively, are two people identical. After all, architecture is made for humans, by humans. We can see reflections of ourselves throughout all eras of architectural history. CU Boulder’s students and faculty, like the buildings we call home, all appear to be uniform, but are actually mosaics of unrelated elements, joined together to become one. The people at CU come from all over the world, bringing with them their own identities and foundations, and their own answers to the question “Who Am I?”. The sandstone used for buildings is harvested from across Boulder County, different slabs and rocks first untouched, then later part of one whole. Only when I opened my eyes to it did I realize that complexity is all around us.