

## THE MEANINGS OF TEMPORAL AND SPATIAL DIMENSIONS OF THE GARDEN

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### Abstract

When dealing with the art of gardening, people often have been inclined to think about gardens in terms of *Nature* vs *Culture*. The purpose of our paper is to analyze the temporal and spatial dimensions of the garden from a semiotical point of view, the relationship *Time* versus *Space*, a space experienced through multiple meanings in an ever-changing reality. Having in view that more than any other forms of art (painting, sculpture, architecture) the art of gardening aims to “incarnate/embody” the time, a dreamed time, which has been imagined as eternal, the garden may be considered a “temporized spatial entity” or a “spatialized time”. The apprehension that an event or phenomenon takes place somewhere in the world, every moment, leads us to think about the meaningful content of different elements related to space and spatiality versus time and temporality. Experience of the nature forms the bottom layer of any experience in the environment. Conscious and subconscious factors of our memory, knowledge and imagination play an important role in this experience. Human beings relate with the environment by means of different signs – indexes, icons and symbols (basic triad according to Charles S. Peirce) which can be used on different layers of space experience, while *semiosis* acts as a connecting link between the body, environment, spirit and culture, creating different meanings.

**Key words:** non-verbal communication, significance, garden, semiosis

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The first evidence of the gardener's art is to be found in the ancient world. From the traceable beginnings of the garden in Ancient times to the public parks of the present day, the art of gardening has experienced continuous change, a change which has been associated with a variety of purposes. Right up to the present day, constantly changing forms of artistically designed gardens have appeared, in harmony with the architecture and the pictorial arts of the time, closely related to and conditioned by social, material and technical developments. Periods when wonderful gardens flourished have alternated with periods of

stagnation. Whenever peace and tranquility have ruled the land, there has been a new desire to get closer to nature and there have been great advances in gardening. All this would not have been possible without the ideas and the creative abilities of the garden designers, who translated their ideas into practical reality and devoted themselves to the care and maintenance of the gardens. Even if the gardener hardly ever sees the completion of his work, this aids great significance to his visionary planning and the working out of his fantasies, so that he may gain the spatial experience he seeks.

### MATERIAL AND METHOD

Although space has practically always been the subject of analysis, it is the 20<sup>th</sup> century during which there have been discovered new aspects of space in the physical dimensions (e.g. findings of A. Einstein) and also articulated the value of space as a very special and precious subject of anthropology (e.g. research of C. Lévi-Strauss *Structural anthropology*, 1968). In anthropological perspective, the space was declared to be the mirror of culture. Anthropology in its 19<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> century conceptions has largely treated culture as based on (or even being wholly) the system(s) of adjustment of a biological being, man, to the environment. Culture, man's invented “unnecessary

luxury”, if approaching from suchlike viewpoint, has been dependent on his ability to adjust to spatial realities. Written documents and illustrations that have been handed down to us from past centuries, excavations of temple gardens, palaces and garden remains help us to realize that the human striving to shape the natural environment and change it to satisfy his aesthetic feelings, began long before the Christian era. Space and place have become into the focus of cultural attention and have usually been in evident and strong connection with the abilities, development and possibilities of man's capacity to use space. As it has been mentioned by Anti Randviir in his work, *Mapping the World : Towards a Sociosemiotic Approach to Culture*, (2004), such

usage can be split into two, and thus we can make a distinction between the different epochs, keeping in mind which aspects of space have gained importance at the relevant era. The roughly two uses of space are physical, material on the one hand, and spiritual on the other. Examination of a culture's use of space allows us to view those specific semiotic structures that are linked to the identity discourse of a given socium. Analysis of space as the substrate of all the cultural semiotic systems is thus in direct connection with the predictability of the development of different cultures. Besides space as the substrate of culture, spatial structures are those within the limits of which all cultural production "takes place". Hereby, another important moment is concerned with what kind of space or spaces a culture can use, uses and does not use. The enclosure of outdoor space began in 10,000 BC. Though no one knows the specific details of the first garden, it seems that the first enclosure was a type of barrier for the purpose of keeping out animals and marauders. Ever since the first garden was made in Ancient Egypt some 4,300 ago they have acted as cultural barometers. Historians of gardens and landscape architecture draw on different kinds of evidence – visual, literary and intellectual, as well as on what there is on the ground – to explore the ideas, attitudes and approaches which any design contains within it. The ideal garden has always been in people's mind, a way of thinking about nature and culture and how they influenced each other. We may say that any garden, as a spatial entity is a balancing point between human control and the wild nature. Gardening is a process, not necessarily a product. It develops at different paces and involves various layers of space experience, while semiosis acts as a connecting link between the body, environment, spirit and culture, creating different meanings. The term *semiosis* was introduced by Charles Sander Peirce (1839–1914) to describe a process that interprets signs as referring to their objects. In other words semiosis is any form of activity, conduct, or process that involves signs, including the production of meaning. In ancient times the garden was at first an oasis, a refuge, an escape from the threat of nature or from marauders, human or animal. Over the centuries emperors and kings developed fantastic gardens and parks to express their power and personality. The parks of the Assyrian kings are legendary, tempting emulation as Europe emerged from the Dark Ages. Louis XIV's 17<sup>th</sup>– century Versailles, still to be admired, expressed the king's triumph over nature's freedom. In the Renaissance architects played with the manipulation of space and studied optics to produce "academic gardens" to satisfy the intellect – geometry and repetition applied to nature. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, garden and nature became philosophically intertwined, with schemes to emulate nature in her natural state, in reality as contrived and designed as the formal layouts of earlier periods. Gardens were laid out more

naturally, without any walls. This style of smooth undulating grass, which would run straight to the house, clumps, belts and scattering of trees and serpentine lakes formed by invisibly damming small rivers, were a new style a "gardenless" form of landscape gardening, which swept away almost all the remnants of previous formally patterned styles. This new style emerged in England and spread across Europe, replacing the more formal, symmetrical Garden à la française of the 17th century as the principal gardening style of Europe. The English gardens were often inspired by paintings of landscapes by Claude Lorraine and Nicolas Poussin, and some were influenced by the classic Chinese gardens of the East which had been described by European travelers. These natural landscapes were the forerunners of the public recreational parks of today.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Garden art and culture have always been profoundly interactive – and we could say that each shapes the other. As Lévi-Strauss claimed in his work *Structural anthropology* (1968), any spatial structure is the crystallization of a society's socio-cultural reality : in spatial structures there have been articulated the social, cultural, cosmological, cosmogonic and other often purely semiotic structures. In the Middle Ages, space was thereby turned into a mechanism and dimension to integrate different cultural systems according to a given cultural dominant, in this case, religion. The medieval period loosely covers a thousand years. Following the fall of the Roman Empire, with much of Europe returning to the wilderness of the Dark Ages, there must have been little, if any, chance to practice gardening for beauty alone. Survival in a brutal age precluded aesthetic considerations, and the concept of creating a garden for enjoyment was lost. Religious paintings were produced during the late 14<sup>th</sup> and the 15<sup>th</sup> centuries as altar pieces. The Christian icons, stylized and imbued with spiritual significance present an especially rich record to be deciphered to discover what medieval gardens were really like. Other painted gardens served as illustrations to the poems and romances written from the turn of millennium. In these we can trace the main patterns of gardens that emerge. In essence they comprise the small, enclosed nestling –hortus conclusus, within the precincts of a building, the larger orchard designed for pleasure as well as fruit production, and the more extensive hunting park. This was an age of faith, and whether religious or secular in intent, all these images of garden are highly idealized and full of symbolism. Gardens in the middle ages were strongly imbued with religious symbolism. The Old Testament *Song of*

*Songs* mentions several types of gardens and flowers. Medieval commentators interpreted this ancient love song to be an allegory of the Virgin Mary, the sealed garden into which the Holy Spirit entered at the Annunciation. Gardens also symbolized the paradise of Eden, which contained “every kind of tree, enticing to look at and good to eat”, planted by God Himself. (Gen. 2:8-9) The celestial paradise awaiting the faithful after death also contained a garden: in the walled city of the Heavenly Jerusalem “on either side of the river were the trees of life, which bear twelve crops of fruit in a year, one in each month, and the leaves of which are the cure for the pagans”. (Apoc. 22:1-2). The *hortus conclusus*, seemingly a place of luxury and ease, with paths and beds laid out to a pattern around a fountain, was translated into Christian symbolism. As Penelope Hobhouse has shown in her book *The Story of Gardening*, (2004), in Christian interpretation, the locked garden stood for the church and the sealed fountain for baptism. The interpretation was extended so that the enclosed garden became the symbol of the church in each individual and the sealed fountain the blessing for those who believed in the virgin birth. As it has already been mentioned, the examination of a culture’s use of space allows us to view those specific semiotic structures that are linked to the identity discourse of a given socium. Under these

circumstances, far East gardens differ from European ones. Besides its completely different topography and its own distinctive forms of expression, the Chinese art of gardening differs from European gardens above all in the interpretation and significance of the individual elements, from which emerges a combination and arrangement of the garden space which depict a symbolization of nature. This desire goes back to Taoism, a philosophy which believes in an immanent order and harmony in nature which remain hidden from man and will only materialize in the moment of “enlightenment”. In China, the garden, however small, is seen as a microcosm of the universe and the ideals of Chinese gardening have remained unchanged over hundreds of years. Chinese ideas of gardening derive from the people’s animistic beliefs and veneration of nature and landscape. Painting and gardening have developed a symbiotic relationship in China. The garden is designed to resemble a landscape scroll. While vertically painted scrolls allow the representations to be perceived at a glance, the idea of the horizontally painted scroll is to open the picture up bit by bit just as nature reveals itself to our eyes. With a few exceptions, the Chinese garden is not to be perceived in its entirety, all at once, either. Japanese gardens are largely inspired

by Chinese ideas, but in Japan’s limited space, garden features become highly symbolic and layouts more ascetic. In Japan, Zen – inspired dry landscape of rock and gravel or gardens of moss and rock are designed to aid meditation. Both Chinese and Japanese garden design traditionally aims to evoke the natural landscape of mountains and rivers. However, the intended viewpoint of the gardens differs: Chinese gardens were intended to be viewed from within the garden and are intended as a setting for everyday life. Japanese gardens, with a few exceptions, were intended to be viewed from within the house, somewhat like a diorama.

## CONCLUSIONS

Both notions – time and space, can be examined within the framework of very different fields: among the authors we can find geographers, physicians, biologists, art historians, environmental aestheticians, semioticians or literary scholars. Such a wide range of authors accounts for the pluralism of viewpoints. However, certain common features and dominants can be distinguished among such pluralism: the creative relationship of human beings with their environment, the relationship between the environment and art, the role of nature and culture in artistic texts, and the relationship between landscape and representation. That is why garden history may take an interdisciplinary approach. Artistic analysis of individual garden styles will reveal design principles and aesthetics, and the garden form may be deconstructed to display the style’s constituent elements, their configuration and the planting. Simultaneous cultural analysis of the garden style will identify and interpret its interactions with the environment, provide insight into the garden’s role and purpose, and explain how the garden style impacted the cultural spectrum, both nationally and on a global level. Gardening as an *art form* remains quite different from more exact disciplines such as architecture, sculpture and painting owing to the time element. The architect, sculptor or painter makes a finished product while the gardener must peer into the future to project his or her plan into another era. Gardening is a process, not necessarily a product. It develops at different paces. A garden’s four dimensional quality, involving development, change and growth, gives it a dynamic quality which bricks and mortar cannot match. As we have seen, a well planned garden may become an expression of an individual’s or culture’s philosophy, and sometimes as a display of private status or national pride, in private and public

landscapes. A distinction can be made between cultural epochs that focus on their spiritual or physical space. In the past, history was written in terms of great estates, their garden fashions evaluated for each period. Gardens as spatial structures are constantly changing and evolving, something that makes them especially rewarding to study as over the course of time they may have been refashioned and reinterpreted by successive generations. Down the millennia and across continents every civilization and nation has developed its own garden styles. Over time and place these styles have evolved in tune with changes in the cultural, artistic, social, economic, technological and political events. Designers, gardeners, landscape architects trying to shape the present and future of our gardens have nearly always kept an eye on the past. Garden design, inspired by modern architecture, naturally follows

the same philosophy of “form following function”. Today, with so many magnificent old gardens open for visiting, all those people involved in artistic gardening admire grander schemes and adapt them for their own use, creating new spatial structures with a strong modernist appeal.

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