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edited by Michel Conan

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Introduction

Michel Conan

Gardens are places of contested meanings, and history a discipline of contested purposes. The symposium “Perspectives on Garden Histories” at Dumbarton Oaks could neither refuse to celebrate the achievements of garden historians who had contributed to intellectual encounters on its grounds, nor silence challenging voices calling into question the purposes of garden history itself. The collected papers of this symposium offer a source of very useful references on the main achievements of garden history in several domains (Italian and Mughal gardens in particular), and they may contribute in a significant way to a self-critical examination of this emergent discipline.

The contributions build up a reflexive discussion about the conditions under which contemporary studies of gardens have developed. Taken as a whole, they yield a picture of ongoing issues that could not be properly captured by any single paper.¹ Four approaches to the collection of papers can be suggested as a first description of its complexity. Each one suggests a different life-world, with its own actors, conflicts, and passions. Each one is duly sketched and suggests both deep shadows and Caravagesque chiaroscuro in the ongoing debates as it highlights some events. First, we shall review the development of garden history as it has been reflected through the years at Dumbarton Oaks, show how it seems to call forth a paradigm shift, and reflect upon the contribution of these historical accounts of scientific progress to cast some doubt upon the model of paradigmatic shift itself; second, we shall argue that garden studies have moved into a historiography starting from problems rather than style; third, we shall focus upon political uses of garden history that seem to cause some paradoxical biases in its development; and fourth, we shall examine how garden history may inadvertently contribute to a naturalization of Western culture and further its hegemony over everyday life in other cultures.

The Coming of Age of Garden History

Elisabeth Blair MacDougall was a noted garden historian when she became the first director of Studies in Landscape Architecture at Dumbarton Oaks. Her research on the origins of this program is revealing. It illuminates our understanding of the conditions

¹ Readers will find an index at the end of this volume that may help them find their own reading entries into this collective discussion. Tracing the uses of one or a few words by different authors may help reach a sense of both explicit and implicit debates in the field.

under which the new discipline of garden history became established and found some support at Dumbarton Oaks despite the strong reluctance of professional organizations, schools of landscape architecture, and academia. It provides an introduction to the history of Italian garden studies to which she had eminently contributed. The first symposium on garden history took place at Dumbarton Oaks in 1971, one year before she started her directorship. It was convened by David Coffin, whose contribution to this volume analyzes the state of art in Italian garden studies at that time.

By the end of the nineteenth century, English and American wealthy families had grown more and more interested in Italy and its gardens. This created an audience for books that offered design models and accounts of travel through Italian gardens. It spurred interest among English and American landowners in the restoration and reinvention of Italian gardens, which in turn stimulated more studies by architects or amateurs oriented toward design. The climax in this kind of interest came in 1931 with the Florence exhibition, which the Fascist regime intended as a political move to capitalize on the interest of American visitors by using and praising the documents produced on Italian gardens by the American Academy at Rome. World War II put an end to the Anglo-American presence in Italy and to these studies. Historicist garden design came under the fire of modernist architects in the 1950s, preventing a redevelopment of attention that landscape architects had given to Italian garden precedents for their own works. However, in the 1960s an interest in Italian garden studies was revived by the arrival in the United States of German art historians. These historians' American students availed themselves of scholarships paying for travel and stays in Italy. They brought to fruition a new wave of Italian garden studies, providing fresh approaches centered on garden meanings rather than garden design. Academia saw for the first time a well-trained group of professors and researchers, with firmly established aims and methods, who rallied under the banner of garden history, started publishing scholarly books, developed courses, and directed a new generation of students. This change was not heartily welcomed by landscape architects and students of gardens of previous generations, but they could not stop it. These developments are documented in the papers by Coffin and Mirka Beneš. They testify to the impressive achievements of the first generation of scholars and of their students who have become professors in turn and are training a third generation of garden scholars.

Even though the word is never used, it can be seen that these scholars have succeeded in establishing a research paradigm. In so doing, they are pursuing a normal course of scientific progress, a course reflected in Beneš's image of the brick wall to which each scholar is contributing in turn, as Thomas Kuhn described in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*² many years ago. Let us summarize this briefly. Gardens are to be studied as complex works of art, and art as a self-contained phenomenon that gives rise to different fields of creation. Two of these fields, architecture and sculpture, are of direct importance for garden studies, while other visual arts may provide useful information. Methods of study demand an extensive gathering of primary sources. They allow the reconstruction in an authenti-

² Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Chicago, 1969.

cated manner of successive stages of the garden at well-known dates, and documentation of the historical context as well as of the figurative, discursive, and ideological sources of the works intended and produced. Each reconstruction of a garden, at any stage, is accounted for in narrative form, allowing the garden to be described as a succession of places as it would be in a very thorough guidebook. Actually, this pattern seems ideally suited to Italian gardens since it follows the pattern of Renaissance guidebooks. Despite its great successes, this approach to garden studies did not remain unchallenged. Neo-Marxist Italian scholars and German historians joined forces in studying the economic and agrarian context of villa development in the Veneto, proceeding from this standpoint to an analysis of landscape appreciation and garden design as an ideological superstructure. Far from allowing gardens to be studied by themselves and for their own sake, they proposed viewing them as an outgrowth of agricultural production processes, of interest because of their contribution to the social domination of the rural population by garden patrons. This amounted to a competing paradigm. Although it failed to take over, it created a sense of an impending paradigm shift among scholars of the second generation. Consequently, these scholars have attempted to broaden their domains of interest and to incorporate new questions that had no place in the paradigm they inherited. This has created a sense of uneasiness with the universal value of the paradigm, which is presented in the last art history section of Beneš's paper. She exposes a paradoxical feature of the development of an American school of garden history. Garden historians in the United States have been dominating the scene of garden history in the world since the establishment of this school of garden studies in the 1970s, and at the same time they seem to have grown more and more isolated from larger changes in the world of historical research at large. Other historians have been confronting all other social sciences in attempts at putting their research into an anthropological perspective.

John Dixon Hunt, the second director of Studies in Landscape Architecture at Dumbarton Oaks, raised during his tenure the question of the purpose of garden history, suggesting that a new direction had to be discovered. His contribution to this volume echoes this concern and offers some perspectives toward the development of a new paradigm. His argument does not stem from a direct criticism of the art historian perspective developed for Italian gardens, but from the indictment of another tradition, the historiography of English gardens, since its inception in the eighteenth century. The defense of a "more perfect perfection" achieved by the English discovery of the landscape garden by Horace Walpole is taken as the original model after which garden histories have been patterned, enabling them to avoid any question about causes and effects, development of social processes through time, or accounts of cultural or political conflicts. This criticism engulfs all other garden historiographies written since the eighteenth century without entering into any further discussion of particular ones. Michael Leslie has further documented the deliberate manipulation of historical narrative by Horace Walpole and the precise political condition under which it took place in Great Britain. His contribution puts the relationships between politics, gardens, and garden history at the center of the picture. Gardens are not inconsequential objects indulged by wealthy patrons that can be

studied in and for themselves as a mere luxury item. On the contrary, they turn out to be battlegrounds where elite factions confront one another in their attempts to establish a symbolic language conveying what they consider the most appropriate ideology to the lower and middle classes. Garden history turns out to be a helping hand, a tool for these great symbolic deeds. Neither gardens nor their history can be studied independently of the contested ideologies that they express and of the social movements that give prominence to these ideologies. Thus we may see, from a critical perspective bearing upon the English scene, garden designs and their histories as battlefields of social importance. This derives from their usefulness in naturalizing arguments exchanged in ideological conflicts about directions of a society's future.

James Wescoat offers a number of practical directions that could be pursued once the necessity for a political decentering of garden studies has been acknowledged as a condition for allowing relationships between garden making, garden history, and politics to come under scholarly scrutiny. Even further, he shows the existence of a growing effort among researchers to pursue garden studies in a comparative perspective, by drawing upon the resources of different academic disciplines and by pursuing in a variety of ways comparisons between gardens in different times and countries. The idea of comparative studies is fraught with difficulties. In a preliminary period it was restricted to questions of filiation, dealing with transmission of formal features across different gardening traditions. But this limited approach of comparison is being superseded by attempts to set both similarities and differences in a theoretical framework. It should be stressed that this presses in favor of a theoretical framework that has yet to be developed and tested in actual research. Wescoat shows how studies of gardens in lands that have been at some time under Muslim rule have made varied uses of comparative studies. But he also stresses a rather dismaying observation: Garden studies seem to proceed either from broad political concerns or from short-term economic interests, of the tourist industry in particular, rather than from practical and cultural concerns about or from people who are living in their vicinity or who may be their primary users. Of course this is a political question, and it can be a haunting one in any perspective that would stress political implications of garden histories. This would call for new approaches.

Demands for yet another paradigm shift are coming from an altogether American perspective, as presented by Kenneth Helphand. He suggests that the growing interest for gardens of the past and for public parks stems from a reaction against ill effects of technological inventions and their democratization, and of the automobile in particular. While the impact of these technologies led to dispersion in homogenized local environments and to individual enjoyment, it has spurred an interest in revivals of local history, natural idiosyncrasies, and public space for common encounters. Thus garden history, protection, and restoration should be seen as an outgrowth of large social and cultural changes in America. These changes are driven by a dialectical encounter between national cravings for mobility and for land-based community. Thus garden studies cannot be made into a self-sufficient domain of inquiry; gardens cannot be accounted for by a functional or a teleological explanation of their forms, meanings, or changes because this would deny the dialectical nature

of the larger phenomena of social and cultural change in which they participate. Hence gardens should be studied as *explanans* rather than *explanandum*, and narratives of garden history in America should explore the embeddedness of landscape culture in American culture. American studies provide descriptions and analyses of characteristic features of American culture and of social processes that contribute to its changes. Thus they stress a number of definite perspectives for further cultural studies, calling attention to categories of thought, such as the idea of Nature, or cultural complexes embodying a dialectical relationship, such as the idea of the “everywhere community” that embodies the tension between calls of mobility and of stable community integration. Gardens offer specific fields of study for the understanding of different outcomes of these tensions, allowing scholars to unravel how, for instance, individualism, community, and mobility meet one another. This affords gaining a new perspective on garden development, and on the role professionals or public officials could play in a way that would be meaningfully American.

Joachim Wolschke-Bulmahn, the third director of Studies in Landscape Architecture at Dumbarton Oaks, has also developed a political criticism of garden history. It echoes concerns voiced by Hunt and Leslie that garden history may be used as a tool in political attempts at social and cultural domination, but he adds a twist that highlights difficulties that had also been signaled by Coffin. This author shows how historiography of Italian gardens had been rescued from the narrowly defined interests of designers in the 1960s. Wolschke-Bulmahn takes issue in a broader way with the purpose of garden history: Should garden historians provide justifications for claims to professional autonomy for landscape architecture, or should they provide accounts of links between social development at large and practices and ideas of landscape architects? He shows how garden history in Germany has been written and slanted several times in order to legitimize a particular course of professional development and to provide it with moral authority. He proceeds then to show how questioning the attempts by contemporary garden historians in the United States to divorce landscape history from a broader political history has led him into polemical debates that have not yet subsided. Beyond any final adjudication of accounts of acrimonious exchanges, we come to see the importance for garden historians of a study of the role of gardens in symbolic communication. Gardens can be used to foster some ideologies. Yet attempts at manipulating social and cultural ideologies developing through positive discrimination of a gardening culture may backfire! The creation and uses of garden allotments for the working class in Sweden provide a well-documented case in point. This example is developed by Michel Conan as one of several cases of studies of vernacular gardens that aim only at contributing to an understanding of a specific kind of social agency. He suggests the possibility of a social anthropology of gardening that would be “a study of an art that turns an environment into places encapsulating intentions and representations about man’s relationship to nature” (this volume, p. 204). It breaks away from studies of gardens as objects for consumption, or as symbolic texts used in ideological warfare only, by stressing the unique domain of social agency that they provide. It would divorce garden studies from commitment to any political or professional interests, helping development of public debates about gardening and landscape.

Of course, gardening is not the domain of action of landscape architects alone any more than health is the domain of action of doctors and nurses alone. Thus garden studies cannot be seen from the sole perspective of landscape designers, even if such a perspective may have developed an elaborate system of categories that take the layman's experience into account. This point is further stressed by Stanislaus Fung. His call for a paradigm shift is most radical. He shows first that the introduction of European concepts used by professional landscape architects, while it provided for the possible development of a Chinese landscape architecture grounded in a modern interpretation of Chinese garden making tradition, also defaces memory and renders incomprehensible aspects of Chinese culture that were accessible only through self-involvement with gardens. Thus comparative research itself might be self-defeating if it exports European concepts into other cultural contexts, barring access to differences it had intended to study. When suggesting that such limitations could be linked to European visual culture or to the ontological status of space and time in Western thought, Fung underwrites the importance given by Kuhn to beliefs and metaphysical assumptions in the grounding of scientific paradigms and makes a case for a radical shift in the approaches of garden studies. It should be stressed that he does not provide an ideological critique of Western discourse about China, in the way Edward Said expertly debunked Orientalism and its scholarly output. In an extremely concise manner he reaches for another level of deconstruction of Western culture, moving away from Derrida. His analysis explores fundamental differences in sensual experiences of the world through vision and experience of time and place that result in a different train of thought to be explored by discourse. This is not to claim a primacy of figurative language over written language which could easily be deconstructed, but to stress that in any comparative endeavor, garden studies should proceed from a knowledge of the dialectics of figurative and discursive language that can account for gardening as a field of social action.

At first sight garden history seems to be a lively academic field in which successful research paradigms are assailed by contenders that cry out for some paradigmatic shift. It seems to follow the pattern of scientific revolutions described by Kuhn: a paradigm of art history applied to Italian garden history had been able to establish a course of development of "normal science." It is assailed by many challengers, and their efforts are ushering in a scientific revolution in garden studies. Should we accept this metaphor of intellectual warfare as a valid reflection upon the conditions of development of the field?

In this view, scientific paradigms are a set of instrumental features necessary for description of scientific production processes. They comprise theories, methods, and beliefs shared by a group of scientists and enable them to agree on purposes and courses of action in scientific research. Such large domains of agreement allow scientific progress to proceed in a "normal" way. It is the most usual situation, and it results in accumulation of knowledge rather than in conceptual changes. It enables researchers who take part in a successful research paradigm to reap some social rewards. However, since such rewards as stipends, research facilities, and tenure are limited resources, researchers adhering to different paradigms are competing with each other. It can be observed, according to Kuhn's theory, that some paradigms achieve social dominance and provide their supporters with a very large

share of available rewards. This stimulates competition in the form of other researchers attacking some fundamental aspects of dominant paradigms and introducing conceptual debates about methods and purposes. Such debates are focused around scientific issues and pit groups of researchers against one another in discussions about the conceptual framing of scientific questions and of scientific results. Thus scientific production processes are seen to result from the interactions in which many mutually contending groups are engaged. These groups may fight each other in order to appropriate a larger part of resources and rewards available in their field. Defeat of a dominant group allows scientific revolution to take place and new scholars to enjoy a privileged position.

Let us show that some elements of Kuhn's theory are present (a variety of competing groups of scholars, a dominant paradigm, attacks on the directions it proposes and beliefs upon which it rests) and yet that the debates in progress do not reflect the process described by his theory. This volume presents several groups of scholars who are engaged in garden history: a group interested in Italian gardens, another one in English gardens, a third one in Middle East and southern Asia; a few more kinds of places, such as American vernacular gardens, are defended by isolated contenders. Members of these groups are certainly very much engaged in discussions about purposes of garden studies, and in questioning of beliefs or assumptions underpinning research done by many of their predecessors. Yet it is striking to observe how little they engage in mutual criticism and how much they seem to be confronted each with their own contenders outside garden history. The only polemical debate that was registered during this symposium resulted from an attempt to conduct comparative research between Germany and the United States. It certainly referred to a larger polemical debate about nativism and developments of environmentalism in landscape architecture, but this debate itself did not extend to a discussion of concepts. We shall come back to this question later.

The contributions by Coffin and Beneš account in a richly documented and convincing way for the establishment of a scientific paradigm for studies of Italian gardens deriving from iconological studies in art history. They show how purposes, methods, and sources for Italian garden studies were a matter of common agreement among a very productive group of American scholars who benefited from several fellowship programs. They did produce new and cumulative knowledge about Italian gardens. Despite a few competing groups of researchers, they were never engaged in any polemical defense of their approaches, and they seem to offer a very good example of "normal" research in progress. In view of this, it may be slightly surprising that criticisms of this paradigm should come from within the ranks of its followers rather than from other groups of researchers engaged in garden studies. Moreover, art historians studying Italian gardens do not engage in intellectual intercourse with English historiographers as much as they do with Italian architects involved in restoration projects of historical gardens. And even this relationship does not seem to amount to any intellectual contest. To a certain extent these architects are carrying on work that could have been initiated by art historians, but neither do they pursue the same kinds of results nor do they claim the same types of rewards. So they provide new material to be used as starting points for different pieces of work by garden historians, which may come to reflect

in the long run the domains of interests specified by the Italian heritage industry. Thus we may wonder about the role of social and economic patterns in the developments of garden studies. Wescoat shows in some detail how Constance Mary Villiers-Stuart wrote *Gardens of the Great Mughals*³ in an attempt to contribute to the acceptance of British rule among Indians, and he notes that “studies of Mughal gardens, undertaken by designers more often than by classically trained scholars, also emerge from practical and comparative interests. In recent decades those interests seem repressed, unvoiced, or underexamined” (this volume, p. 138). He notes with some distress the competition with the tourist industry when restoration of Mughal gardens is at stake. In a somewhat different vein, Hunt notes that garden studies remain in a marginal position in academia because of the difficulties of attaining tenure as a garden specialist.

To make a long story short, these developments of landscape studies seem to be constrained by the particular interests of three groups of people—landscape architects, preservationists, and tourists—rather than solely by ongoing intellectual warfare between groups of garden scholars. It must be stressed that these different social groups that have a stake in garden studies may also develop ways of studying gardens. This is certainly true for landscape architects, or for architects doing restoration of villas and their gardens. But they do not compete in the same course of excellence, or for the same symbolic or material rewards, which prevents these intellectual encounters from developing into a field for scientific revolutions as described by Kuhn. Outsiders’ influences seem to bear mostly on the choices of gardens that may receive attention and even on the garden elements that deserve careful historical research. They proceed from social agenda rather than from scientific or conceptual questions.

Yet this volume also reflects another kind of debate that seems to have weighed upon the development of the field. MacDougall vividly describes difficulties encountered by Mrs. Mildred Bliss, the founder of this program at Dumbarton Oaks, in obtaining academic support and approval of a program in landscape studies. The ensuing developments indicate how a subdiscipline of art history reached academic status. The Dumbarton Oaks program in landscape studies may have played a role in establishing garden history as a field of scholarly work and as a course topic in schools of landscape architecture. Yet Hunt points out that this field of research is not yet fully established and accepted in academia and that many young researchers are discouraged from pursuing doctoral research on gardens lest their future career suffer from such choice of topic. In short, garden studies seem to be looked down upon for their lack of concern with theories that are developed in a number of disciplines at the margins of which they are growing. But on the other hand one may watch another criticism leveled at them by landscape architects teaching in university departments who are interested in design-oriented knowledge and wary of too much abstraction in garden studies. Thus garden studies tends to be treated in academia as a domain of applied research for scholars who are already established in their own discipline rather than as a discipline in its own right. This situation is prompting many scholars who are

³ Constance Mary Villiers-Stuart, *Gardens of the Great Mughals*, London, 1913.

approaching garden studies from very different perspectives, and with quite different field work experience, to search together for possible groundings of the discipline. Hunt offers a set of principles for the discipline; Wescoat suggests systematic comparisons over long periods of time and different places in an interdisciplinary spirit; Helphand proposes to establish garden studies within the context of American studies. Obviously there is a debate, and there are contending positions, but they are not motivated by internal competition for the appropriation of established rewards, but rather by external competition in search of academic legitimacy in a divided academe.

Yet there is little doubt that garden studies have achieved great changes during the last 30 years, and that they are broadening their interests and moving into new directions in using new methods in search of an adapted theoretical framework. So we should simply conclude that the model of scientific revolutions proposed by Kuhn does not apply in this domain and that to gain an understanding of changes in garden history one should take a fairly broad view of its social and political context. This volume, however, offers a striking view of changes that are taking place.

From Period Gardens to Cultural and Social Problems

Any reader discovering this book may wonder why, on the twenty-fifth anniversary of garden studies at Dumbarton Oaks, medieval gardens, French formal gardens, ancient Roman villas, Persian gardens, or picturesque gardens were not given as much attention as Italian gardens or Mughal gardens. This may be felt as a weakness of the whole volume. MacDougall in her introduction indicates that she “hoped eventually to organize symposia for all national styles and periods” (p. 25). And readers might feel eager to learn how historiography of each of these subdomains of garden history has evolved over the last 25 years. The question is certainly an interesting one. Yet addressing only this question would give a false picture of changing scenes in garden historiography.

Clearly garden studies received a great impetus from the support given by Dumbarton Oaks to encounters between scholars interested in national styles and period gardens. It has allowed garden historians to confront their own work with scholarly interests in neighboring fields or disciplines. Beneš shows how her generation of garden historians have discovered the kinds of questions that were raised by Marxist scholars and how the questions led to different framings of garden research. She also invites a broader intercourse between garden studies and other domains of historical research.

Actually the national style approach of garden history is crumbling. This is not to say that studies of Italian gardens are on the way out, but simply that the political agenda of research purporting to link garden style and nation has become one of the critical issues coming under scrutiny in garden studies. This is an important point to which we shall return, but it is certainly not the only one. Helphand in his attempt to propose future perspectives for research provides a very interesting example of a search for meaningful contemporary issues that lead to garden studies. The reversal from the previous historiography, which started from a few arbitrarily selected gardens to search for questions that could be addressed by research, is worth noting. His questions relate to American society and

American culture. They take as a starting point some deep cultural contradictions in the relationship between Americans and nature, and they develop into a search for relevant material, places of study, and sources. He notes, for instance, that “the impact of [transportation] technologies has been simultaneously centrifugal and centripetal, spreading things and people apart and pulling them together, creating dispersed concentrations,” and goes on to suggest how this may invite a study of Lawrence Halprin fountain environments as a way of seeking the solace of the traditional in a defensive way; or a study of the resurgence of park interest as a response to a trust in “nature” coupled with a hope for a new public life.

The same approach starting from some cultural issue common to a large number of societies might be used to construct research topics over different places or time spans. Hunt goes as far as proposing a set of guidelines that would avoid falling into the most common pitfalls of past garden historiography. It can be summarized like this: (1) rule out teleology as a principle of judgment; (2) beware of worn-out categories that go in pairs, such as formal versus informal, or gardens versus ecology; (3) pay attention to counter-trends when studying trends, to margins when studying a central theme; (4) establish a specific domain for your historiography, one related to other kinds of history such as social history or history of *mentalité*; (5) engage in studies of garden reception; (6) always keep the question “what is a garden?” in front of you; (7) seek the universal in man’s dialogue with nature and culture that results in gardens. These seven rules set a difficult challenge. They posit gardens as historical manifestations of a transhistorical human endeavor that mirrors the human condition between an ever changing culture and a nature filtered by social and cultural constructions in a world without finality. Wescoat demonstrates a number of different ways of setting up problems for research: discussing the diffusion and differentiation of garden models; or attempting to integrate different disciplines in order to examine relationships between two structures, one cultural and individual—the structure of vision—and the other political and social—the structure of power inscribed in Cordoban space. In several of his examples one may recognize that the problems raised stem from a criticism of unstated assumptions of previous garden historiography. This is undoubtedly different from Helphand’s approach, and it leads to very different problems to be studied. Conan describes briefly a small number of problems that have stimulated garden studies. His first examples start from problems raised in the social sciences: establishing the functional rationality for a horticultural society of a seemingly irrational system of beliefs about gardening described by Malinowski. He also suggests that comparisons between different societies may give rise to dilemmas that can serve as a starting point for future research, noting, for example, that among horticultural societies that all indulge in beliefs about supernatural beings there is no explanation of why some practice garden magic and others scoff at the idea. And most intriguing problems have been raised by Fung when noting that garden research assumptions by Westernized scholars may detract from any possible understanding of the objects they are studying and may contribute to changes in the cultural value or existence of these objects. Then we can see that fundamental concepts, even some of the *a priori* concepts of the mind posited by Kant, are the source of problems that cannot be clearly expressed, because this would require altogether new concepts at a deeper level.

A search for concepts and conceptualized questions to be addressed is noticeable in many of these efforts. It has not yet reached any great success that could have been presented during the symposium. Yet there is a deep lesson that is coming through. We have noted earlier that the only polemical debate that we were fortunate to hear about during the symposium did not reach into discussions of concepts. Actually it was not a debate about research theories, but about ideological implications of research assumptions! The debate was external to the field, not internal, as would have been expected according to Kuhn's theory. It is no surprise then to observe that efforts toward conceptual progress are sought through interaction with already well established disciplines in the social sciences. This was the way the *Ecole des Annales* had contributed a rejuvenating of history. The guidelines proposed by Hunt give clear indications about developing new concepts and new theories and refrain from attempting to provide conceptual foundations for an encompassing paradigm for garden history. He warns against pitfalls such as uncritical use of traditional categories of description or judgment, against confusing domains of observation, such as gardens, with conceptual objects of enquiry, and he recommends linking history of gardens with history of social or cultural change, which implies at least using a few concepts and assumptions from these domains, and eventually borrowing or reformulating some theories.

Nevertheless this parade of new approaches points to all sorts of directions, and one may feel at a loss because no central focus or set of problems has been found to catch most attention. Instead of the orderly procession of studies devoted to period gardens, one watches a disorderly crowd of studies that span time and space according to the needs of each issue. Can a discipline survive such a centrifugal movement? If we follow Beneš's intuition that the *Ecole des Annales* has something to teach to garden studies, it could be simply hoped that in the future this problematization of garden research would be promising. There has never been any method, purpose, or paradigm common to all historians who were published by the *Annales*. They were united at a different level, moving away from narratives that made historical research a handmaiden of national consciousness and of the reconstruction of times past, toward studies of theoretical problems in the social sciences that could benefit from studies over long time spans when temporality itself was subject to discussion. Some researchers took demography as a source of problems to be raised; others started from economics. They were extremely successful because of the concepts and quantitative methodologies they could rely upon. But many other approaches borrowing sociology, psychoanalysis, or cultural studies have been used as well, providing different concepts and approaches and depending very little if at all upon quantitative methods. A lively field of historical research that has captured the interest of contemporary audiences for history has resulted from this eclecticism. Cultural or social issues, paradoxes, and theoretical questions are a number of ways of establishing a problem to be analyzed as the focus for historical research on gardens.

This new direction for garden studies remains, however, veiled in some obscurity because research has not always explicitly addressed such practical concerns as the kind of materials, archives, methods of observation, and methods of analysis to be used. Further-

more, one might wonder whether any problem is as good as any other as a starting point for research. A possible answer might be that problems that are stated within a clearly established theoretical perspective are most likely to provide such useful guidelines. Social history derived immediate benefits from borrowing questions from demography. It offered theories, methods, and concepts that attracted attention to parish registers, which had been ignored until then as a useful source, and it allowed transposition of these questions into studies of book publications and readership, two populations that called for adaptation of the conceptual apparatus. This may suggest how garden studies after having borrowed from existing disciplines may enrich them. A few examples of this have been alluded to in the contributions by Wescoat and Helphand. The discussion by Conan of recent studies of family garden allotments in Scandinavia offers a snapshot of several problems raised by a succession of authors: Lena Jarlov, E. N. Anderson, Werner Nohl, Mark Francis, and Magnus Bergquist. The last author adopts an interactionist perspective in order to analyze the outcomes of municipal policies, a surprising and interesting move, and calls upon life histories of the gardeners as well as upon accounts of social interactions in the gardens or at home, and of gardening practices. This provides an unexpected presentation of relationships between popular gardening and developments of contemporary myths in Sweden, which certainly contributes to a deeper understanding of both Swedish gardens and Swedish society.

Politics and Garden History

Out of all these problems, a few seem to grow out of various manifestations of contemporary difficulties in moving toward multicultural societies everywhere in the world. They call into question abilities to construct self-identities in a culturally decentered world. And since gardens provide symbols for individual or group identities, these problems may lead to garden studies and to political confrontations around such innocuous things as flowery gardens and their histories. Wescoat provides a fascinating example in his account of the first major study in English of Mughal gardens, Villiers-Stuart's *Gardens of the Great Mughals*. He shows how her very sensitive study of Indian garden-craft aimed at fostering a new policy for the British Empire in India that would allow "peaceful domination" and Indian loyalty: gardens as opium for the Indian people! Her garden history was meant to carry a political message, and the suppression by later scholars of any mention of her intent does not improve the truth value of a historical vision guided by ideological concerns with the time of its writing. It contributes, willingly or not, to the diffusion of some of her preconceptions about Indian society and to the confusion between preaching and describing. This volume shows to a surprising extent how deeply garden history is still bound to political discourses.

Garden history can be used like any other piece of art history for nationalistic purposes, as in the Italian Fascist government's use of American historical research of gardens that is briefly noted by Coffin. This certainly deserves attention, but it is not specific to garden history. All art history has been used for propping up nationalistic regimes in search of internal as well as international legitimacy. Hunt points to a specific kind of relationship.

He shows that the naturalization of a political message that was written down in the model for garden historiography proposed by Horace Walpole in the eighteenth century has been a major conceptual block to the development of garden history: England was pictured as the first country to have discovered the “only true mode of gardening,” so the very beginning of garden history was only its end, since it was true to eternal nature. It implied that the same was true of the English political regime that had brought the most perfect system of liberties to its people, as Leslie has argued with great acumen in his own paper. Instead of accepting this false ingenuity in the use of the concept of nature, which contributed to a nationalist narrative by naturalizing it, garden historians might attempt critical reviews of the different ways of constructing the idea of nature in the context of their own research.

The model of historiography proposed by Walpole has been very well received by many students of garden history because it is very difficult to avoid believing that nature proceeds from an eternal essence rather than from a cultural construction, and to evade the argument that acts of reason should be true to this essence. A garden art that claims nature as its source of materials and its mode of expression lends itself to such beliefs, and to passing facile judgment in the name of an idea of nature on other approaches to garden art. Thus the identification of garden art as a quintessential expression of national identity may serve as a political instrument in attacking contending political regimes as essentially wicked since they are acting against nature. This argument may seem to apply first and foremost to English garden history. It is the merit of Wolschke-Bulmahn’s paper to have broadened the study of the interdependence between garden history and broader social and political issues. It is meant to show how garden history can be rewritten in order to legitimize a particular course of professional development, and to provide it with more authority so that it becomes part of political propaganda. The paper proceeds from a study of the development of landscape architecture in Germany under the Nazi regime that had been presented at previous symposia at Dumbarton Oaks to an account of the polemics among garden historians that he stirred when questioning some political implications of ecological landscaping in the United States. It certainly illustrates the difficulties of a critical analysis of political aspects of garden history that would avoid the pitfalls of ideological polemics. According to Wolschke-Bulmahn’s argument, the interdependence between garden history and broader social and political issues would stem from a conjunction of three factors: (1) the reappropriation of political ideas by landscape architects in order to provide their profession with positions of authority; (2) the willingness of garden historians to write history in such a way that it supports the claim to authority of contemporary landscape architects; (3) the ethical context of political ideas upon which landscape architects rested their professional orientations. Under such conditions writing garden history would become entangled in ethical debate, at the same time pushing garden historians to realign their interpretations of garden history with changing political ideas.

This certainly cautions garden historians against the temptation to act as beacons in contemporary debates and to provide further legitimacy to any direction sought or achieved by the profession of landscape architecture. More importantly, this argument raises a difficult issue: What is the impact of an appropriation of political ideas by landscape architects

upon public debates, or upon the “public space,” if we may borrow the words of Habermas?

What is the symbolic efficacy of landscaping? One may fear that controversial ideas in human ethics, when applied to plants in the name of ecological correctness, may become familiar arguments inviting many people to accept contested ethics as laws of nature. Thus one might fear that landscape architecture might have a symbolic efficiency that would amount to no less than political alienation. This is typically a problem for garden research.

Such a claim can be examined empirically. It demands a study of the role of gardens in symbolic communications. Conan, describing Scandinavian research on garden allotments, provides examples that illuminate another aspect of such a discussion. Bourgeois philanthropists who advocated garden allotments in Europe were hoping that gardening and garden experiences of family life would curtail revolutionary impulses of the working class. Yet gardening is not a discipline in the Foucauldian sense of a method for subjugating people under a self-imposed power. Most working-class leaders never bought into the idea of gardening, and success of garden allotments in Sweden did not prevent social-democrats from wresting political power from the hands of the bourgeois establishment. One should add that working- and middle-class gardeners who cultivated these allotments have created ways of life in the garden allotments that do not match the expectations of their initiators. This example only shows the need for a deeper understanding of conditions under which garden experiences resonate into everyday life and political life outside garden limits. A reflexive analysis of the mutual embeddedness of political rhetorics and discourses about nature demands empirical studies of landscape and garden reception, as well as an effort to propose theories of communication, and of cultural development through rituals of garden making.

Toward a Critique of Universalism in Western Culture

Wescoast in his reflections upon the place of garden history within narratives of world history takes the discussion in a slightly different direction. He shows how various authors who have written on Mughal gardens have chosen a different cultural perspective on their topic: Anglo-imperial with Villiers-Stuart, Eurocentric with many European travelers, Islamicate with Marshall Hodgson, Indian with K. N. Chaudhury, American with a few contemporary researchers. It becomes apparent from such a survey that the indiscriminate use of garden history as a guide for conservation or reconstruction of ancient gardens may underwrite a particular culture to the disadvantage of others that are equally concerned with the same gardens. This concern illustrates in a new way the need for research on symbolic efficiency of gardens, and for reception of gardens by users belonging to different cultures. It also shows how much garden historians in spite of their aspiration to truth, method, and reason cannot avoid building up their narratives upon deep-seated beliefs about men, society, and the part of the world where they anchor their own identity. This line of thinking echoes the deep skepticism of deconstructive analysis of metaphysical bases of rational discourse in Western cultures. Such concerns, voiced in this volume, have called into question fundamental beliefs that are the building blocks upon which description of gardens are resting.

Conan calls attention to garden studies conducted by social anthropologists and by sociologists that have attempted to account for the gardeners' perspectives on garden experiences without imposing the observers' categories of thought. It reveals how much delusion may grow out of trusting ideas and interpretations derived from visual experience. In his work among the Achuar Indians, Philippe Descola accounts for similarities between forest growth and garden growth. Both of them comprise three layers of vegetation, and gardens, being much smaller than the forest, look like miniature forests to Western eyes. To the Indian's eyes the situation is reversed: forests are gardens tended by supernatural spirits, and this similitude derives from their interpretation of kinship relationships rather than from our interpretation of the layering of vegetation. Two different cultural systems lead to diametrically opposed evidence offered by the naked eye. These examples suggest critical methods that may help us avoid the pitfalls we might encounter if we relied solely on our own visual experiences when studying gardens and their meanings and uses. Fung takes the reflection upon cultural encounters one step further, from critical philosophy into uncharted territories.

Fung's argument grows out of a critical reading of Chinese garden historiography. It leads him to broad epistemological questions about the truth value of visual evidence. Descartes would have loved that! In a word, seeing is believing according to a cultural habitus, and describing the sight offered to the eye is falling prey to cultural bias, to the fallacy of primary visual evidence. He recalls how a Japanese scholar, Oka Oji, produced a major history of Chinese gardens that introduced a visual interpretation according to the criteria of Western landscape architecture, and provided a model for developments of Chinese garden historiography as well as sources of the recently growing practice of landscape architecture. Thus garden history appears as a contribution to the Westernization of China. By providing new ways of seeing, experiencing, and relating to gardens of the past these garden histories may give a sense of reappropriation of a forlorn culture even as they obfuscate the past.

The history of gardens is very seldom mentioned in ancient Chinese texts. Fung mentions only one text, by Chen Jiru (1558–1639), that calls "garden history" a poetic record of particular events in a garden. He insists on the fact that gardens are experienced and that experiences are ephemeral. Traditional Chinese writings thus do not seek to define general characteristics of the physical aspects of gardens that could be subsumed under physical components, or visual qualities; rather, they see them as parts of life processes.

Fung suggests that this could be linked to the ontological status given to space and time in modern Western metaphysics. This is a very interesting line of thought that could be pursued by asking how contemporary historiography is retroprojecting our ideas of time and space upon previous Western cultures. Should we write the history of gardens of antiquity in the light of Renaissance ideas about time and space?

His criticism of the cultural validity of methods and concepts used when defining visual sources of information—or texts, or professions—invites a thorough reflection on the invisible limits of scientific categories that make claims to universality. What is the experience beyond the object that we are describing? This is the fundamental question that

Fung raises. It demands that we question the implicit assumption of much garden history that making a garden is an intentional activity that finds its conditions of satisfaction in the realization of a place that can be thoroughly experienced in a visit. Should we consider historians as scholarly tourists traveling through time, and garden history as a subclass of travel accounts, or would-be itineraries for armchair tourists? Or would it make sense to acknowledge that there have been many ways in the past of making sense of garden experiences, some of them in allotment gardens, or native gardens in horticultural communities depending upon gardening and garden making (albeit in a way that is not similar to the Chinese), and others making sense out of public interactions, others out of intimate moments? We would then have to acknowledge that any experience has to be grasped as part of a larger number of experiences in order to yield its own cultural significance.

Yet the paper by Fung is raising another very significant question about the kinds of outcome that we may expect from such acknowledgments of differences between our own culture and the culture of other social groups, be they or not our predecessors in any sense. Should we see contemporary garden history as part of a modernization of the present culture or as an effort at distancing ourselves from the present? In other words, should we study history as a way of legitimizing a conservation of past objects, or as a way of discovering in past experiences new ways of thinking about our own?