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# *From Vernacular Gardens to a Social Anthropology of Gardening*

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Michel Conan

## *Introduction*

An interesting philosophical puzzle was introduced by Arthur Danto when asking in the manner of Wittgenstein, “What is left over when we subtract the arm from the motion produced when an arm is lifted?”<sup>1</sup> Danto had noted that Giotto figured Christ on the north wall of the Arena chapel at Padua, raising his arms in six different scenes, but that each of these gestures introduces a different meaning: admonition, magic, acceptance, commanding, blessing, and expelling. It suggests that only the intention remains when subtracting the arm. Two paintings, one by Titian, showing the Bacchanalia at Andros, and the other one done by Rubens after the painting by Titian, provide another example. They are showing almost exactly the same characters, the same things, and the same natural features of the landscape, yet it takes only a glance to see that they are totally different, allowing the design styles of the two artists to become conspicuous. Here, the question I shall raise is: What is left for the study of gardens when garden design is taken away?

This intriguing question was put to scholars at a conference at Dumbarton Oaks in 1990.<sup>2</sup> It was introduced by John Dixon Hunt in an attempt to broaden the field of garden studies in the same way that architectural history had broadened its field when acknowledging vernacular architecture as a legitimate object for architectural studies.<sup>3</sup> The word “vernacular” had been used for local languages as opposed to the dominant language of colonial invaders. It translated into an interest in architecture that was made according to folk practices and beliefs as opposed to the dominant practice of building design brought about by the ever larger division of labor in modern societies since the Renaissance. So the word “vernacular” was calling attention to works of architecture without architects, designs without designers, and cultural differences between custom-bound people and their so-

<sup>1</sup> A. C. Danto, *Analytical Philosophy of Actions*, Cambridge, 1973, ix.

<sup>2</sup> See J. D. Hunt and J. Wolschke-Bulmahn, eds., *The Vernacular Garden*, Dumbarton Oaks Colloquium on the History of Landscape Architecture 14, Washington, D.C., 1993.

<sup>3</sup> B. Rudofsky, *Architecture without Architects*, New York, 1964.

phisticated rulers. The simple question was: What can architects learn from folk design that designers ignore? The same perspective could be adopted with regard to gardens. A large crop of new ideas could be expected since gardens studies had been mostly given to the study of design in self-consciously designed gardens.

There are many pieces of research that are centrally concerned with such gardens. They have been carried out for a variety of reasons, and very few offer a historical perspective. Social anthropologists have, for a long time, studied gardens in horticultural societies out of an interest in their economy, and more recently to test the explanatory power of ecological conditions with respect to their economic practices. I shall mention only two of them, a study of Samoan gardeners by Bronislaw Malinowski and a study of Jivaro Indians and their gardens by Philippe Descola. We shall then turn to the gardens of two dominated groups, a society of gardeners cultivating vegetables for sale in the city of Amiens, France, who lived under the powerful control of first the Church and then local merchants from the thirteenth century until the beginning of the twentieth century, and the gardens of African Americans in the United States today. A special group of marginalized gardeners in contemporary societies has received considerable attention. They have been called naive or visionary artists and *habitants-paysagistes* by Bernard Lassus, whose work will be reviewed briefly. Then I shall turn to allotments of working-class gardens, which have received much attention in several countries, and I shall limit my comments to Swedish research on these gardens. Even though there are not many studies of middle-class gardens, I should mention at least one study that was presented at a conference at Dumbarton Oaks by Todd Longstaffe-Gowan.

There is no tradition of “vernacular garden studies.” This recent wording simply stands as an umbrella for studies of extremely different gardens. It is useful to review several types of vernacular gardens in order to show that there is no unity of form, content, or use that cuts across all of these different gardens. There is no concept of the vernacular garden that would apply to all of them, beyond the general idea of a garden. Nevertheless, many studies address similar issues, because relationships between gardeners and their gardens stand as a common focus. All of these gardens are expressions of dominated cultures and are created and maintained by groups subjected to social inequalities of some sort, and there are more of these than could be accommodated here. Gardens created by two of these groups, socially dominated groups and “visionary” folk artists in mass-consumption society, were presented at the 1990 symposium on vernacular gardens at Dumbarton Oaks. On the other hand, neither gardens of horticultural societies nor working-class allotment gardens have been discussed at Dumbarton Oaks, and most of the examples to be used are not available in English at present. Hence it was necessary to provide more background information for these two types of vernacular gardens. Yet each of these types has been analyzed from three perspectives: structure, order, and agency. These abstract terms will be introduced and illustrated empirically in each of our four studies. They will enable us to propose a common framework of theoretical analysis that could be used for studies of vernacular gardens as well as many others without ever suggesting that any two of these categories of gardens are similar. Actually, this attempt at discovering a common vantage point for the study of gar-

dens, whether characterized or not by their design, leads from the history of period gardens to a social anthropology of gardening. From this perspective, there is no essence of a garden to be found in form, enclosure, or etymology. Gardens are simply places where a social group engages in gardening. This makes the definition of gardens contingent on economy, environment, and culture of any group of gardeners.

### *Horticultural Societies*

Studies of native societies in several archipelagos of the Pacific Ocean and in South America have provided very detailed descriptions of gardens. The first of these was published in 1935 by Bronislaw Malinowski.<sup>4</sup> It was followed by several others, such as a study of Tikopians by Raymond Firth in 1939,<sup>5</sup> and more recently by Leopold Popisil in 1963 on the Papuans,<sup>6</sup> Maurice Godelier on the Baruyas of New Guinea,<sup>7</sup> and Philippe Descola on the Jivaro Indians of the Amazonian forest in 1986.<sup>8</sup> Most of these studies were concerned with the economy of native societies, and they paid attention to both ecology and cultural practices. More recently a large body of ecological studies of Indian economies in the Amazonian forest, which calls for detailed analysis of gardens and of gardening, has developed.<sup>9</sup>

The questions raised and methods applied in these studies have undergone significant changes within half a century. We shall avail ourselves of these changes to show how garden studies are deeply affected by choices of theoretical perspective and to introduce our own perspective. Hopefully it may be useful for research and lend itself to critique. Let me contrast briefly questions raised about gardens in the study of coral gardens by Malinowski, and in the Amazon basin by Descola. It may help to review similarities in order to introduce differences between the two studies. Malinowski and Descola both aimed at understanding the economic system of the people they visited, and both were struck by the importance of gardens. These gardens were cultivated in order to provide households with food and plants for different uses (this is mostly documented by Descola, who shows how the Achuar produce beer, poisons, medicine, and fibers) so that gardening certainly contributed to the general economy (even though circulation of goods reaped in the gardens were quite different in both societies). In neither case would ecological conditions suffice to account for gardening practices, and moreover it is quite striking that aesthetic pursuits were of utmost importance in both cases.

Let me elaborate on the evidence for aesthetic pursuits. Both studies were carried out by professional anthropologists committed to avoidance of cultural judgment passed upon

<sup>4</sup> B. Malinowski, *Coral Gardens and Their Magic*, Bloomington, Ind., 1935.

<sup>5</sup> R. Firth, *Primitive Polynesian Economy*, London, 1939.

<sup>6</sup> L. Popisil, *Kapauku Papuan Economy*, New Haven, 1963.

<sup>7</sup> M. Godelier, *L'idéal et le matériel: Pensée, économie, sociétés*, Paris, 1984.

<sup>8</sup> P. Descola, *La nature domestique*, Paris, 1986; idem, *Les lances du crépuscule*, Paris, 1993.

<sup>9</sup> R. Carneiro, "Subsistence and Social Structure: An Ecological Study of the Kuikuru Indians," Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1957.

deeds or beliefs of native culture.<sup>10</sup> And yet, somewhat surprisingly, in front of the gardens both make comparisons with gardens from their own countries. Descola compares the orderly rows of cassava plants to an alley in a French garden and the thoroughly cleaned ground to a carefully tended parterre. “Its smooth and slightly sandy soil, studded here and there by the stalks of cassava plants, recalls the perfectly raked alley of a garden in the French style.”<sup>11</sup> Malinowski is lyrical: “The gardens are certainly the more attractive part of the landscape. . . . We traverse a yam garden in full development, reminiscent somewhat of a Kentish hop-field and unquestionably more attractive. The exuberant vines climb round tall stout poles, their full shady garlands of foliage rising like fountains of green, or spilling downwards; producing the effect of abundance and darkness so often referred to in native spells.”<sup>12</sup> Actually, they follow the same didactic approach: they describe their own aesthetic response to these gardens in order to introduce an account of aesthetic experience from a native perspective. This effort to put aesthetic judgment in anthropological perspective leads to two questions of method: Which are the objects of aesthetic experience? And under which description of this experience can we describe aesthetic appreciation?

For us, when discussing landscape, design and scenery would be an answer to the first question; disinterested contemplation of beauty, the sublime, or the picturesque an answer to the second. How should we account for the two natives’ perspectives? Let us start with a description of aesthetic experience in Kiriwinian gardens in the Trobriands. In his first book, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, Malinowski already noted how important gardens were for natives:

Half of the native’s working life is spent in the garden and around it centers perhaps more than half of his interests and ambitions. In gardening the natives produce much more than they actually require, and in any average year they harvest perhaps twice as much as they can eat. . . . Again they produce this surplus in a manner which entails much more work than is strictly necessary for obtaining the crops. Much time and labour is given to aesthetic purposes.<sup>13</sup>

And when paying much attention to this aspect of their work, since it could not be accounted for by economic necessity, he would attempt to describe it from their own perspective, as he does in *Coral Gardens*: “The gardens are, in a way, a work of art [Fig. 1]. Exactly as a native will take an artist’s delight in constructing a canoe or a house, perfect in shape, decoration and finish, and the whole community will glory in such an achievement, exactly thus will he go about the laying out and developing of his garden.”<sup>14</sup> This aesthetic

<sup>10</sup> Malinowski explains that sons of a Kiriwinian family have to take care of their dead parents and that they should in particular taste their flesh; Descola explains how, as an honored family guest, one should eat living larvae of insects as big as a thumb by shearing the head from the body with one’s teeth and by sucking slowly the greasy body afterwards. Neither one expresses a value judgment or even a word of personal comment.

<sup>11</sup> Descola, *La nature domestique*, 216.

<sup>12</sup> Malinowski, *Coral Gardens*, 57, 58.

<sup>13</sup> B. Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, London, 1922, 58, 59.

<sup>14</sup> Malinowski, *Coral Gardens*, 80.



1. *Waiting for a magic ceremony in a Trobriand garden (from Malinowski, Coral Gardens, fig. 103)*

attention is expressed in the care and attention which is put into making visible the excellence of gardening practices to a native eye:

A considerable amount of energy is spent on purely aesthetic effects, to make the garden look clean, showy and dainty. The ground before planting is cleared of stones, sticks and debris, with a meticulousness far beyond what would be strictly necessary on purely technical grounds. The cleared soil is divided into neat rectangles about 4 to 10 meters long, and 2 to 5 meters broad by means of sticks laid on the ground. These rectangles have little practical purpose, but much value is attached to the proportions and quality of the sticks which mark their boundaries. . . . Pride is taken in selecting strong, stout and straight poles as supports for the yam vine. During all the successive stages of the work, visits are exchanged and mutual admiration and appreciation of the aesthetic qualities of the gardens are a constant feature of village life.

A considerable amount of pleasure in well-accomplished work and the social pressure embodied in the imperative: "It is the right, honourable and enviable thing to have fine-looking gardens and rich crops"—these are the psychological elements which we shall find expressed in many features of gardening, harvesting and of the general economic condition.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 80, 81.

But however important the aesthetic pleasure derived from enclosing the garden, cleaning the soil of stones and debris, and providing strong yam poles, the greater pleasure taken by all members of the community in the gardens is at harvest time. This is the time when all the villagers rush to the gardens, and when crops are brought back to the village in large baskets among much chatter and frolic.

Let us turn now to an account of aesthetic appreciation. Malinowski notes that the natives' sense of beauty cannot be divorced from a sense of material pleasure, and he writes somewhat bluntly,

It was at that time that I received the first inkling that the Trobriander is above all a gardener, who digs with pleasure and collects with pride, to whom accumulated food gives the sense of safety and pleasure in achievement, to whom the rich foliage of yam-vines or taro leaves is a direct expression of beauty. In this, as in many other matters, the Trobriander would agree with Stendahl's definition of beauty as the promise of bliss, rather than with Kant's emasculated statement about disinterested contemplation as the essence of aesthetic enjoyment.<sup>16</sup>

He shows through a large number of detailed examples how unnecessary care is lavished upon practical activities, and how much public attention it receives, establishing the reputation of the gardener, and how it is used to appreciate the quality and quantity of the crop itself. He mentions the "almost pedantic perfection"<sup>17</sup> of the clearing of the ground on some special plots, the *leywota*, as well as the extra care and neatness lavished upon the laying of the boundary poles, the *tula*, and he goes on to show how aesthetic pleasure and economic activities are entwined: "There is no doubt that the *tula* add to the elegance of a garden plot. At first sight, however, it is difficult to see how they influence that economic or technical side of gardening, but there is no doubt that they fulfill indirectly such a function."<sup>18</sup>

The *tula* help to set up the squares in which each woman is going to work, and they take pride in having their square cleaned or planted better than that of their neighbor, claiming, "When the *tula* are there the work goes quickly, it is pleasant to do it; when no *tula* are there, or when they lie crooked, work goes slowly, we do not want to work."<sup>19</sup> Admiration begets envy, and it is no surprise to learn that Kiriwinian gardeners can be criticized for their laziness and for their lack of care when gardening, as much as they can be admired for the beauty of their gardens, since "good gardens are a virtue in themselves, a duty towards relatives-in-law and a duty towards the chief."<sup>20</sup> Thus this pursuit of beauty turns out to be a show of civic quality. Yet there is a limit that each member of local society must not exceed in this display of gardening excellence, since "a man may be attacked because his gardens are too good. He can then be accused of emulating his betters, of not

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, 122.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

giving a fair proportion of his crops to the chief and to his relatives by marriage, and thus of acting disloyally and pandering to his own vanity and greed.”<sup>21</sup> And when a man dies, an occurrence always attributed to sorcery, it is often believed that it happened because of his good gardens. In summary, for Kiriwinian gardeners aesthetic experience is derived from making care in all gardening operations visible for other villagers, and aesthetic appreciation entails the promise of plenty, of admiration by other villagers, and of good reputation among family members.

Let us now turn to the Jivaro gardens. Like Malinowski, Descola describes aesthetic concerns of Achuar gardeners. The beauty of a garden brings praise to the woman who is in charge of it. Beauty emanates from the sheer size of the garden, its careful weeding, and the variety of plants it holds. “It would be rather dishonorable for a woman to allow weeds to proliferate in her garden. . . . For the sake of the honor of a household a small garden carefully tended is to be preferred to a large garden a half of which lies fallow.”<sup>22</sup> In Achuar society only women are in charge of gardening, whereas men are mostly responsible for hunting, building the house, and clearing the forest in order to establish the gardens. Yet the beauty of the gardens held by the different wives is a tribute to the virtue of the whole family. It is as actively sought as in the Trobriands: “The maniac meticulousness that presides over this activity [of gardening] goes far beyond sheer horticultural necessity. A beautiful garden can actually be characterized mostly by the gardener’s ability to scrap nature’s intervention that it displays. . . . Neither a twig, nor a turf should spoil the beauty of this polished place that asserts itself, undoubtedly to a greater extent than the house, as a pole opposite to the forest.”<sup>23</sup> Descola also notes, “Being able to have a large variety of plants is a way for a woman to display her abilities as a gardener and all new plants are immediately adopted even though they only play a small role in the daily alimentation.”<sup>24</sup>

Just as the criticism of a garden could lead a Kiriwinian gardener to suicide or incite tribal war, criticism of an Achuar gardener may incite jealousy and sorcery. This consists of special prayers, known only by women, that bring about the rotting or the drying of some garden plants. A woman whose garden is touched by such a plague searches her memory to remember all the other women who have visited her garden. The one who has lavished the most enthusiasm at the beauty of the garden is immediately known to be the culprit, since her excess of praise betrayed her jealousy.<sup>25</sup>

Malinowski shows that pride and self-esteem can be gained through gardening, and that aesthetic appreciation of gardens and their fruits is closely linked to the anticipated pleasures of social praise for good behavior in the ensuing exchanges of gifts between family members. Descola points to a similar relationship between aesthetic pleasure taken in tending a garden and its rewards in terms of family pride and social status for both the gardener and her household.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Descola, *La nature domestique*, 188.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 216.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 208.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 261.



Of course the relationships are not identical in both cases since different social structures are distributing status and creating social obligations that may beget self-esteem and social praise in different ways. So we ought to be aware of large differences despite broad similarities. In each case differences in social structure create different aesthetic experiences and different forms of aesthetic appreciation. This may invite students of landscape architecture to wonder how aesthetic judgment might be dependent on social structures.

There is another aspect of life in Kiriwinian gardens that Bronislaw Malinowski relates to aesthetics. In *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* he wrote, "There can be no doubt that the natives push their conscientiousness far beyond the limits of the purely necessary. The non-utilitarian element in their garden work is still more clearly perceptible in the various tasks which they carry out entirely for the sake of ornamentation, in connection with magical ceremonies and in obedience to tribal usage."<sup>26</sup> This implies only that magic may give rise to an aesthetic activity, and it gives a further twist to our ideas about aesthetics. Garden magic in the Trobriands is a public service that is performed in the name of the community by one of its most eminent leaders, the magician of gardens. "Magic and practical work are, in native ideas, inseparable from each other, though they are not confused. Garden magic and garden work run in one intertwined series of consecutive efforts, form one continuous story, and must be the subject of one narrative. To the natives, magic is as indispensable to the success of gardens as competent and effective husbandry. It is essential to the fertility of the soil: 'The garden magician utters magic by mouth; the magical virtue enters the soil.' Magic is to them an almost natural element in the growth of the garden."<sup>27</sup>

This raises a simple question. If Kiriwinian gardeners consider that garden skills and toil are responsible for the growth of their gardens and that the quality of the crop and the beauty of the garden can be put to the credit of the gardener, why do they pay so much attention to magic, and why do they practice it at all? Malinowski's answer, in a nutshell, is that gardening is an uncertain activity and that many hazards may reduce the gardeners' efforts to nought. Natives know very well how much careful work is necessary in order to prepare a good crop, but they know as well that no amount of work will prevent plagues or misfortunes, such as visits to the garden by wild animals, a drought, or a storm. They also know that crops may be abundant beyond all expectations. Magic explains away all aspects of chance. Natives ascribe happy results to magic, and misfortunes to black magic, or to flaws in the accomplishment of garden rituals.<sup>28</sup> "The belief that only sorcery lets loose the

<sup>26</sup> Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, 58, 59.

<sup>27</sup> Malinowski, *Coral Gardens*, 62.

<sup>28</sup> "To the natives, . . . the aims of magic are different from the aims of work. They know quite well what effects can be produced by careful tilling of the soil and these effects they try to produce by competent and industrious labour. They equally know that certain evils, such as pests, blights, bush-pigs, drought or rain, cannot be overcome by human work however hard and consistent. They see also that, at times and in a mysterious way, gardens thrive in spite of all anticipations to the contrary, or else that, in a fairly good season favoured by good work, the gardens do not give the results they should. Any unaccountable good luck over and above what is due the natives attribute to magic; exactly as they attribute unexpected and undeserved bad luck to black magic or to some deficiency in the carrying out of their own magic." *Ibid.*, 77.



2. *Two women in an Achuar garden, drawn by Philippe Munch after a document by Philippe Descola (from Descola, Les lances du crépuscule, 119)*

pests and plagues which torment man is very deeply rooted. It has got a significant parallel in the belief that sorcery and sorcery alone is the ultimate cause of all which threatens human health and welfare and produces the accidents to human life. Neither crocodiles nor a falling tree nor death by drowning ever come of themselves, they are always induced by black magic.”<sup>29</sup> Thus natives see magic as an activity that fulfills an important purpose; it reduces anxiety in the face of life’s hazards, and it restores hope at times of distress. Care lavished upon magical aspects of gardening allows them to expect bountiful crops, and for that reason gives rise to aesthetic appreciation. This is a functionalist interpretation—magic and aesthetic each contributing to the maintenance of social order.

Descola, a student of Levi-Strauss, has traveled another intellectual path. Magic is as important in the Achuar gardens, but it follows a totally different pattern. Magic is part of the secret life that a woman gardener shares with the plants she raises in her garden. Natives consider these plants to be literally her children. Actually, both cultivars of plants and magic

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

spells to raise them are passed down from mother to daughter (Fig. 2). They are the source of women's power, their efficiency and their prestige in society. Descola has studied very carefully a number of Achuar gardens in different places, and he has measured their productivity and their sustainability in ecological, biological, and economic terms. His conclusion strikes a blow at Malinowski's theory of magic: there is no uncertainty in Achuar gardening, and there are sites that are used sometimes, but not always, by the Achuar where gardens may last indefinitely. Hence garden magic cannot be explained by a need for metaphysical reassurance in an uncertain world. Instead of studying gardens in and of themselves, he attempts to place both garden activities and garden lore in a broad relationship to other activities and other lore entertained by the household.

In order to achieve this, Descola adopts a structural method of inquiry, and this might be of interest for other kinds of garden studies. He looks for pervasive oppositions between concepts the Achuar people hold that they express in their behavior, use of space, myths, and accounts of events in their lifeworld. An opposition between culture and nature can be expected, but it craves comprehensive knowledge of natives' categories and an understanding of their mutual relationships. For instance, Achuar people think of wild animals, as well as of some supernatural spirits, as almost human because they have a family life, while they think of some tame animals, such as dogs, and some wild animals, such as the howler monkey, as non-human because they are incestuous. Moreover, there are other conceptual oppositions, which are striking, such as contrasts between forest, garden, and house, oppositions between roles of men and women, oppositions between roles of household members and roles of outsiders. Gardens, for instance, are almost exclusively a woman's domain, and the plants that she grows are her children whom she fosters with her work and magic.<sup>30</sup> The forest, in contrast, is almost exclusively the men's domain, and the animals that they hunt are thought of as parents through alliance whom they coax with their magic. In both cases danger is present. Hunting is physically dangerous, and any hunter can be killed by forest animals if he displeases some of the supernatural beings who look after forest animals. Gardens are also dangerous in their own way, for purely magical reasons, so that men avoid entering them. Cassava plants are believed to be thirsty for human blood, and men usually go across gardens walking on the top of very large fallen trees that enable them to escape their greedy leaves. This is also a source of danger for children, and their mothers spend a lot of energy pacifying through recitation of magic spells the bloodthirsty plants that they cultivate.

Many anthropologists working in the Amazon Basin have been struck by the resemblance between gardens and the forest. Fifteen months after the forest has been cleared, Achuar gardens have reached their grown-up appearance, and their three-tiered levels of

<sup>30</sup> This stands in strong contrast to the role of Kirwinian women in gardening. Let me quote again from Malinowski: "A woman never gardens in her own right. She is never styled 'owner of a garden' or 'owner of a plot.' She never works independently, but must always have a male for whom and with whom she works the soil, and this refers also to women of the highest rank whose husbands are necessarily of a lower rank than themselves." *Ibid.*, 79.

foliage reproduce on a smaller scale and in a rather orderly fashion the surrounding forest. Larger-leafed banana trees and papaya trees provide the top cover, cassava plants contribute the larger part of the second cover that prevents the earth from being washed out by rain, and different vegetables and smaller plants provide the ground cover. Thus gardens appear as a cultural imitation of the natural forest. One of the most arresting results of the method used by Descola is that it enables him to show that this is only true to the eye of a Western observer. Actually, for the Achuar, the forest is just another garden that is cared for by spirits who are almost human (they take care of the wild animals as humans do their own tame animals, and they hunt them in order to eat them as humans do their poultry). He has shown that nature is organized according to social relations that are identical to social relations within the household.<sup>31</sup> Nature is perceived along a pattern derived from household life in Achuar society. It turns out that social relationships within their society provide the models for describing nature, rather than nature providing the model for social relationships and artifacts as we would have it. Women and garden plants are thought of on the model of parental relationships, while men and forest animals are thought of on the model of alliances between brothers-in-law. Thus social structure offers the model for a representation of the relationship between garden and forest, or one could say, between garden and the larger landscape. This division of space allows women to have a place of their own in the gardens where men are exposed to supernatural dangers from which they are protected by their magic. Thanks to these dangers women are not subjected to the will and the wrath of men everywhere, and they may enjoy a relative autonomy in the gardens. This is how we may come to assess the importance of gardens for the Achuar; beyond the resources that they provide, they embody a fundamental condition for the reproduction of family life and their social structure. Strangely enough, a structuralist method leads to a functionalist interpretation.

This confrontation of two great studies of horticultural societies shows as well, and most importantly, how interest in gardens changes over time under the mutual influence of new theoretical ideas such as structuralism, and new social movements of our times such as feminism and ecology. In short, gardening in horticultural societies results in a system of meanings that allow natives to create highly specific places set apart from the environment by their visual aspects, physical settings, ecology, and meanings. Relations between these places and their environment are predicated upon a small number of dyadic relationships between opposite categories of thought, such as nature and culture, metaphysics and physics, aesthetics and economics, and inside and outside. They offer the sight of visually ordered places, but a knowledge of gardening activities reveals an even more striking ecological order. All of this stresses social or cultural conformity and it can only yield limited opportunities to individuals for creative activities. Since gardening appears as an expression of social structures, we should expect a conceptual diversity of gardens among diverse horticultural societies.

<sup>31</sup> Descola, *La nature domestique*, 398.

*Gardens of Socially Dominated Groups*

Gardens of native peoples are undoubtedly created, tilled, and maintained according to folk habits and practices that are quite different from gardening habits of the Westernized members of the neighboring societies on which they are usually dependent at least for the supply of iron tools and firearms. So we ought to consider all of these economies as vernacular economies rather than genuinely native, insofar as they are dependent on a larger market economy. There are a few studies of gardening practices that were presented at the symposium on vernacular gardens at Dumbarton Oaks, which dealt with gardens raised by members of a socially dominated group. One was concerned with a society of gardeners growing vegetables on small artificial garden islands in the riverbed of the Somme, near Amiens, France, between the thirteenth century and the early twentieth century. This closed group was under the political and economic control of local merchants. The other was concerned with gardening practices among African Americans in the southern United States.<sup>32</sup> Both studies call attention to the search for variety and to the display of personal taste and invention among gardeners; they also point to the kinds of social games that gardens make possible, games not always confined within the limits of the garden itself, as was made very clear with the boat races between proud gardeners rowing at night toward the market at Amiens. Neither type of garden was designed in a formal sense, and yet they evince a sense of order that can be appreciated only by a visitor who shares to a large extent the gardener's culture. Other people will fail to notice qualities and defects in garden care and layout, or they will misjudge them. Hence it may not be a surprise to learn that these gardeners were deriving a sense of cultural identity from the care and development of their gardens.

It is quite remarkable, however, that in both cases the gardeners' communities seem to uphold some values that had been defended by the dominant group even after it has abandoned them. The gardeners in the Somme River remained staunch supporters of the monarchy after the French Revolution, and African American gardeners seem to uphold many American agrarian values, such as resourcefulness, hard work, common sense, distrust of city life, and self-reliance, all of which were characteristic of white American rural owners' culture; moreover, gardening practices, choices of cultivars, horticultural techniques, and layout may have been symbolically expressive of a deeper cultural resistance. This raises very intriguing issues about the dynamics of cultural change in garden practices and garden design. Could we say that dominated groups tend to stick to traditional gardens while groups gaining access to power are more likely to look for new garden environments? Whether the question is well-formulated or not, these studies of vernacular gardens invite efforts at unraveling the social dynamics of the spreading of garden styles, or gardening techniques or garden uses.

<sup>32</sup> M. Conan, "The *Hortillonnages*. Reflections on a Vanishing Gardener's Culture," and R. Westmacott, "The Gardens of African-Americans in the Rural South," both in *The Vernacular Garden*, ed. Hunt and Wolschke-Bulmahn.



3. A rocaille garden in Marseilles. Grottoes by Gaspard Gardini, allée Nicolas (from M. Racine, *Architecture rustique des rocailleurs*, Paris, 1981, 83)

In short, gardening by socially dominated groups is an activity that enables a sense of community to be maintained, setting the group apart from a somewhat hostile social environment. It is expressed through rituals of interaction among gardeners and through social exchanges. These gardens offer a visual order that may escape a culturally blind visitor but which is exacting for the gardening community. It may give rise to the reuse of discarded items of the surrounding society that demonstrate a capacity for figurative creation without any specific meaning, as a way of inviting outsiders' curiosity. Otherwise gardening activities seem to be very socially constrained and to offer little opportunity for creation of altogether new meanings.

### *Gardens of Visionaries*

There is a growing number of studies of gardens made by untrained artists. Many of these studies were stimulated by an interest in naive creations, and they give more attention to objects created in a place than to the features that made such a place into an invented garden. Actually, the same attitude is found in many contemporary gardens of sculpture designed by artists for their own work.<sup>33</sup> Yet several of these monographs provide a stimulating insight into the process of cultural change. Michel Racine in his study of rocaille gardens in the Marseilles region has shown how a group of immigrants with new technical abilities in rusticated masonry were able not only to introduce new garden features, but, even further, to bring a new vision and to change ways of appreciating private gardens among well-established garden owners (Fig. 3). They were not transmitting Italian garden

<sup>33</sup> Carl Milles's garden in Stockholm; Ian Hamilton Finlay's garden in Scotland; and Vigeland in Oslo.

patterns; they just happened to invent a way of using their know-how in gardens of well-to-do Marseilles owners in order to make a living. These changes were growing out of fresh approaches to garden layout in the most unexpected and unplanned way. This may be one of the reasons for the importance of visionaries, creators who can be acknowledged as such by members of their own social group because their production in some features breaks away from its cultural habitus. They may unwittingly stimulate the common development of new cultural patterns. It is commonly accepted that cultural developments in the arts follow a pattern described as the "trickle-down process," according to which new artistic ideas are supported by a social elite and are imitated and passed down the social hierarchy, becoming more adulterated the further it trickles down. This theory denies the lower classes any capacity for cultural influence on the creative process of artistic forms. This is probably an implicit assumption in many of our current garden studies.

An interesting study carried out by Bernard Lassus in the early 1970s supports a contradictory assumption. Lassus, then a young professor at the Beaux Arts in Paris who had been trained as a painter by Fernand Léger, was intrigued by the very careful developments of gardens in front of their houses by working-class people living in industrial suburbs. He chose to look at them with the same curiosity he would lavish on contemporary exhibits of the visual arts. He attempted to unravel the design problems that they were setting for themselves, paying more attention to their handling of spatial relationships than to the narrative or figurative aspect of their work. This led to three striking discoveries. First, he has shown that despite the seemingly unique aspect of each garden and the variety of sources from which design elements had been borrowed, they proceeded from a small number of specific tenets that he has characterized. Second, and most striking, these tenets of a working-class aesthetic turned out to be strictly opposed to the aesthetic tenets of modernist architecture, without the creators themselves being aware of this. Since these people were scattered in the north and east of France and in the Paris region, he suggested that they were expressing in their own way a popular culture common to their social group (Fig. 4). Third, he was able to show that a few of them who had pursued their creation over a longer period of time had achieved in their environmental creation a personal solution to metaphysical questions about time, man, and nature. These garden creations could be seen as testimonies to the quest for a comprehensive meaning of life that both traditional religious beliefs and modernist visions of the good society fail to offer. This development could be taken as idiosyncratic and very personal to each garden creator; conversely, it can be seen as a symptom of changes in popular cultures, linking together more visionaries. Following the same lines of reasoning as Lassus, this observation might suggest that in Western societies people who do not share in the excitement of social changes may find solace and support for their identities in gardens (nature adorned and transformed by landscape architecture), while public powers are trying to establish civic symbols through grand architectural designs with no attention to the creation of meaningful and playful landscapes. If this interpretation were shown to have some truth, it might call for renewed attention to so-called visionary artists and for public building policies as a source of cultural identity.



*4. Suburban visitors viewing a garden near Nantes in France  
(photo: Bernard Lassus)*

In short, gardening by visionaries is a way of asserting individual expression by offering an infinite variety of garden elements. In that sense it stands in opposition to gardening by socially dominated groups. However, it also enables these gardeners to redeem their self-esteem and to reclaim a social identity that their social environment is denying them, and to bring order to their own world. They are very often poor at expressing themselves through articulated speech, a disability many articulate outsiders capitalize on to depreciate



their work while ignoring their creative use of figurative language. Creative gardening amounts to a public assertion by visionaries of their right to develop figurative systems without a semantic content. Of course, to critics who believe that there is no humanity outside discourse, both creations and creators are objects of contempt. These gardeners always create highly distinctive places that contrast vividly with their environments. Such relations between place and environment call into play a number of opposite categories that invite a structural analysis, such as habit and invention; class or neighborhood and individual; and, most importantly, sign and figure. These last two categories belong to two different realms of communication systems among humans: discourse and figurative language, of which they are the elementary forms. Signs command meanings, and meanings are always attributes attached to signs within some systemic order. Signs are decipherable. Figures, however, are not bound to a specific meaning; they always call upon the observer to imbue them with sense. Figures demand interpretation.<sup>34</sup>

### *Family Garden Allotments*

Garden allotments (Fig. 5) offer an interesting example of public policies by local authorities meant to foster development of workers' gardens. They have received some attention during the last two decades. These policies started in earnest at the turn of the last century. Their objects went by different names in each country, such as workers' gardens, family gardens, community gardens, and even colony gardens in Scandinavia. They were issued in the name of improving the living conditions and the way of life of workers' families by well-to-do citizens, and they have been very often taken as a proof that workers "needed" gardens. Isn't it a common belief that economic demand results from primary or secondary needs, that is, from psychological cravings? So their success might be taken as proof that they fulfilled real needs felt by the workers. Nevertheless, these policies were opposed by trade-unionist leaders who feared that gardening would alienate the political will of the workers by engaging them in the pursuit of individual interests in a garden of their own, and that it would foster a false consciousness of their needs. They were right to a certain extent since these gardens were clearly intended to help workers' families develop frugal and peaceful habits of their own will.<sup>35</sup> The allotments were designed as a whole, but

<sup>34</sup> Yet figures can be inscribed with signs so that they introduce language into non-rhetorical usage. This is the case of emblems used in gardens in the eighteenth century, for instance. Conversely, some signs can be used according to rhetorical figures that allow poetic or symbolic communication of thought. This is the case in garden poetry, which La Fontaine claimed to be superior to gardens themselves. These remarks simply stress the importance of considering these two distinctive forms of human communication when considering any system of expression, because human expression always takes advantage of a dialectic of discursive and figurative language, albeit in a different way for each mode of expression.

<sup>35</sup> Anna Lindhagen, who was one of the major proponents of such policies in Sweden, wrote in her first book on the topic in a chapter devoted to the usefulness of garden allotments: "For the family the plot of land is a uniting bond, where all family members can meet in shared work and leisure. The family father, tired with the cramped space at home, may rejoice in taking care of his family in the open air, and feel responsible if the little plot of earth bestows a very special interest upon life." A. Lindhagen, *Koloniträdgårdar och planterade gårdar*, Stockholm, 1916.



5. Garden allotments at Thiais in the Paris suburbs in 1989 (from O. Cena, *Les jardins de la sociale, Paris, 1992, fig 79*)

the gardens offered for rent were not subject to any design, thus inviting the initiative of their users, and pressuring them into a process of self-discipline. They seem to offer a perfect example of a power technique to which Michel Foucault has called attention in *Surveiller et punir*, as it was used by the bourgeoisie to curb the revolutionary impulses of the working class.<sup>36</sup>

A number of studies of these garden allotments have been carried out in Sweden and Denmark. Historical studies of their development support neither the view that these gardens would express essential cravings of the working class, nor the view that they were only the alienating outcome of a disciplinary project<sup>37</sup> carried out by bourgeois elites trying to weaken workers' movements. They show that the first users of these gardens belonged to the upper social groups of the working class,<sup>38</sup> and that their development has been the most successful when people felt the urge to grow food for survival, between 1914 and 1918, and after the economic slump in the early 1930s when 10 percent of all garden products in Sweden were grown in the 130,000 garden allotments in the country.<sup>39</sup> At the same time, allotment gardens offered possibilities for aesthetic pursuits and for a social life proceeding from these gardening practices to develop even long after the gardens had lost any real economic significance. This makes a study of contemporary uses of these gardens most interesting as part of a general study of the sense of garden experience in mass society.

Different methods have been used offering slightly different perspectives. Social aspects of allotment gardening have been stressed by some authors, such as Lena Jarlov. In her book *Boende och skaparglädje* (Dwelling and the joy of creation),<sup>40</sup> she shows how garden life has been sought deliberately by many Swedish renters in order to feel free, to achieve something by themselves, and to engage in neighborly relationships with other gardeners, often at the cost of worsening their housing accommodations because they had to move to get close enough to a garden allotment. An American social anthropologist, E. N. Anderson, has carried out a survey of popular gardens in the United States.<sup>41</sup> He provides a totally different interpretation of gardening practices, as conspicuous consumption allowing gar-

<sup>36</sup> According to an oral tradition, Anna Lindhagen was a social-democratic leader and is said to have met Lenin when he came to Sweden and to have taken him on a tour of garden allotments without winning his approval. This folk legend is interesting as a myth capturing a central contradiction of this policy for the workers' movement.

<sup>37</sup> A Danish worker recalling debates about garden allotments at the beginning of the century is quoted as saying, "It was something of a myth that people in the allotment garden had no other interest than the allotment. Even in the political propaganda one could notice a slightly demeaning attitude. For example, allotment gardeners were always made responsible for an unsatisfactory demonstration or parade meeting on the first of May." I. Tølstrup, *Kolonihaven*, Copenhagen, 1978, as cited by S. B. Ehn, *Kolonins sista strid*, Göteborg, 1990, 25.

<sup>38</sup> In 1904–5, in one of the very first allotment gardens, there were 42 percent workers, 27 percent craftsmen, and 21 percent salaried employees. See Ehn, *Kolonins sista strid*, 28.

<sup>39</sup> G. Englund and S. Hallgren, *Koloniträdgårdar*, Stockholm, 1974, 44–51.

<sup>40</sup> L. Jarlov, *Boende och skaparglädje. Människors behov av skapande verksamhet—en försammad dimension i samhällsplaneringen*, Göteborg, 1982.

<sup>41</sup> E. N. Anderson Jr., "Att anlägga en trädgård: en folkkonst," in *Folklig och Kommersiell konst: En antologi*, ed. Bengt Jacobsson, Varnamo, 1980.

den owners to display signs of their social position in the hierarchy of social classes. His research suggests that there are significant differences between upper-class and middle-class gardens, and that working-class gardens fail to exhibit a similar pattern, due to economic differences between their users and efforts to keep up with members of higher classes. He has also noted that all of these gardens are clearly raised so as to look different from the surrounding natural environment, which confirms that they can be looked at as man-made signs. A German student of gardens, Werner Nohl, points to the sense of appropriation of things and places that grows out of personal involvement in their making. His research claims that a major difference can be observed between upper- and middle-class gardens, which are mere status symbols and thus they lack personal significance, and working-class gardens, such as allotment gardens, which can give rise to a sense of appropriation when creativity is not hampered by excessively constraining collective rules. Thus Anderson and Nohl offer complementary interpretations of the class-related significance of gardens, stemming from totally different perspectives. Yet this is far from satisfactory. Both of them have proceeded from their own observations alone in order to support their interpretations, claiming implicitly an objective stand. Magnus Bergquist, following in the steps of Mark Francis, who had chosen to interview gardeners themselves to learn from them why they were gardening, went much further in his inquiries. He made in-depth studies of a few gardens in Sweden,<sup>42</sup> of the everyday life in the gardens and its experience by the gardeners, and he took pains to collect brief life histories of these gardeners in order to understand under what circumstances they became gardeners. From a methodological point of view this is a bold departure from most garden studies. It confronts the actual garden and its user's perspective, it explores everyday life in the garden and its social environment, and moreover it demands that attention be given to the life history of the gardener. It provides a fascinating insight into the relationships between vernacular gardens and developments of contemporary myths.

Nowadays these gardens offer their Swedish users the possibility to experience independence, a sense of ownership, and a sense of individual achievement,<sup>43</sup> as well as to indulge at the same time in flights of fancy that take them back into the good Swedish rural society of mythical times. Let us delve a little into this aspect of life offered by the allotment gardens since we are not used to thinking that modern men, who are supposed to be all too rational, could still be creators of mythical discourse. Both the association of gardeners and the garden allotment itself offer a miniature image of an enchanted rural society. Thus one may see these gardens as providing an anchoring of personal development and national identity to their users.

This slightly surprising mythical significance seems to be invented anew in each allotment thanks to independent initiatives by most of the gardeners. Of course this is the stuff

<sup>42</sup> M. Bergquist, *Trädgårdens betydelse för folk i flerfamiljshus*, Göteborg, 1980.

<sup>43</sup> The same idea was noted by Englund and Hallgren: "At present it does not pay any longer to cultivate one's vegetables and berries, say most allotment gardeners, but it is not so much the economy but rather the pleasure to have cultivated by oneself one's products that one seeks." See Englund and Hallgren, *Koloniträdgårdar*, 96.

that myths are made of—independent variations invented by natives along some common patterns. Here are some of the most salient traits of this image of rural society: the division of labor and authority along traditional lines between men and women, which has been changing so much in Swedish families over the last forty years, is very common and some conflicts even arise when “ladies’ associations” start expressing too many ideas about the management of the allotment; self-government gives an image of old-time cooperation between free owners in agricultural hamlets;<sup>44</sup> a community spirit of mutual help and care prevails between neighbors; easygoing social relationships with neighbors take place over a glass of beer or a plate of herring with baked potatoes or a relish of *surströmming*,<sup>45</sup> which is unheard-of in housing areas; the community gathers around the maypole and organizes dances and drinks on the long midsummer day; all parents pay close attention to children’s pleasures and teach them the joys of gardening; on almost every plot is built a small cottage surrounded by flowers and fruit-bearing bushes or fruit trees in the garden.<sup>46</sup> All of these features, which convey images of the good rural life in olden times, are given shape in a personal way, and constantly re-invented by the users of these allotments. This is a myth that expresses itself as the plot of a drama whose actors are the gardeners. In a sense the myth comes true through a series of rituals of everyday life. It is not the whole life any more than a feast at Versailles. This is but a temporary social gathering, a series of ritual encounters, that bring together people whose lives remain separate (they very seldom see each other at home during the winter, or at any other time during the year, and they do not engage in shared social events outside the gardens themselves). Hence we may look at these gardens and at the social practices that they foster as a whole, as social rituals that contribute to the maintenance of shared beliefs about the good society, and about the mythical past that they are supposed to emulate. In that respect these vernacular gardens do not seem so fundamentally different from the native gardens we described earlier.

A recent development documented by Gunilla Englund and Sören Hallgren is even more evocative of some unexpected beliefs attached to some of these gardens.<sup>47</sup> There is a bulging group of allotment gardeners who want to grow their own food according to so-called biologic or biodynamic principles. Discussions of food poisoning by chemicals in the mass media have given them a recent impetus. These gardeners are critical of applied science, so they avoid any uses of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. They also entertain a view of nature and of man’s correct relationship to nature that implies some ideas about the “true forces” at work in nature that resemble mystical beliefs in a supernatural nature. Kjell Arman,

<sup>44</sup> “Work in the allotment gardens reminds [one] a little of the old peasant society,” write Englund and Hallgren in a few pages where they describe at some length the features of life in the allotment gardens. See Englund and Hallgren, *Koloniträdgårdar*, 80, 83.

<sup>45</sup> Surströmming is a small Baltic Sea herring that is allowed to rot in a tin box before it is eaten. It is a pure relish for many Swedes, and a source of disgust for most foreigners.

<sup>46</sup> “A garden cabin may have a variety of origins. . . . But it is most common that garden cabins call to mind the [Swedish dream of a] little red cabin with white corners, a veranda decorated with joinery, and in front of the cabin a small flagpole with a flag flying at its top, surrounded with a resplendent flower parterre.” Englund and Hallgren, *Koloniträdgårdar*, 118.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 105 ff.

one of their spiritual guides, advocates in slightly bombastic prose a new approach to nature: "If we use the laws of dead matter for the living things we shall eradicate life, but if we learn to acknowledge life as a force, and if we learn how to use it, we can make life out of matter—we can make bread out of stones."<sup>48</sup> He develops the old idea common in the eighteenth century that life is movement and that stillness is death. According to this notion, blowing wind and running waters bring health, while still air or waters are deadly. Hence biodynamic texts recommend a practice called *utrörning*, a new Swedish word meaning "stirring out," in order to give a new start to living forces. It calls upon stirring any manure that has been prepared for the garden into water, so that the living forces residing in the waters may penetrate into it. In order to make planting successful, the preparation should be spread on the earth within a few hours afterward, since the water cannot hold the "liberated forces" for a longer time. It is advisable to do this by moonlight.<sup>49</sup> The result of these practices is debatable, since unhealthy plants may produce counterpoisons of their own that may be more detrimental to human health than plants that have been sprayed with chemicals or pesticides. Nevertheless, the point is that, even at present, there are some gardeners who claim a positivistic view of nature, while others believe in a supernature and resort to magical practices when gardening. We need not travel to the Pacific Islands or to the rainforest in the Amazon to be confronted with magic in gardens.

These studies do not yield, as yet, a comprehensive picture of all developments and their dynamics. But they show how life in these gardens may have been important, how rituals of family or community life have taken place there, and how freedom of initiative has been conducive to large investment in aesthetic pursuits. Ironically, these aesthetic inventions have been (and still are) coming under attack by local authorities and by watchdogs of good taste. Of course, garden policies have not been produced for the sole benefit of the working class, and at different times other social groups have been targeted. Todd Longstaffe-Gowan has studied gardens of naval officers in Great Britain; others are interested in gardens of the middle class, for whom garden-cities have been designed in many countries since the end of the nineteenth century. All of these gardens seem to share a few features that were clearly shown by Longstaffe-Gowan; they are places where people could integrate into the established social order while indulging in individualistic shows of affluence. Several studies have been made in France of home and garden life in these suburban developments. In contrast to the developments of aesthetic invention and display of individual tastes and skills exhibited by the working class, one sees among the middle-class or upper-middle-class owners of these suburban homes and gardens the development of disciplinary attitudes imposing a strict limit upon the range of individual variation in the personal design of the garden and of the home environment. This observation echoes the work by Anderson. The meaning of gardens seems to be even more baffling than the relationship between magic and horticulture. We are led to wonder whether aesthetic con-

<sup>48</sup> K. Arman, *Jord och Bröd*, 1921, quoted by Englund and Hallgren, *Koloniträdgårdar*, 106. This book has been republished recently by the Rudolf Steiner anthroposophical press.

<sup>49</sup> Englund and Hallgren, *Koloniträdgårdar*, 106.

formism may be a self-imposed discipline of the middle class, which comprises people who revere common values of autonomy, initiative, and personal achievement at work and in leisure activities, while working-class people hold the reverse of these values.

In short, gardening in family garden allotments constitutes a system of expression that imposes strong constraints on the choice and organization of place, on behavior, and on family and group organization. Nonetheless, it allows individuals to develop personal expressions and to achieve a sense of empowerment and self-achievement that they cannot reach in ordinary city life. These garden allotments are always clearly distinct from their surroundings. They are very often established in derelict spaces that the gardeners have turned into highly civilized places. The relationships people entertain with nature can be captured under a number of dialectical categories, such as nature and culture; work and leisure; metaphysics and physics; aesthetics and economy; and social class and individual. These gardening communities are very orderly. They usually display a sense of ecological order, and the organization of space follows a twofold order: a step-wise scale of privacy between public and intimate places, and a semantic order allowing each garden to stand for a symbol of the good society somewhere between nostalgia and utopia. Rituals of interaction among gardeners and rituals of visit follow an orderly pattern of events, and colors, tastes, and fragrance in the garden contribute to patterns of spatial composition.

### *Conclusion*

What have we learned that would be useful for studies in landscape architecture? Let us start from a simple remark. Visits to vernacular gardens have led to fascinating questions about the gardeners' roles in social reproduction and about gardening's contribution to cultural production. Gardening has turned out to be a system of expression, very much like language, music, painting, or dancing. It results from the development of some distinctive human capacities that can enable people to create all sorts of works, out of which only a few count as high art, understood as all forms of art entertained and enjoyed by socially dominant groups as symbols of social distinction.<sup>50</sup> This is why it invites a study of all corresponding human performances. Studies of vernacular gardens suggest a tentative definition for this domain. A social anthropology of gardening would be the study of an art that turns environments into places encapsulating intentions and representations about man's relationship to nature. Culture and social structure impinge upon such a relationship, so that a study of this art cannot limit itself to a study of its output. We should reach, as well, for an understanding of gardening as a creative process that contributes to cultural and historical change and is constrained in its practice and in its development by the existing cultural and social orders. Thus gardening appears as a system of expression that includes landscape architecture and much else in the creation of some very special places where people entertain a continuous relationship with living nature.

<sup>50</sup> In multi-layered societies, where there is not one single socially dominant group, the definition of high art is, not very surprisingly, a contentious issue.

The studies of vernacular gardens seem to suggest a broad methodological outline that could be applied in empirical studies of any kind of garden. Drawing upon the results of this survey, a social anthropology of gardening would rest upon four levels of analysis, dealing with the elements of gardening, structural organization of these elements, characteristic order and composition of figures and events within a place, and the domain of creative action it affords to individuals. Each of these levels can be discovered in vernacular gardens as well as in period gardens, even though many of the questions that they raise have not been studied until now, and some of them may be out of reach because of a lack of archival materials.

*Elements of gardening* comprise a description of *characteristic activities*, the *social organization* of each of them, *objects* or *forms* they help create, and the main *uses, emotions, and meanings* that each of these activities entails.<sup>51</sup>

*Structural organization of gardening* rests upon an acknowledgment of the *embeddedness of gardening culture* within the broader culture. This is an aspect of gardening that has been very seldom covered in studies of historical gardens and thus calls for a renewed effort. It would be especially valuable in order to avoid projecting contemporary western cultural perspectives onto gardens of other civilizations such as the Roman, Arabic, Persian, Japanese, and Chinese. In each case it would demand an assessment of intentions and representations of man's relationship to living nature when gardening with respect to cultural orientations of persons engaged in the gardening activities under scrutiny. We have seen that some couples of opposite categories, which can be mutually exclusive or dialectical, follow distinctive patterns in a given culture. Whenever they are significant for a gardening activity they may help us to understand how gardening relates to social action or to culture in general.<sup>52</sup>

*Order and composition of figures* have been at the center of studies in landscape architecture until now. Visual order has been given much attention. Nevertheless, the field suggested by studies of vernacular gardens is broader: *semantic order* deserves as much scrutiny, as does *ecological order*, which is very seldom studied. In addition, one may look at orderly organizations of cues or events that proceed from gardening activities such as *organizations of sensuous experiences* of sounds, odors, tastes, and motions. Each order may be expressed through a *figurative composition*, the principles of which should be discovered.

The study of *creative action* introduces a totally new field. It might allow a structural analysis of culture and praxis to come to grips with the history of social change. Let us note simply that both vernacular gardens and period gardens result from gardening practices that are socially and culturally constrained. Nevertheless, gardening activities have always al-

<sup>51</sup> Deforesting, planting, sweeping a yard, and visiting a historical garden are examples of elementary gardening activities, the knowledge of which would provide the building blocks for studies of the art of gardening.

<sup>52</sup> Among possible dyadic categories that we have already encountered are nature and culture; work and leisure; metaphysics and physics; aesthetics and economy; inside and outside; class and individual; consumption and action; social distinction and personal appropriation; habit and invention. Of course, these dyads may be combined in different ways, offering different structures of thought within which the art of gardens may be developed.



lowed some room for personal initiative and for unconstrained activities. We are interested, thus, in registering all actions that may introduce new elements or meanings in gardening or new experiences in gardens in order to understand their conditions of existence and to account for their impact on social and cultural change.

This falls short of providing a theoretical outline for a social anthropology of gardening. Much additional research will be required to create such an outline. Yet one may hope that, alongside art history of gardens and cultural geography of landscape, a social anthropology of gardening might open new vistas for research that would benefit from past scholarly achievements in studies of landscape architecture, and that would provide new sources of excitement. Theories in social anthropology of gardening can help us understand relations between a society and its gardens in a synchronic perspective or in a short-term perspective of change. It cannot replace historical studies. On the contrary, it might stimulate them by offering new insights to start with.