

PHILOSOPHICAL AND SOCIO-PHILOSOPHICAL BASE OF HISTORICAL GARDEN TYPES DEVELOPMENT – FROM CONTINENTAL FRENCH FORMAL GARDEN OF THE 17TH CENTURY TO INSULAR ENGLISH LANDSCAPE GARDEN OF THE 18TH CENTURY

Marie Zgarbová, Ing.

Mendel University in Brno, Faculty of Horticulture, Czech Republic

Abstract

This paper would like to enrich the common analyses of the historical changes of the garden and landscape space composition with the deeper philosophical and social context of these changes. The very aim of the presented interdisciplinary research is to point out at rather neglected but very important connection of the aesthetics, composition and creation of garden with the dominant way of thinking of a specific era, i.e. with the main philosophy of the period. Specifically, the research focuses on the period of founding and the authentic existence of the two main types of garden space within the history of garden design and landscape architecture of the west civilisation (French formal garden and English landscape garden). This period, the 17th and the 18th century, is also the era of founding and climax of the modern-day philosophy and social philosophy in Europe. The attention is paid both to the mainland of Europe – represented by the modern-day Rationalism that, as it will be shown below, had an impact on the composition of the gardens of French formal type, and England – represented by the modern-day Empiricism that influenced the inclination to less formal, more landscape-friendly composition of the English landscape school. Both of these philosophical schools raised the thoughts of the Enlightenment and especially Empiricism in England anticipated the Romantic era in which the development of English landscape garden culminates.

Keywords: French formal garden, English landscape garden, theory and development of garden and landscape architecture, modern Rationalism, modern Empiricism

Introduction

The development of the garden and landscape architecture has been an inseparable part of the rich European cultural heritage. Exploring the tangible manifestations of this development - of the monuments of garden art - informs us about the cultural level, especially about an intellectual and creative maturity while pointing at many local particularities and individualism of the creation, which seem to defy a series of general characteristic of the particular cultural epoch. The present text somehow disregards the above mentioned, otherwise very reputable and attention deserving particularities, whereas the emphasis is here being put on the generally valid features and elements of the garden arts monuments which are closely related to the general culturally conditioned preferences of the given society, especially with the philosophy of the given period and geographical area. Exploring the general does not mean superficiality in this case but rather a way how to deeply understand what mindset and what social bonds stand behind the refined composition of the landscape art monuments.

After all, not a single person familiar with the garden and landscape composition can maintain that a fine garden and architectural work such as the French formal garden of the 17th century or the English landscape garden of the 18th century is only a result of more or less random impulses and motives of the author independent of the tradition.

Present society considers itself to be freer, more open and independent of the tradition and authorities of various kinds. In the interest of the emancipation of the rational entity the contemporary Western society resorted to the condemnation of the integrating traditions - (narrative) stories and determinisms. The heterogeneity and veracity in the sense of the veritable values of logical operations thus acquired is redeemed by demoralisation and loss of the sense of traditional justice and responsibility thus disintegration of the foundations upon which the legitimacy of the social ties stands. Also today it is more about abandoning the traditions and authorities unmasked and shift towards the new yet unexamined; see e.g. Lyotard (1993), Kuhn (1997).

It is undeniable that every high quality garden-architectural work, be it historical or contemporary, is to a certain extent "subject to" some preferences widespread in the society and there is no need to hide it or be ashamed of it. Therefore only then, when there is a deeper understanding of the general cultural prerequisites of the creation, it is possible to state with relative satisfaction that the work itself is understood, that the ability to learn from it and to draw inspiration from it is acquired and at last that there is the ability to also establish one's own creation on more solid foundations.

Material and method

The study of cultural-historical changes of the composition of garden space is an inseparable part of the professional examination of the garden and landscape architecture, it is, however, considerably limited methodologically and by its own subject. Its descriptive and comparative practices are almost exclusively oriented on a description and comparison of the composition of the garden space, description and comparison of the compositional changes of the garden space in time alternatively on the vague discussion on the impact of the garden composition and its partial elements on the onlooker. The garden space is here preserved especially physically (quantitatively), only in better case, and this rather exceptionally, also relationally (qualitatively). In any case the study covers one mere level of the garden space - the visually exposed, material and moreover methodologically very limited ; for details see Kostrhun et Zgarbová (2013, p. 6 - 11).

Even the majority of attempts to qualitatively analyse the cultural-historical changes of the garden space do not exceed these narrow limitations and respond only the question "How is the garden space composed and how does it look like?" not the question "Why is the garden space composed in this particular manner and why does it look like this?" (Kostrhun et Zgarbová, 2013).

The research briefly presented on the following pages shows one of the possibilities of how to extend the professional examination of the changes of the garden space in the course of the past so, that even the other above mentioned question was included or at least partially answered. It focuses on the intellectual and philosophical context of the changes of the garden space composition. In terms of the method it involves an interdisciplinary research of the philosophical and social prerequisites of the garden-architectural creation.

Two historical types of gardens of a great importance - the French formal garden of the 17th century and the English landscape garden of the 18th century were selected as the "researched material". Although for greater clarity also the concrete examples are being used in the text, these are theoretical examination of the representative sample of the general characteristics defining the given type of the garden rather as its ideal picture and not as the concrete works. Although the interpretation is systematically not focusing on presentation of

any concrete garden but on deeper understanding of the general type, the conclusions of this analysis are more less valid for any concrete garden classified as this type.

Relation to previous research

The presented research is a sub-part of the author's wider research dealing with the Phenomenology of the garden and landscape; for details see e.g. Zgarbová (2010, 2012), Kostrhun et Zgarbová (2013). This extensive research follows the ideas and extends the ideas of the philosopher and architectural historian Christian Norberg-Schulz summarized in the work *Genius loci, k fenomenologii architektury/Genius loci, towards phenomenology of architecture* (Norberg-Schulz, 1994). The centre of the extensive research is the articulation and rehabilitation of the natural and to certain extent traditional need of every human, that is the need to anchor his/her existence in some essential, authentic and unifying principle to really belong somewhere. This need is demonstrably connected with the inhabited environment - with the familiar home, garden and its typical landscape as defined by Norberg-Schulz (1994).

Person and the environment inhabited by them are from the perspective of phenomenology of the garden and the landscape essentially intertwined and their existence is the mutual existence determining them both. The unifying concept denoting the various nuances of the specific unity of a person and the environment is so called sense of belonging; see e.g. Barbaras (2005). The sense of belonging regulates the widespread and quite simplified images of a person as of the only or at least main active element in the environment. It rejects the idea of an autonomous human being and heteronymous environment, where the activity is one-sided from a person toward the environment. Against the unilateral scheme of the dependence the scheme of mutual contingent relation on both levels - the epistemological level (cognitive level) and on the ontological level (level of existence); for details see Zgarbová (2010, 2012), Kostrhun et Zgarbová (2013).

Only then, if there is an effort at the scientific level to understand how the various landscapes or gardens influence the thinking and the creation of a person and at the same time how the human ideas and their application in turn stimulate the transformations of the landscape and the garden, only then the deeply meaningful and coherent complex of the knowledge can be reached in the field of garden and landscape architecture and related fields. The part of the Phenomenology of the garden and landscape is also the study of the philosophical and philosophical and social basis of the development of the historical and contemporary types of the gardens and composition of the landscapes from the ancient time till today. Essential is the grasping of the influence of the prevailing philosophical concept and related philosophical social mood of the given period for garden and landscape compositions.

Results and discussion

Differences and similarities - brief comparison of French formal garden and English landscape garden

The development of the garden and landscape architecture in the modern period in Europe is dominated by two historical types of gardens - on one side it is the French formal garden with the peak of its development in the 17th century and on the other side it is the English landscape garden which culminated in the development in the 18th century. It is logical that these two types of gardens, which are today evaluated as *Loci classici* of the garden architectural creation have originated -as their names suggest- in the territory of the formerly by power, socially, culturally and intellectually advanced powers - France and England. Although both types later spread around Europe and beyond the place of its origin (the type of French formal garden penetrates from the place of its origin- France- into another

European countries including Great Britain; similarly the English landscape garden appears beside the British territory also on the continent including France one century later), they retain their essential characteristics, especially the compositional patterns in the authentic or not too modified form. It is so because the both types of gardens have reached a certain grade of perfection of its kind that had simply not been overcome but copied and imitated. They are a manifestation of perfection that is strictly speaking only one, albeit in diverse forms portrayed; for more details about idealistic conception of perfection see e.g. Plato (2003) – his Middle dialogues. The unifying link of the both garden types is their perfection.

When taking into account not the ideal perfection of human creation but purely the formal compositional patterns and principles the two examined types of gardens are on the contrary very often put in contrast to each other. They stand against each other almost diametrical opposites, whereas we can hardly find more distinct opposites in the history of the garden and landscape architecture. Their differences are evident especially due to differences on one hand a very strictly formal and on other hand relatively loose natural composition. Entirely different compositional patterns are used on many levels and in many scales of the garden space. Furthermore these differences are amplified also by force and urgency with which the composition of these two garden types at that time and today affects and captivates the soul of the onlooker and also the surrounding while awakening Genius loci in unprecedented force.

Today these significant forms of the French formal and English landscape garden in form of different composition and visual effects can be perceived as based on a different taste of the society in the 17th and the 18th century in France and on British Islands, the majority of the informed is, however, aware that with this approach we would make an improper simplification that neither the French formal garden or English landscape garden deserve. Not by far the sovereign garden types are only the expression of the different superficial aesthetic preferences. On the contrary the different social structure and different prevailing mindset of modern France on one side and modern England on the other side speaks authentically through their artistic forms. It is amazing, how clearly and significantly the philosophical-social context of the epoch has imprinted into the both types of gardens.



Fig. 1: Versailles - French formal garden (photo author 2010)

Fig. 2: Stourhead - English landscape garden (photo author 2011)

Society and politics

Let's consider briefly the philosophy of the society, the society and the politics of France and England of that time and their influence on the formation of the typical garden space. From about the mid-17th century there are different views of influential theorists on suitable social and political arrangements that oscillate between the authoritarian, absolutistic

and liberal the society democratizing concept. The real state of the political system or the effort to establish it goes in hand with this theory - whereas in France a strong monarch Louis XIV. maintains the absolute reign, the English society sympathises with the early liberalistic ideas, that despite all the power twists and turns is taking roots here; for details see Holzbachová (2006).

Socio-political situation in France of the 17th century gave rise to a new concept of the garden space in form of generous spatial compositions that serve as representative, perfectly geometrically structured space, where a spectacular residence is nestled (Hendrych, 2004, p. 67).

Louis XIV. was in many respects a perfectionist and he was very careful not to limit or to destroy the French nobility. It would have otherwise had ambitions to break out of the king's influence which was neither in harmony with his personality nor with his political ambitions. Everything, and even the garden has to represent the absolute power of the monarch, who was even the "King of Sun" in France from the second half of the 17th century. As far as a huge, the landscape captivating, perfectly designed, with hundreds of fountains abundant and with gold and marble gleaming garden is concerned, the money is not the issue. Whereas in its whole the French formal garden is, e.g. the greatest in *Versailles* an example of disciplined authoritative approach, and, as it will be explained later, not only of a monarch toward the society but also of a human toward the nature, the partial garden spaces are the stage and the scenery of the royal capricious games and people in his favour.

In any case the French formal garden is a symbol of absolute power. A meaningful example showing the significance of the garden in France of that time is a story about the fate of Nicolas Fouquet, the king's finance minister, who is connected with the garden *Vaux-le-Vicomte*. This magnificent formal garden that has become a prototype for the creation of similar garden spaces in the whole Europe was founded not by the king but this minister of his even before the establishing of the garden in *Versailles*. The garden raised the king's ruthless jealousy. The king Louis XIV was said to be totally hit by the visit of *Vaux-le-Vicomte* - firstly he could not bear to look at the perfection of the garden he did not own himself and secondly he finally found the unique way of how to materialize his absolute power. In *Vaux-le-Vicomte* he saw a garden space in certain way composed and gaining an unlimited overlap transcending the concrete place toward the whole universe - similarly it should be with the monarch's power. So, after the visit of *Vaux-le-Vicomte*, he knew already how to make the "centre of the world" out of his own residence in *Versailles*. To Fouquet himself, his influence, ambitions and extravagance planted in the garden *Vaux-le-Vicomte* have brought him a life imprisonment. More on Fouquet's story, on the garden *Vaux-le-Vicomte* and other significant French gardens is to be found e.g. in the valuable work of Ivar Otruba *Krásy francouzských zahrad/Beauties of French Gardens* (Otruba, 2010).

While strictly straight lines and axes of formal composition of French garden persuasively symbolise the absolute power of the monarch over the subjects and also the power of a human over the nature, the relatively more liberal society and its responsive approach toward the natural matter is reflected in the freer and relatively looser shapes of the English landscape gardens. The development of the capitalist economic form connected with a somewhat disputable measures - so called enclosing of the formerly community and peasant land have caused the disintegration of the traditional farming structure and almost complete disappearance of the small farmers in England. At the same time enclosing gave rise to the great landscape sections and to future development of the landscape school. The vast enclosed units serving primarily for sheep farming guarantee the unity of ownership and at the same time anticipate and suggest the future compositional and aesthetical principals of the creation of the landscape gardens. Already in the 16th century Thomas More (1950) criticizes the state of English countryside, which is called by the motto "the sheep are eating people";

see also Uryč-Gazda (2010, p. 1.) Also the emerging constitutional arrangement of the power in England at the end of the 17th century favours the nobility and other privileged wealthy who owned the land. These owners are not perceived as threat to the sovereign, but as a positive manifestation of growing economic and social level; for details see Holzbachová (2006).

The establishment of the new compositional principles of English landscape school is also helped by the practical consequence of the socio-political situation. The enclosed landscape sections should primarily not serve for demonstration of wealth and political power, but should be a background for a new way of life - so called "country living" and the production of the valued commodities such as wool or wood. Maintaining of the strictly regular compositions of the French type gardens is not economically viable for the owners and at the same time it is not compatible with their lifestyle including a new "more natural" aesthetics of gardens (Hendrych, 2004, p. 6 - 11).

Therefore we can better understand now, from where the urgent desire to own a garden came, the garden that resembles more to heroic and bucolic landscapes in from the paintings of Classical painters than to the formal compositions of Le Nôtre. The logical consequence of the socio-political situation in England is the publicly declared opposition from the ranks of artists (essays of Joseph Addison, Richard Steel and Alexander Pope) toward the continental formally designed gardens of Baroque and Classical period and their copying in the environment of English countryside; see Hendrych (2004, p. 96).

Philosophy

Many philosophers have defended and sometimes even anticipated the differing views on the "ideal" socio-political structure of the society, which, as earlier explained, affects the appearance of landscapes and gardens. The philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588 - 1679) was not a Frenchman by origin, yet he spent most of his life time in France and openly expressed the sympathies with the ideal of royal absolutism. Probably under the influence of horrific events, when England had executed their monarch (Charles I. in 1649) and the successor to the throne (future Charles II.) he emigrated to France and stood against the poor masses and against nobility limited in number and he did not recognize any form of their independence from the sovereign (Röd, 2001).

Hobbes (2010) has thus become one of the most influential theorists of absolute power till today. According to Hobbes' vision the ideal state should be controlled by the unlimited will of the monarch who reigns over both the human goods including decisions about human life and death and also the nature goods. The state is thus a strictly organized unit consisting of subordinate individuals similarly as the French formal garden is a strictly organized unit consisting of tamed natural elements.

A very different view of Hobbes' was held by the English philosopher and influential theorist of liberalism John Locke (1632 - 1704); for details see Locke (1992, 2000). His far more moderate, liberal social theory admits the human many liberties. A right to protection of life and private property are some of them. Heading towards a freer position of the individual in the society, explicitly expressed in Lock's work in the field of political theory and in real terms forming in England of that time preceded a relatively free and considerate manipulation of a human with the natural elements that in the 18th century was applied by the English landscape school at its climax.

On the purely philosophical and above all epistemological (theory of knowledge) grounds, the views of the philosophers of that time oscillate between two main modern schools of thought - the rationalism establishing itself rather on the continent and the Empiricism prevailing on the British Islands. Especially new age Rationalism is the cornerstone of this type of thinking that supports the bold idea that the human is the lord and

master of nature. The French philosopher René Descartes (1596 - 1650), fairly considered to be the founder of modern Rationalism, has brought this idea in his epistemological concept to the theoretical peak; for details see Descartes (2010).

Modern Rationalism combines well with the socio-politically oriented ideas about the absolute power that, as we have learnt already, are related to the aesthetics of the French formal garden. The philosophical movement of Rationalism in the 17th century strived to achieve the unquestionable foundations of the knowledge, through which a person gains a perfect knowledge about the social and natural reality thus also supremacy over the social conditions and the nature, thus de facto over the whole world. The aesthetics and architectural works of that time are also based on the same theoretical concept. Compositional principles of the French formal garden get hold of almost all natural elements included in the garden and even the surrounding landscape. The architect does not hesitate to use all the mathematical regularities, rules of perspective illusion and sometimes significant interventions into the landscape done by them; see e.g. Hendrych (2004, p. 68 - 74). This all is about a "magnificent space calculated to impress" (Hendrych, 2004, p. 70).

In connection with emerging modern Rationalism the human thinking started to concentrate primarily on the secular tasks for the first time after long centuries and it deviates from the contemplative life in favour of the active life. Person will not have to be responsible for their earthly deeds to some transcendental entity (God) but on the contrary, they will and should do whatever their intellectual capabilities and capacities allow them. The thinkers of that time on the continent believe under the influence of rationalism, that while pursuing their goal (supremacy over the nature) the intellect will provide the ideal science - science on the model of mathematics, the findings of which are undisputable, obvious and unambiguous; for details see e.g. Röd (2001). Should we seek a perfect knowledge of nature that can be used when creating the garden spaces it will be provided by kind of a mathematized natural science.

From the perspective of today it is, however, clear that the variability, ambiguity and intangibility of nature or landscape is very hard to be combined with the ideal of security and clarity of the mathematized natural science. Where does then such given mathematized natural science take its legitimacy, when not in natural matter? The modern Rationalism had already in the 17th century an apparently sufficient answer for this question. Unlike the modern Empiricism it is not searching for unquestionable basis of the cognition in the experience with the surrounding world, but it is looking for it directly in a person and their intellect. For this reason the modern Rationalists believe in principle that if the intellect (it is capable to think) contains whatever undisputable (mathematical) principles, and they will apply it consequently in the surrounding world, they will not commit any misconduct. Should we realize that during the formation period of the French formal garden the above mentioned school of thought prevailed, then we can also understand that this type of garden is able to defend its almost exaggerated, extreme regularity and precision that goes in many ways against the nature.

English modern philosophers led by the already mentioned John Lock were opposing the modern continental Rationalism with their empirically (experience) oriented philosophy; for details see Röd (2004). Whereas the sensory experience is a source of volatile and therefore mostly deceptive cognition for Descartes, for the representatives of Empiricism it represents on the contrary something, in which a person is naturally rooted and what gives them a possibility of genuine understanding of the world. Valuable knowledge must on the contrary be based on the world existing everywhere around everyone, not only on purely speculative processes of human mind.

According to Lock (1984) the nature is an infinite set of hypotheses about the reality that cannot be fully rationally explained. Also the knowledge is from the perspective of his

Empiricism is "merely" a hypothetical explanation of the reality, without the right to achieve absolute validity; for more details about epistemology of Locke see e.g. Krüger (1973, 1981), Bennett (1971). The measure of all human doing, thus also creating of gardens and interventions into the landscape is nature itself, not the ratio. All the human thoughts must be firstly found in nature itself and firstly then used. The ideas of modern Empiricism on British Islands are very aptly complemented with former more liberal society-wide situation and together they form a convenient mental context for the development of the aesthetics of the English landscape school inspired by free nature, culminating in the 18th century in form of English landscape garden.

It should be noted here, how elegantly the modern Empiricism anticipates the end of the rationalistic ideal of indisputable cognition, the place of which can be taken by an entirely different ideal - the ideal of authenticity in sense of open and tolerant relation toward the world, thus also to the surrounding nature matter. This ideal is then considered in connection with the environmental crisis and crisis of social relations in the society especially during the whole 20th and at the beginning of the 21st century till today.

Conclusion

We have tried to look at the historic changes of the composition of the garden space from other than commonly held point of view on the lines above. This deeper examination showed that the garden space is by no means a trivial object that could be easily described and fully understood by a narrowly focused study of the material compositional side of the matter. The intangible, philosophical and social context of the time plays a very important role in the formation of the various garden types throughout the history. Therefore, its understanding is strived for in the field of the garden design and landscape architecture.

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