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Utopian Architecture  
5/15/17  
Final Essay

The Fragmented Garden:  
The Role of Order and Chaos within Vermaarde Park

A bird's eye view is brought to life within Romeyn de Hooghe's engraving of the Vermaarde Park Van Anguien: Park van Edingen, a park which was proposed within 1685 as a center within Edingen, Belgium. The self is placed above the land, angled towards a vast arrangement of geometric shapes. A eurythmy exists between the fluctuating shapes. A radiating circle extends symmetrically propelled limbs to the border of a hexagon. This cross hatching is framed by a complex of rectangles, smaller segregated garden spaces. An axis, slightly off center from one's view, acts as a main artery into the system. Within each space trees, garden patches, hedges, and fountains are perfectly arranged. This was the 17th century concept of a safely bound nature. It was an ordered whole which a divine figure could gaze upon with admiration, delight, and pleasure. Only with human reason and a sense of control could the natural be manipulated to form such a heavenly imbued space. The chaos of wilderness exists in the far distance, barely visible. The picturesque was a chosen arranged frame, a scene which was difficult to achieve within the unordered mess of the forest. It is, however, within the the most ordered that a sense of turmoil and absurdity arises. The same view of Vermaarde contains fragmented narratives and spaces which are compiled together. A viewing tower (reminiscent of the power of Babel) is placed within the hunting grounds, which is overlooked by the radiating panoptic central tower. Prairies, jousting, and shooting zones surrounded the central tower. Towards the entrance formal gardens, a small sailing ground, labyrinths, manergeries with

oriental structures, and specimen gardens were placed beside each other to form an ultimate space of varying pleasures. The apparent order within European pleasure gardens results in an irrational collaging of space.

It was believed that through man's hand nature could become a beautifully perfected emblem. Cunningham describes that “Within the garden an aesthetic prevails: beauty is constructed from rearranging nature.”<sup>1</sup> The natural is morphed into a type of artifice, as each form attempts to reach an idealized state. Within the garden this takes continual maintenance as the organic chaotic natural systems are continually impeding. Plants must be put back into their right place, a configuration where culture and nature intersect.<sup>2</sup> The architecture of the palace was brought out onto the land through the formal garden. This allows man to see themselves within the natural, acting as a dominant authoritative figure. The arrangement of the natural is made to please one's senses, highlighting its pictorial and sculptural qualities. Art and nature forms a symbiotic relationship. The gaze of one's eyes was meant to travel with ease and admiration over the landscape as if it were a painting.<sup>3</sup> Eye soars and the inelegant remained outside of the the walled garden. Plants, fields, or lakes became as malleable as paint or clay. The ground at times was completely reconfigured to allow for flat landscapes and proper views.<sup>4</sup> Nature is highly objectified negating its purpose or environmental context. The park, during this time, needed to be highly constructed in order to create a pleasurable and leisurely experience for its users.

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<sup>1</sup> Cunningham, *The culture of Gardens*, 38.

<sup>2</sup> Cunningham, *The culture of Gardens*, 38.

<sup>3</sup> Cunningham, *The culture of Gardens*, 44.

<sup>4</sup> Cunningham, *The culture of Gardens*, 44.

The use of hedges acts as barriers between each space, building the geometry of the garden. The high hedges begin to take on the presence of interior walls, reaching stories tall. Within the foreground of the view onto Vermaarde park the immense hedges form a clear boundary between the park and the exterior road. They continue through the garden separating each specified space, forming a walled in atmosphere as well as an excluded “other.” The uncrossable and oppressive barriers were designed to categorize, order, and develop singular spaces within a larger whole. The knowledge of other spaces and other individuals becomes hidden, one becomes fully saturated within their desired unit. The boundary of the exterior walls and those within the garden reflect each other.<sup>5</sup> The boundary offers a sense of security “separating the cultured space of the naturalistic construction from the real dangers of the outside.”<sup>6</sup> The hedges offer a form of stability to the entirety of the space as well as to the viewer within. The walls constantly hold a similar form throughout the garden forming a visual fluidity through the space.<sup>7</sup> The regimented straight foliated barrier also directs the viewer's gaze upon the more indexical interior forms and picturesque views. The hedges stunted one's view, placing the viewer within a maze of leisurely spaces.

The decontextualization of the park space allows each form to be viewed as a singularity. This singularity is particularly present within the specimen gardens. The garden as a surface of presentation, morphed science and art. The concept of the individual perfect plant and specimen arose.<sup>8</sup> Within the botanical gardens specific plants were grown to be looked at individually.<sup>9</sup> Perfection was so strongly applied that issues regarding one's copyright over images was in

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<sup>5</sup> Kaczmarczyk, *Hedge mazes and landscape*, 58.

<sup>6</sup> Kaczmarczyk, *Hedge mazes and landscape*, 59.

<sup>7</sup> Kaczmarczyk, *Hedge mazes and landscape*, 59.

<sup>8</sup> Eisler, *The Renaissance Print*, 253.

<sup>9</sup> Swan, “Approximating Nature” 54.

debate. With a perfected form and true representation differences in illusion would not occur.<sup>10</sup> An environment of sterility becomes necessary to focus one's attention on the singular form. This focus emphasized methods of collecting, organizing, and exotifying. Fragmentation is created to allow for a type of order, as each is given a parcel of space separating it from the others. The inability of other plants to impede upon their space allowed the viewer to see the specimens entirety. Each plant, bloom, and form within the garden became a symbol which could be read into. The lily is looked upon as a symbol of purity and cleanliness.<sup>11</sup> The emblematic and anthropomorphism of the natural was an attempt to form a more comprehensible image. This attempt in forming a clearer sense of meaning within one's environment inherently related it back to the human.<sup>12</sup> The desires within the garden to order, define, categorize, and understand were also methods being applied to humans themselves.

An individualization on a larger scale, develops the garden into its own representative unit of the world. The garden becomes a metaphor for paradise, a Garden of Eden. Paradise was a perfected space containing the epitome of harmony within an entirety of life.<sup>13</sup> Held within its own barriers is an otherworldly natural realm. A wholeness is contained within its peaceful tranquility. The perfected, with all its entirety and variation, was compiled onto this idealistic land. The garden holds a relationship to the world and all its parts. The contraction of the world's whole is described by Foucault as bringing together "inside its rectangle four parts representing the four parts of the world, with a space still more sacred than the others that were like an umbilicus, the navel of the world at its center."<sup>14</sup> The four parts of the garden illustrate the layout

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<sup>10</sup> Eisler, *The Renaissance Print*, 253.

<sup>11</sup> Taylor, *Dutch Flower Painting*, 36.

<sup>12</sup> Ashworth, *Emblematic Natural History*, 20.

<sup>13</sup> Griswold, *Pleasures of the Garden*, 11.

<sup>14</sup> Foucault, *Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias*, 6.

of the traditional formal garden. The park is an expansion of this formal arrangement and concept of space. The park, like the garden, attempts to hold the world within its own barrier. The display of exotic features from different distant regions, solidifies the symbolic form of each land. All comes together to form a unified microcosm, a central collection.<sup>15</sup> Traveling through these spaces gives the viewer a sense of experiencing all divine features of the earth, forming a space for the ‘armchair’ traveler. This reinforces a sense of ownership and power, traveling over, understanding, and controlling the inconceivably large expanse of humanity and nature. The ability to gaze upon this vastness within one frame, as depicted within Vermaarde, offers one a complete sense of the entire collectively of earth. The map of Vermaarde imprints a name onto this universality, a maker, and controller. The illusion of possessing the entry of a space molds a fantasy within a physical reality.

The garden space of Vermaarde fuses different landscaping styles into a unique arrangement of natural space. Vermaarde was planned to be built in Enghien, a small medieval town close to Brussels in Belgium.<sup>16</sup> As Belgium during the 17th century was highly influenced by France, their formal and dominant arrangement of natural space within formal pleasure gardens were incorporated.<sup>17</sup> Dutch as well as Italian styles were also included within the park. The Vermaarde “gardens conformed to the Dutch garden aesthetic. And it was close enough to the border with Flemish Brabant that it could be easily reached by Dutch visitors who found it to be an exemplary and accessible Baroque garden model, whereas the gardens of Italy and France were not.” The baroque style during this period had associations with Italy and Rome.<sup>18</sup> This

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<sup>15</sup> Foucault, *Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias*, 6.

<sup>16</sup> "BibliOdyssey." The Pleasure Garden

<sup>17</sup>"Chateau d'Enghien (Edingen)." Gardenvisit

<sup>18</sup> "Baroque period." Baroque period - New World Encyclopedia.

crossing of regional styles, helped to unify a European landscape. Specific features within the garden such as the larger viewing ground (tower of babel) and the terraced island spaces were particularly Italian features.<sup>19</sup> Italian gardens were known for manipulated greenery, while the Dutch admired colorful flower beds.<sup>20</sup> The compiled aesthetics allowed those from different regions to appreciate the space, creating a unified common ground.

The geometric configuration of the Vermaarde garden depicts a heavenly connection. Within the engraving of Vermaarde Cherubs are illustrated within the clouds which hang above the park. The angelic figures were viewed as directly attending to God, ornamenting the image with a holiness. Nature was often viewed as “revealing God’s basic attributes, his divinity, his goodness, his power, and his wisdom.”<sup>21</sup> Nature held a purity to it, offering man the refreshment of his spirit.<sup>22</sup> Geometry was often associated as connecting the earthy to the heavenly within a harmony.<sup>23</sup> Large geometric arrangements of land, in a sense, were meant to be looked at from above, and designed for heavenly figures. The gardens of Versailles, arranges the central axis to be aligned with the Sun, referencing its divinity.<sup>24</sup> As God had given humans the right to dominate, master, and manage the natural, it was man's job to display his creation.<sup>25</sup> Humans being more beautiful and perfectly formed than animals and nature, made their arrangement, training, breeding, or manipulations of each hold more aesthetic value.<sup>26</sup> With this man could be viewed as taking the hand of God. This separates man from the natural making him closer and at

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<sup>19</sup> "BibliOdyssey." *The Pleasure Garden*

<sup>20</sup> "BibliOdyssey." *The Pleasure Garden*

<sup>21</sup> Taylor, *Dutch Flower Painting*, 29.

<sup>22</sup> Cunningham, *The culture of Gardens*, 41.

<sup>23</sup> Cunningham, *The culture of Gardens*, 42.

<sup>24</sup> Lablaude, *The Garden of Versailles*, 6.

<sup>25</sup> Thomas, *Human Ascendancy*, 27.

<sup>26</sup> Thomas, *Human Ascendancy*, 31.

times overlapping divine figures. The perspective of the Vermaarde engraving gives the viewer an unattainable higher view, looking down over the land as if God himself. Geometry becomes an illustration of the human ability to hold reason and order.

The formal garden and park used geomery to recreate ancient Greek and Roman arrangements of space. Ancient Romans and Greeks used” geometric shapes: perfect circles enclosing squares, enclosing circles, enclosing squares. Geometry and proportion ruled, harmony prevailed.”<sup>27</sup> The garden was a location which allowed for a new birth of ancient ruins with classical gods and myths.<sup>28</sup> It was believed that the Romans derived an artistic perfection from Greek architecture.<sup>29</sup> Greek architecture was thought to be where regularity of form, order, and a sense of the picturesque would harmoniously intersect.<sup>30</sup> The parks space became an place to attempt to recover ancient ideals.<sup>31</sup> Fountains, grottos, pergolas, and terracing was adapted from ancient Roman gardens. Lining paths in rows of trees, as prevalent within Vermaarde, was another ancient adopted practice which illustrated a larger cosmic harmony.<sup>32</sup> Tafuri describes how order fantasy and rhythm were combined within a network of shapes.<sup>33</sup> A star formation, fan, circle, or claw pattern are seamlessly woven together allowing each shaped to be nestled inside of the next. The reference to history through the organizations of land molds the space into a mathematical configuration.

The variations of shapes and patterns within the park space can be viewed as a turmoil of excessiveness. Each space takes on its own form, decoration, presentation, and scale, lacking a

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<sup>27</sup>Cunningham, *The culture of Gardens*, 42.

<sup>28</sup> Cunningham, *The culture of Gardens*, 42.

<sup>29</sup> Wittkower, *Parere su L'Architettura*, 147.

<sup>30</sup> Wittkower, *Parere su L'Architettura*, 148.

<sup>31</sup> Cunningham, *The culture of Gardens*, 48.

<sup>32</sup> Cunningham, *The culture of Gardens*, 42.

<sup>33</sup> Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia*, 20.

contextualization for the whole. The park was designed to vary one's pleasures and forms of pleasures. Milizia eloquently stated that "He who does not know how to vary our pleasures will never give us pleasure. [The city] should in fact be a varied picture of infinite unexpected episodes, a great order in the details, confusion, uproar and tumult in the whole."<sup>34</sup> The space becomes infinitely subdivided, into a collection of individual beauties. Within Vermaarde such variation of pleasure are endless from the seductive experience of plants and views, to the entertainment of jousting, sailing, or hunting. A form of pleasure was thought to derive from the sensation of new experiences, giving the viewer a sense of wonderment and surprise. The exotic in this case was admired and heightened, further adding variety to the space. These various features and activities when densely packed or spatially compared create an excessive and overstimulated atmosphere. The self becomes disoriented with the lack of a clear foundation. This lack of time or place, however, was often a desired feature of the garden, allowing one to escape into a sanctuary.<sup>35</sup> There was a lack of awareness and accessibility to the outside world, except through entrances or viewing ha-has.

The park due to its variation in features, pleasures, and activities forms a heterotopia. Foucault describes that a "heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible."<sup>36</sup> Vermaarde is filled with these juxtapositions as the menageries consisted of a row of buildings with architecture that corresponds to the animals contained within. One of the only places that these highly varying structures could fluently exist next to each other was within the garden or park. When looking at the architectural structures in themselves a high level of confusion, upheaval, and

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<sup>34</sup> Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia*, 20.

<sup>35</sup> Griswold, *Pleasures of the Garden*, 43.

<sup>36</sup> Foucault, *Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias*, 6.



internal stress could arise. Through the collection of exotic material the park was able to display elements from different regions that would otherwise never exist together, allowing for the park to hold no sense of place itself. Forms of myth, folklore, fantasies, and other narratives were implanted into spaces with little correlation. Vermaarde contains a tower reminiscent of the the Tower of Babel. The highly symbolic structure injects its narrative into the unrelated hunting ground. This brings the space out of a set time, as well as grounded reality.

Piranesi amplifies the sense of the fragmented park space to form his own utopian space. Piranesi used the bourgeois historical criticism of the complex of “Gothic, Chinese, and Hindu Architecture and the romantic naturalism of the garden landscape, in which were immersed the jests- devoid of irony- of exotic pavilions and false ruins, are related ideally to the atmosphere...”<sup>37</sup> This spatial irrationality was configured within Piranesi's *Campo Marzio* which created a land devoid of symbolic significance through its own attained order.<sup>38</sup> It is here where rationalism fully illustrates its own irrationality. The individualized architectural elements such as the classical ruined forms or Babel lose a part of their symbolic contextualization, narrative, and power as a sing, resulting in the deconstruction of its own significance.<sup>39</sup> This void occurs within the garden through its inaccessible larger connection to the heavenly.

Piranesi's late Baroque use of “unity within variety” bridges various spatial contradictions.<sup>40</sup> Within this contradictory framework he forms the ‘city-park’ of *Campo Marzio*, a space of congested forms which related back to ancient structures.<sup>41</sup> Piranesi's arrangement was in a sense an extension of the park, as it attempted to bring reason and natural

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<sup>37</sup> Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia*, 10.

<sup>38</sup> Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia*, 14.

<sup>39</sup> Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia*, 14.

<sup>40</sup> Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia*, 14.

<sup>41</sup> Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia*, 16-17.

together, combining the city and the forests.<sup>42</sup> There was a struggle between order and formlessness, illusion and reality, and banality and stimulation. Naginski writes how the viewer would find themselves “shifting erratically between contradictory registers (pictorial illusion on the one hand, and architectural reality on the other). Provokes a sensory overload along with a deep metaphysical malaise in the perceiving subject.”<sup>43</sup> The overemphasis of form, order, and the picturesque came to their own contradictory demises. Vermaarde park held a similar visual and conceptual foundation as Piranesi’s *Campo Marzio*, as it developed optical disorientations. The high compression of space at times form an instability within its fragmentized whole. When the spatial constrictions dramatically collide, such as within that of nature and reason, oneself loses a sense of the desired stability.

Order and chaos are mental process which manipulate one's condition and experience of that space. An awareness of pattern, predictable sequencing, and formal relationships becomes highly relative. Parks, such as Vermaarde, attempt to present a cultural concept of order. Yet it is within these spaces that forms are seen as fragmented forms which rest incompatibly beside each other. The highly regimented garden can then be seen as a chaotic space of disjuncture and alien forms. As straight row of trees never rests within a wild forest, if one were to run across such a view an intense sense of fear, anxiety, or curiosity would arise. It is within the formal gardens however which these configurations of natural material form a desired space of leisure, opulence, and serenity. The neglect in Vermaarde park was in part the shift in these cultural concepts and values. These derived perspectives place the self in a very specific relationship to the natural, illustrating one’s fears and fantasies.

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<sup>42</sup> Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia*, 6.

<sup>43</sup> Naginski, *The Built Surface*, 238.

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Vermaarde Park van Enghien, Edingen Belgium, engraving, Romeyn de Hooghe, 1685



Giovanni Battista Piranesi, plate from *Campo Marzio dell'antica Roma*, 1761-1762. Perspective view of the area of Hadrian's tomb and the *Bustum Hadriani*.

