Response to Dr. Bradburne's paper 'Local Heroes...'

Gardens in memoriam and more

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As Dr. James Bradburne so clearly stated, gardens and museums share many characteristics and attributes. In the following, I shall attempt to accentuate a couple of aspects of this cross-disciplinary agenda. Given my personal fascination with horticulture, gardens will be my main focus point. My idea is to apply some of Dr. Bradburne's museological reflections to garden theory, to introduce the term *hortus musealis* in the present context, and then conclude with some points concerning the reconstruction of historic gardens.

The connection with *museion* is found in museums and gardens alike. Collecting and reflecting plays a key role in both spheres. Yet for all their seemingly ephemeral character, the complexity of gardens seems to be in need of continuous defence. Gardens indeed encompass much more than sheer physical elements, and they hold much more than trees and plants. They are works of art. Furthermore, and in continuation of Dr. Bradburne's viewpoints on museums, gardens may be labelled institutions of memory. They document culture and they reflect identity. Like museums and other collective phenomena of collective memory, gardens are shared by groups and they are instrumental in creating groups. Every single garden composition is a highly significant world, sacred and secular values blending within each garden's specific fence. Again paraphrasing Dr. Bradburne, a garden –

just like a museum – can be looked upon as a non-narrative collection of texts.

It may seem somewhat bold to assert the importance of our personal encounter with museums and gardens in the highly scholarly context of the present seminar. Yet I think it should be attempted, because this point may open our minds to new ways of approaching as well as appreciating the essentials of both domains. For example, it may help taking the *empathetic* dimension of our approach to museums and gardens into consideration. I should like to refer to the Polish poet Wislawa Szymborska's poem entitled 'Museum', because it so brilliantly points to the category of time in our appraisal of museum exhibits.¹ Facing such exhibits, it becomes clear that here life has been extinct. And yet life continues beyond the lifespan of the female first person. We approach museums and gardens as persons bearing with us time past, present and future, and the very experience of time is, of course, one of the very basic features of these encounters.

For all their ephemeral and fragile character, gardens embody life. And they give life, thus overcoming the melancholy inherent in Szymborska's universe. If we also devote some attention to physical dynamics, to bodyscape and movement when considering the nature of our encounter with gardens and museums, we may realize the importance of the *path* and

its rich ritual meanings.² Museums and gardens are not only platforms for study and remembrance. Past, present and future intertwine, and museums as well as gardens are basically privileged places for acquiring new understandings, reaping playful and intelligent collective experiences, and creating new memories.

Whereas museums are late constructions, it is impossible to imagine man or woman without gardens – nor without collections, for that matter. The ontological state of gardens and museums, respectively, do indeed hold interesting differences, yet both provoke kindred experiences of life and death, poetics and politics, lull and energy, sorrow and delight, etc. Villa Adriana in Tibur (today's Tivoli), laid out in the early 2nd century, is a point in case.

This complex was indeed much more than an Imperial retreat from Rome. A large court lived here during Emperor Hadrian's last

The Canopus is one of the central features of Villa Adriana, constructed in the early 2nd century as a retreat for Emperor Hadrian. The pool was named after an Egyptian city where a temple was dedicated to the god of Serapis. The crocodile reminds of the Egyptian site. Yet the architecture and the statues of the Hadrian Canopus are Greek. Author's photos, 2006.

years, and his successors also used the villa. Villa Adriana was a large-scale construction that was both a cosmos and a museion. It was a place in which to rule and to linger, to accommodate congenial spirits and to cultivate the recollections of various phenomena experienced elsewhere. The villa boasted an extensive suite of scenes and replicas from the Emperor's travels, thus embodying what I would choose to name the first *hortus musealis*.³ This concept was to be diligently copied and elaborated upon, particularly in the late 18th century when sights encountered on the Grand Tour were aped elsewhere, and Rousseau's tomb in the Ermenonville garden and other

100 motifs tied into contemporary poetics, and history engendered replicas in landscape gardens all across the European continent.

Hortus musealis points to the specific memoirs and associations that the garden owners of that period aimed at staging, and which they also hoped that their guests and the readers of their garden guide books would apprehend. Yet the term may also be seen as reaching today's encounter with the self-same historic gardens. Within the bounds of the historic *horti museali*, our minds and memories are being addressed and perhaps even challenged. Over time, new memory collectives are being created. But it is a fact that numerous historic gardens, including Villa Adriana, have come down to us in a state relentlessly marked by their fragile and ephemeral character. Constructions are ruinous and Nature has taken possession of what was once a sophisticated landscape and planting scheme.

Over the past few decades, the ambition of recreating some of Europe's great gardens has come to fruition. This trend has led to new and inspiring discussions about terms and tools, meaning and memory. Much enthusiasm, energy, courage and craftsmanship have been applied to projects concerning a series of fine 16th and early 17th century gardens. Many such gardens were deeply indebted to the Hero of Alexandria heritage, not least to Hero's teachings on pneumatics. Most of the garden-makers' projects of those times are gone, but knowing Hero's text helps in enabling today's professionals to carry out their jobs.

This entails a double path. Next to focusing on the hermeneutics or the readings of gardens we must analyze, attempt to understand and possibly stay loyal to the original makers' knowledge, their techniques and visions. Contrary to Dr. Bradburne, I do not consider

it a misfortune that gardens are fragile and ephemeral. Fusing distillates of our rich historical sources with modern technology – and with an empathetic view to our common garden historical heritage – will continue securing the prospering of garden reconstructions.

New landscape and gardens designs play many of the same chords. But they also offer new and creative perspectives on our contemporary lives. In so doing, they may already be on their way to the vast fields of our collective memory.

NOTER

1. The poem entitled 'Museum' by Wisława Szymborska (born 1923) is quoted here in its full length from <http://library.thinkquest.org/11959/szymbor/34poem1.htm>

MUSEUM

Here are plates but no appetite.
And wedding rings, but the required love
has been gone now for some three hundred years

Here's a fan – where is the maiden's blush?
Here are swords where is the ire?
Nor will the lute sound at the twilight hour.

Since eternity was out of stock,
ten thousand aging things have been amassed
instead.
The moss-grown guard in golden slumber
props his moustache on the Exhibit Number...

Fight. Metals, clay and feathers celebrate
their silent triumphs over dates.
Only some Egyptian flapper's silly hairpin
giggles.

The crown has outlasted the head.
 The hand has lost out to the glove.
 The right shoe has defeated the foot.

As for me, I am still alive, you see.
 The battle with my dress still rages on.
 It struggles, foolish thing, so stubbornly!
 Determined to keep living when I'm gone!

2. Phenomenological approaches to historic gardens are gradually gaining ground. Nicholas Mirzoeff, *Bodyscape. Art, Modernity and the Ideal Figure* (1995) and Francesco Careri, *Walkscapes. Walking as an aesthetic practice* (2002) both have other agendas, yet may prove inspiring to future studies in garden design.
3. I introduced this term in an article about late 18th century French landscape gardens, 'Hortus musealis. En retrospektiv visit i den franske landskabshave', in: Lise Bek (ed.), *Naturopfattelse og landskabsæstetik*, Århus 1986. Recently, I have expanded upon the issue in an article entitled 'Hortus moralis. C.C.L. Hirschfeld and Other 18th Century Actors in the Danish-German Borderland', to be published in a forthcoming issue of *Word and Image*.

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