

Gardening

Garden refers to the *environment* only to establish in it the good rules of gardening, and to *landscape* only as it never stops engendering it. ... the garden appears as the only territory of encounter between man and nature where the *dream* is allowed.

Gilles Clément, *Gardens, Landscape and 'Natural Genius'*¹

According to Martin Heidegger, one of the “essential” characters of modernity—the *Neuzeit*—is “the necessary interplay between subjectivism and objectivism.”² Through technics and modern science, he maintains, the experience of the world as well as its understanding becomes something ‘objective’, something that we can look at in its detachment from us. Modernity is then the age of the world ‘as a picture’: a representation, in the German sense of *Vor-stellung*, that therefore positions man not inside of it or above it, but in front of it. This ‘setting before’ of the object turns man into the other pole to it, the *subject*, and forces him to ‘represent’ himself as such. As a subject, man becomes then part of such a ‘structured picture’ (*Gebild*), and tied to its rule. Once man walks inside this picture, all previous metaphysics are accounted in it as ‘world-views’ and, as ‘views’ and not as pictures, they cannot help but being ultimately reduced to ‘subjective’ stances.

In his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France, *Gardens, Landscape and 'Natural Genius'*, landscape architect Gilles Clément seems to rearticulate Heidegger’s question in a novel manner. The antinomy between subject and object, world-view and picture is presented in another form, abstracted from an epistemological set-up, and translated in a rather ‘ecological’ one of *landscape* and *environment*. “Landscape”—he says—“refers to what is in our range of sight.” Something that “appears as essentially subjective.” Landscape is “an object that is not reducible to a universal definition. In theory”—he continues—“for every site there are as many landscapes as individuals to interpret it.” Environment, on another hand, “is the exact opposite of landscape, as much as it attempts to provide an objective reading of what surrounds us.” Like Heidegger’s *Weltbild* that is at the same time set-before, in front of the subject, thus separated, and at the same time a ‘picture’ that encompasses him, the

environment shares a similar ambiguity: as Clément himself highlights, “environment” can also be translated as *milieu*, “a term that suggests an immersive condition rather than a putting into distance.” The novelty of Clément is the addition of a third element, the one of the *garden*: “*Garden* refers to the *environment* only to establish in it the good rules of gardening, and to *landscape* only as it never stops engendering it.” By designing the landscape as an ‘image’ of the environment, the garden acts as a medium between the two poles, the ‘subjective’ one of the first and the ‘objective’ one of the latter. Evidently though, the mediacy that the garden enacts is not simply a given one: only by consciously designing and shaping the ‘givens’ of the environment the garden can (literally) ‘take place’. The mediation is therefore not analytical or epistemological, but architectonic. In other words, following the ‘botanical metaphor’, wildness already implicitly engenders a landscape by itself (is a tropical forest not a landscape?), but it is only in the garden that this landscape becomes architecture.

Nevertheless, this must not lead to an apodeictic classification of the garden as an ‘artificial’ fact, in opposition to a ‘natural’ one. Any classification that operates through antinomies cannot possibly hope to grasp it. The garden is not opposed to the wildness of the forest, it is rather an ‘instance’ of it: it is only by embracing the wildness, collecting, cultivating, and carefully selecting its species that the garden can happen—but this means that many other orders can be ‘hidden’ and ‘encrypted’ in the wildness, like incomprehensible tongues waiting to be heard. The garden is then the result of this ‘hearing’; it would therefore be better to speak of the garden as an action, as *gardening*. The act of gardening can be described as a domestication of entropy: an

order that is not created *ex nihilo*, but that is weaved upon what appears as disorder, a space that removes itself from wildness, still establishing a communication with it. This ‘imaginal’ space [see: *Imaginal*] arises through a *continuous* cut, both in space (enclosure) and time (recursion): weeds are kept outside of the garden, but they are also cut away whenever they appear inside of it. The gardener defines then a new kind of ‘subjectivity’, one that is not just ‘receiving’ objects as ‘pictures’, but that actively designs them, and that understand nature not as a given, but as a *project*.

Gardening makes room for a space of rest out of restlessness: “the garden appears as the only territory of encounter between man and nature where the *dream* is allowed.” In the words of Clément, the dream is connected with nakedness: only in a place of rest, in which all possible threats have been excluded can one both dream and be naked, ‘unarmed’. In the garden, we could add, images are ‘naked’: they are the product of what Plato called *tekhne phantastike*, images that do not derive from anything else, and that therefore are not bound to the necessity of ‘covering’ any truth. Like *tôkoi* [see: *Tôkos* p. 61–63], these images are non-referential and therefore self-determined: not ‘natural’ (as opposed to fictional), but *naturing*.

1 *Jardins, paysage et génie naturel*, inaugural lecture held for the ‘Chair of Artistic Creation’ at the Collège de France on December 1st, 2011.

2 Martin Heidegger, ‘The Age of the World Picture’, in *Off the Beaten Track*, Cambridge University Press, 2002; p. 66.