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The Spirit of Luxury: Shenstone, Delille, and the Garden Theory

> Thus winding through flowering shrubs we are conducted to the stables . . . but the first object that strikes us is a Venus de Medicis, beside a bason of gold-fish.
> – A Description of the Leasowes

I

One cannot talk about the eighteenth-century garden without mentioning the locomotive abilities of man's body; the story of the Leasowes or Stowe belongs to the order of the foot. William Shenstone in one paragraph moves from aesthetics to politics, from the immovable eye to the mobile body. Criticizing the geometric patterns of the formal horticultural designs, the owner of the Leasowes estate writes: "To stand still and survey such avenues, may afford some slender satisfaction, through the change derived from perspective; but to move on continually and find no change of scene in the least attendant on our change of place, must give actual pain to a person of taste. For such an one to be condemned to pass along the famous vista from Moscow to Petersburg, or that other from Agra to Lahor in India, must be as disagreeable a sentence, as to be condemned to labour at the gallies."[1] As we shall see, Jacques Delille will think of spirit also in the categories of the foot and meandering path.

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[1] *The Works in Verse and Prose of William Shenstone, Esq.* (London: Dodsley, 1777), Vol. II, p. 116.

II

Thus a certain science of taste is suggested, a science whose guiding signs have been partly established by Hume's thought. At the center of this science is not just a man but "a person of taste", i.e. one who is defined less in terms of a specific aesthetic preference, but one **whose being refutes the principle of constraint and rigidly demarcated boundary**. According to Hume, taste is a force which, expanding human disposition towards pleasure and pain, follows a path upon which a double alienation is possible: first, taste singles man from those deprived of its blessings, second – by making human response ever more delicate and subtle, by ever enlarging his potential for being affected by reality – it opens a possibility of estranging man from his native, proper domain. "Delicacy of taste", we read in Hume's essay, " has the same effect as the delicacy of passion: It enlarges the sphere both of our happiness and misery, and makes us sensible to pains as well as pleasures, which escape the rest of mankind."[2] The man of taste is thus a notion in which works a critique of at least two aspects of the mid-eighteenth-century society: of the ever growing pressure of mercantile economy, and of the falsely egalitarian ideas of the early stages of mass society. To listen to Hume again: "They [emotions cultivated by taste] draw off the mind from the hurry of business and interest" and "delicacy of taste is favourable to love and friendship, by confining our choice to a few people, and making us indifferent to the company of the greater part of men".[3]

To talk about "taste" implies a certain anthropology which presents man as a being which is never "completed", never "well-placed", a being which develops through distancing itself from its concerns ("business") and its human environment ("the greater part of men"). **Man is a being with and of a distance, thus never is in "one place", a being never truly "domestic".** A step further along the same path could allow us to see in Shenstone's thoughts on the garden a Romantic theory of freedom (in Hume still restricted by social mores and conventions) which sees in aesthetic activity a disposition towards fundamental freedom of human being. We read in Schiller's 21 Letter on the aesthetic education of man that "By means of aesthetic culture . . . the personal worth of man, or his dignity, inasmuch as this can can depend solely upon himself, remains completely indeterminate; and nothing more is achieved by it than that he is henceforth enabled by the grace of nature to make of himself what he will – that the freedom to be what ought to be is completely restored to him".[4]

The distance which seems to be the element of man precludes him from permanently rooting himself/herself anywhere: **to be is to see a world always as**

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[2] D. Hume, "Delicacy of Taste", in D. Hume, *Essays. Moral, Political, and Literary* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1987), p. 5.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 7.

[4] F. Schiller, "Letter on the Aesthetic Education of Man", in F. Schiller, *Essays*, eds.W. Hinderer, D. Dahlstrom (New York: Continuum, 1993), p. 147.

a stranger. This is one of the principle convictions of Delille's art of gardening which advices man to look with the eye of a stranger: "voyez . . . vous-meme, aux yeux de l'etranger/ vous montrez vos travaux".[5] This distance does not invite a radical transgression or questioning of the principles of ethics or economy; just the opposite, it suggests that the distance ought to be conceived of as a space where a shuttle-like movement between the extremes is possible, because it is only such a concept of distance which allows us to both know business and "draw our minds off it", to recognize the social merits of "the greater part of men" in order to shun them, so as to, by keeping one's distance, become again a more useful participant of the social exchange. It is a garden, with its proximity of nature and human intervention, of mercantile economy which makes it possible and rustic pastoralism that abounds in its territory, which presents us with an ideal model of such a distance.

If Hume's doctrine of taste seems to, first, recognize boundaries in order to, second, transcend them, and if the garden is an ideal spatial model of this philosophical proposition, it allows for a reading of Hume's thought which would make it a partial opening for the Romantic masterplan of removing boundaries and a transferring of cognitive abilities from the eye to imagination. This opening must be called partial because while recognizing the significance of imagination, Hume's taste, in the final analysis, functions as a measure reintroducing regularity and orderliness. We learn from Hume that "To check the sallies of the imagination, and to reduce every expression to geometrical truth and exactness, would be the most contrary to the laws of criticism . . . But though poetry can never submit to exact truth, it must be confined by rules of art . . . ".[6] Thus, while Schiller will in his 1800 seminal essay "On Naive and Sentimental Poetry" reproach critics for being "border patrol of taste",[7] he might be attacking Hume, but on the other hand, we have to remember that his poetic principle of "disrupting boundaries"[8] can be detected, in a budding form, in Hume's disagreement to "check the sallies [a 'sally' is a 'sudden breaking out by soldiers who are surrounded by the enemy', thus an interruption of a boundary] of imagination".

III

Shenstone seems to have learned Hume's lesson. While complaining of the endless vistas of Russia and India, he practices certain cultural and political geography which, for two reasons, locates the edges of Europe and Asia off the map of the science of taste. The first cause of Shenstone's objection to the geometrical garden design is ocular, the other philosophical. What takes place in the horticultural theory and practice of the proprietor of the Leasowes is a discussion of the function of the eye in aesthetic process and a meditation on a difference-based distinction between nature and culture. Shenstone's argument against the "slender satisfaction" of "perspective" is based on a charge that geometry destroys the unity of the human body as well as destabilizes the relationship between man and world. A double act of dislodging which needs to be inspected in some detail. The geometry of "straight line" (of what Delille called "une long alee droite"[9]) privileges the eye over other organs and, by doing so, it turns the ocular into the dominating force which imposes its procedures and decisions upon them; things can become available to other organs only having been first inspected by the eye. In short, geometry spells the triumph of the immobile eye over the locomotive parts of the body, a triumph based not on the elimination of other organs but on proposing sight-based protocols of knowledge, the process not only completed but also characteristically aggravated by the seventeenth century ("Keller and Grontkowski trace the tradition of associating knowledge with vision back to Plato, and they argue that by the seventeenth century the equivalence of knowing with seeing was a commonplace of scientific discourse . . . But when Descartes discovered that the eye was a passive lens . . . he was forced to separate the seeing intellect from the seeing eye"[10]). Shenstone's formula for this mechanism of the "straight line" holds that it constructs a space in which "the foot is to travel over, what the eye has done before".[11]

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[5] J. Delille, "Les Jardins", in J. Delille, *Oeuvres*, Vol. 7 (Paris, 1810), p. 154.

[6] D. Hume, "Of the Standard of Tase", in D. Hume, *Essays* . . . ., p. 231.

[7] F. Schiller, "On Naive and Sentimental Poetry", in F. Schiller, *Essays*, p. 200.

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 200.

Two most pronounced consequences of this "ocularisation" of space are the disintegration of the body in which the eye acts somehow "against" the foot, where no simultaneous pleasure of various organs is feasible (while the eye relishes a view, the foot stands in place; while the foot marches, the eye is always somewhere else, ahead of it), and the uninterrupted jurisdiction of the law of repetition which Shenstone understands as the erasure of difference ("a repetition of the same object, tree after tree, for a length of way together"). The philosophical reason for which geometrical design is under attack is a conviction that whereas culture operates by way of transactions of identity and repetition, nature makes use of the mechanism of variation and heterogeneity. The formal French garden practice and theory (as described, for instance, by Rapin[12]) are founded not only upon the mercantile precepts of land propriatorship but, more importantly, upon a certain philosophical economy which wastes the natural supplies of difference and uniqueness in order to achieve the profit of identity and interchangeability. As Shenstone's maintains in the same passage: "identity is *purchased* [emphasis added] by the loss of that variety which the natural country supplies every where, in a greater or less degree". One should note the verb in this fragment which not only conveys the operations of economy ("purchasing" as bying) but also speaks of the eagerness of pursuit (Old French *purchacer*, to pursue eagerly) and brutality of hunting (French *chacer* and English *chase*). Thus, the identity principle which Shenstone detects as a corner stone of the French garden is obtained at the cost which Hume's "man of taste" was not willing to pay. Rapin's seventeenth-century theory or the practice of his compatriot Le Notre, through their strategies of interchangeability of repetitive forms exempt from the operations of surprise, perpetuated that "hurry [or 'chase'] of business [or 'purchase'] and interest" which Hume wanted to counter in his theory of taste. **If the seventeenth century promulgates the world of the pleasures of the eye supported by the economy of repetitive commodities, a century later the "man of taste" rediscovers other organs of the body, unconceals the pleasures of mobility which need the economy of difference, a mobile** (and certainly more democratic, as the sneering remark about India and Russia can also be motivated by the critical attention drawn to their absolutist political systems) **economy of the foot and agitation**.

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[9] *Ibid.*, p. 155.

[10] C. Rose, *Feminism and Geography* (London: Polity Press, 1993), p. 88.

[11] *The Works . . .*, vol. II, p. 115.

[12] See Pere Rapin, *Of Gardens. A Latin Poem in Four Books. English'd by Mr. Gardiner* (London, 1772).

Such an economy does not measure the efficacy of its operations with profit and other kinds of visual and legal appropriation, but it must take into consideration what is not at the moment visible, what has been lost from and for sight and what has only very slowly and indirectly been approached and regained by the foot (Shenstone: "When a building . . . has been once viewed from its proper point, the foot should never travel to it by the same path which the eye has travelled over before. Lose the object, and draw nigh, obliquely"[13]).

IV

To approach the object obliquely, i.e. in an ec-centric, devious, and erratic manner does not belong to the domain of mind but that of **spirit**. Before one of Blake's proverbs of hell construes an isomorphy between the off-course track and wisdom ("Improvements makes strait roads; but the crooked roads without Improvement are roads of Genius"[14]), Delille will maintain that the garden is not only an achievement of an architect but also a statement on spirit and man's relationship with it. While walking along the path of the garden, we need to remember that "l'esprit demande qu'on le mene par des routes un peu detournees,/ et qu'on lui presente des objets inattendus".[15] We can say three things about this horticultural philosophy of spirit. First, spirit (*esprit*) and man are linked by the sense of urgent care which allows spirit to request and expect obedience of man: *l'esprit demande*. Second, man when called by spirit abandons his/her individual self, ceases to be an agent, which does not mean that man responding to the demand of spirit remains passive; just the opposite – man becomes a part of a larger action, of a greater agency (since we are in the garden, shall we claim that this force is *phusis*, or the energy of growth?) which transforms the language of action from active towards neutral constructions: spirit requests a transformation from *je* to *on* (*on le mene, on lui presente*). It is not a regular human subject which encounters spirit on a garden path, but an enlarged self which belongs to "nature" understood by Schiller as "the uncoerced existence, the subsistence of things on their own, being there according to their own immutable laws".[16]

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[13] *The Works . . .* , Vol. 2, p. 116.

[14] W. Blake, *Complete Writings*, ed. G. Keynes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 152.

[15] J. Delille, *Oeuvres*, Vol. VII, p. 5.

Third, the call of spirit concerns not a certain point or stasis but precisely a path, not any path but a way which would be off-course and meandering (*routes detournees*, not one of fashionable seventeenth-century garden mazes, but only a gently – *un peu* – winding road) because it is only such a path that can present to spirit what it wants to see – surprising objects (*objets inattendus*). **In Shenstone as well as in Delille the foot and the (renewed) eye (see Blake's project of a new theory and practice of vision) play essential role in the domain of spirit.**

V

Whereas formerly one general perspectival view was enough to generate a "slender satisfaction", now the demand is for a constant change of scenery. If Rapin would be satisified with the relationship of identity holding between the "scene" and "place" (i.e. with a design where a move from one place to another would not necessitate a noticeable change of view), Shenstone considers such a possibility in the categories of suffering, not just a metaphorical discomfort or uneasiness but a most real torture of "actual pain". The unguarded celebration of the eye is now mitigated by a diagnosis of its illness: the long-sightedness of the perspectival vista is not any longer a solemnization of vision but the discovery of the hidden myopia, of dim-sightedness which previously was neutralized by the long-ranging prospect and thus went unnoticed. The late eighteenth-century garden theory tries to describe a certain blindness, an ophtalmological disease, inherent in the works of Le Notre, Descartes, and perhaps even Spinoza. The "man of taste" must suffer, feel the "actual pain", when he encounters a world which has been robbed of its freedom (for Shenstone, the "actual pain" is comparable to the suffering of a slave labouring "at the gallies") which means, let us add, a world that did not make itself available to the procedures of reading. The diagnosis of the crisis of vision, Shenstone's repetitive critical meditation on the primacy of the eye over the foot, can be subsumed under a double rubric: that of ophtalmology ("I cannot see", or perhaps "I see strangely, my sight is distorted") and literary ("I cannot read"). Shenstone's defense of the irregular garden design not only wants to retrieve a balance between the eye and the foot, between the specular and the locomotive, but it also wishes to address the issue of the text. Despite Shenstone's conviction that it is painting that ought to be a guiding art for gardening ("I think it is the landskip painter is the gardener's best designer"[17],) his critique of the straight line allows one to postulate the text, reading/writing, in a word, literature as the hidden agenda for the landscape architect. Even when promoting painting as his model, Shenstone approaches it with an eye of the reader: a world of the garden is one in which man has to practice a double mobility – that of his foot and of his interpretative skills. Neither can remain satisified with what the eye sees momentarily but must proceed further and "obliquely" towards the object which thus retains the aura of what Shenstone calls "the grace of novelty". Thus we read: "Objects should indeed be less calculated to strike the immediate eye [as they do in the geometry of perspective], than the judgment or well-formed imagination . . . . "[18] The eye with which Shenstone looks at his Leasowes is not an "immediate" one, i.e. neither instantaneous nor operating in hurry; the eye which one can refer to as a "mediated" one, the eye which takes its time, the prepared eye of the cultivated man of taste whose mind is "drawn off from the hurry of business".

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[16] F. Schiller, *Essays*, p. 180.

The movement from Le Notre to Shenstone is then a therapy applied to the European perception accused of perpetuating the inauthentic vision and partial blindness which covers up the disease of short-sightedness by the pretence of long-ranging perspective. What the eighteenth-century garden recuperates is the sense of minute, short-range vision, the ability of attentive and careful reading which allows for the study of details, particular signs and in this way permits one to escape the crowds inhabiting perspectival prospects. In this sense the garden (like the Leasowes, for instance), despite its stress on salvaging nature from underneath the layers of art, is an extension of a reading room or painting gallery; not a place where one rules and dominates over large and anonymous expanses, but where one lovingly (Hume: "a delicacy of taste is favourable to love and friendship") practices the meditation on minutiae for which one needs either clear sight or a pair of good glasses. Hume modifies a paradigmatic Enlightenment metaphor of a machine in such a way so that it could be used to illustrate our point: "the judgment may be compared to a clock or a watch, where the most ordinary machine is sufficient to tell the hours; but the most elaborate alone can point out the minutes and seconds, and distinguish the smallest differences of time".[19] In the Leasowes we are somewhere halfway between Enlightenment and Romanticism.

To textualize a landscape means therefore to both open it to the fluidity of walking and to, momentarily at least, freeze it in the forms which are read by our eye as objects which we face not only as a part of the script of the eye but also as a script independent of the intention of a maker other than the seeing eye. Textualizing is a manner of privatizing and individualizing a landscape, of liberating it from a mere relationship of property, of temporarily removing a position of the proprietor. As Barnes and Duncan put it: ". . . a landscape possesses a similar objective fixity to that of a written text. It also becomes detached from the intention of its original author, and in terms of social and psychological impact and material consequences the various readings of landscapes matter more than any authorial intentions. In addition, the landscape has an importance beyond the intitial situation for which it was constructed, addressing a potentially wide range of readers".[20]

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[17] *Ibid.*, p. 115.

[18] *Ibid.*, p. 112.

[19] D. Hume, *Essays* . . ., p. 7.

VI

To cure the disease of the eye is to train it in detecting minute elements of heterogeneity and difference, to free the detail from the domination of the centralist perspective and to open it to ("well-formed") imagination, to turn the eye from the petrifying organ of immediacy into a movable organ of mediation, i.e. interpretation. Hume sees in such an operation the perfection of an organ: "It is acknowledged to be the perfection of every sense or faculty, to perceive with exactness its most minute objects, and allow nothing to escape its notice and observation. The smaller the objects are, which become sensible to the eye, the finer is that organ . . . . "[21] This scheme which wants to achieve two purposes – to turn the garden as a model world into a script of details, and to make man aware of the cultural myopia and semi-literacy – receives auxilliary support from philosophy. First, together with the centrality of the eye and its ideology of homogeneity ("place = scene") one must question the centrality of man as an epistemological project: the eye in Shenstone's garden becomes peripheral, loses the support of a grand narrative of knowledge, which crisis finds its parallel in a radical rejection of the universalizing scheme of a human point of view taken to be THE perspective of creation (Shenstone: "Man is not capable of comprehending the universe at one survey"[22]) and a formation of an epistemology which is not only fragmentary and, as Shenstone would put it, "oblique" (man is "endued neither with organs, nor allowed a station proper to give us an universal view"[23]), but results in a fundamental overcoming of geometry and its rules: once the eye is "cured" of the false and inauthentically universalizing vision of the prospect, man not only finds himself in a peripheral position but in a "station" which is profoundly "wrong" according to any standard principles of geometry. In Shenstone's contention "But we are placed in the corner of a sphere",[24] we may read either a disclaimer of the conventional knowledge (a "sphere" is a figure which precisely does not have "corners"), or a promise of a new geometry (where spheres with corners are allowed).

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[20] T. J. Barnes and J. S. Duncan, "Introduction: Writing Worlds", in T. J. Barnes, J. S. Duncan, *Writing Worlds; Discourse, Text and Metaphor in the Representation of Landscape* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 6.

[21] D. Hume, "Of the Standard of Taste", in D. Hume, *Essays* . . ., p. 236.

[22] *The Works* . . . ., Vol. II, p. 126.

[23] *Ibid.*, p. 127.

The de-placed eye must reveal a profound displacement of man both as an ontological and epistemological project. In Shenstone's attempts at formulating a philosophy-based theory of gardening we may read a critique of Cartesianism with its stress upon geometrical optics (and what Delille calls superbly "pompeuse ordonnance"[25]); **Shenstone's interest in painting as a model for landscape gardening seems to promote another protocol of thinking about reality motivated not by the operationalism of a geometry of the whole but by the careful perception of the detail**. Delille sees the garden as a struggle between an architect on the one hand, and poet, philosopher, and painter on the other ("En un mot, ses [Rapin's] jardins sont ceux de l'architect; les autres sont ceux du philosophe, du peintre et du poet"[26]). Richard Knight will be even more severe in his judgment; for him geometrical gardens are products of "men with minds and hands of a mechanic"[27] (Delille speaks of such designers as "froids decorateurs"[28]). The geometry attacked by the English *Lustgartnerei* is not only a matter of architectural design and philosophical premises but also that of economy which opposes the Baroque cult of excessive spending attached to the royal presence. It is hard to overlook the fact that a most spectacular critique of this economy must take up the garden as its main object: "The difference between baroque spending and the new attitude to prodigality . . . can be exemplified with reference to gardens. These, like metaphysical systems, may be taken as paradigms of society's ideological assumptions. The formal garden . . . might indeed be spoken of in connection with Descartes's universe . . . such gardens are the gardens of the king . . . In 1678, some 821,000 livres were allotted for the parks and gardens. The following year the costs had risen to 965,000, and by 1680 to, 1,627,000 livres . . . By contrast the landscape gardens of the type "improved" by Capability Brown implied not only a different aesthetic, based on a different metaphysics of nature, but also a new economics".[29]

When in Shenstone we read about the garden as a painterly practice, we need to understand it partly as an aesthetic instruction which takes us away from the economy of spending and mere luxury but partly as an opening of an important ontological insight similar to the one traced in the work of Merleau-Ponty: "Merleau-Ponty, noting that painting, for Descartes, can obviously in no way define our access to being, speculates that an attentive study of painting would inaugurate another philosophy, one no longer enthralled by the ideals of the conceptual grasp, intellectual mastery, and technical manipulation, but willing to interrogate the unmotivated and irreducibly complex upsurge of a world 'which is not matter or in-itself'".[30]

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[24] *Ibid.*, p. 127.

[25] J. Delille, *Oeuvres*, Vol. VII, p. 155.

[26] *Ibid.*, p. 5.

[27] R. Knight, *The Landscape* (London 1795), p. 11.

[28] J. Delille, *Oeuvres*, Vol.VII, p. 157.

[29] R. G. Saisselin, *The Enlightenment against the Baroque. Economics and Aesthetics in the Eighteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), pp. 12–3.

VII

But this project in which a universalizing perspective is replaced by a sequence of peripheral ones is also connected with the philosophically understood problematic of reading presented as an analysis of placing. Looking at the Leasowes Shenstone consistently demonstrates his belief that in the garden one can see that **the power and grace of placing has been denied to man**. Thus we read: "Art . . . is often requisite to collect and epitomize the beauties of nature; but should never be suffered to set her mark upon them: I mean, in regard to those articles that are of nature's province; the shaping of ground, the planting of trees, and the disposition of lakes and rivulets".[31] There are at least two important observations in this passage which shed some light on the landscape gardening as a philosophical project. First, there is a conviction that art remains in a special relationship with nature, a relationship of which let us only say for the time being that it dictates an awkward form of art's presence: art is present without being seen. **Art is a ghost of nature, i.e. a relationship which the garden offers for our study is not that between nature and culture but one between the present (nature) and the nonpresent which does not mean "absent" (culture).**

This invisible intervention, a peculiarly clandestine operation without manifestation, can be discovered only by the dislodged, de-placed eye which has recognized the disease of its former myopia, the reading/interpreting eye of one who approaches objects "obliquely". Second, it is nature not art which is given a force of placing, a power of location and grounding, of "shaping" and "planting". In a word, nature has its "province"; a place belongs to nature, to *phusis*, man can only re-place but the grace of placing has been removed from him. And yet it is not incidental that Shenstone mentions art rather than just "seeing" in this context: the de-placed eye does more than merely "sees", registers in one glance the reality (as we remember from previous analysis, such an impression is false because man lacks a proper "organ" which could provide him with such a universalizing perspective), it "collects" and "epitomizes" the "beauties of nature".

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[30] V. Foti, "The Dimension of Color", in G. Johnson (ed.), *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader. Philosophy and Painting* (Evanston: NorthWestern University Press, 1993), p. 294.

[31] *The Works* . . ., Vol. II, p. 126.

One should not pass these two verbs in silence as it is on them that the Shenstonian philosophy of the garden as the reading/writing practice of the eye largely hinges. While looking with the eye no longer myopic, we not only perceive the surface of things but intervene into it, find our way to reconnoitre its texture and consitency. The eye perceiving the English garden of Shenstone cuts the surface of an object, inscribes it with a writing of one specific perspective soon to be replaced by another. **A thing is a palimpsest of points of view, a combination of invisible script of several oblique perspectives replacing one immovable frontal view**. Another consequence of this ocular scripting is that an object is condensed, abridged, to a series of views revealing its various aspects ad facets. In a word, the eye does not merely perceives but "epitomizes" (*epitome*, from Greek *epitome, epi* + *temnein*, "to cut upon", a "surface incision", an "abridgement").

Such a scripting operation of the eye makes it possible for us to see nature not as one homogeneous continuity but as a series of particular and heterogeneous shapes, thus the task of man, who is not able to place things, is to "collect" them. In this activity we should hear at least three different tones. To begin with, that of a human attempt at organizing what constitutes a part of a larger system forever closed to our perception; as Shenstone maintains, we have no proper organ which could "exhibit to us the variety, the orderly proportions of the system".[32] We "collect" in order not to lose grip upon reality which, after our eye has undergone its therapy, has become either unintelligible (in the sense of "chaotic") or ungovernable (i.e. defying man's power to reason and perceive). Then, there is a social dimension which allows one to recognize "collecting" as a manner of displaying one's possessions to the public eye. Both these echoes of the verb to "collect" demonstrate what we may refer to as to the "musealization of nature", i.e. a process through which man tries to understand the phenomenon of "placing". Things of nature are approached in this process as belonging to a powerful "province" to which man has no access and thus the natural phenomena can be understood only in their "abridged" (epitomized) form of a fragmentary perspective and later displayed to the eye as a "collection". The garden is nothing else but a "collection" of natural objects, but by this fact it reveals a fundmental change in epistemology that took place in the eighteenth century.

The third echo brings us to the scene of reading, to the garden as a text. By "collecting", that is to say, carefully looking at the minutest details of each particular fragment of a space, by living a theory that "each place is a different scene", we open the object to reading. There is no reading of wholes; a true reading deals only with crumbs and fragments because reading consists in arranging and rearranging these details. To "collect" means to bring fragments together (*col=con-cum*) in order to make them temporarily legible (*legere* = "to collect" but also "to read"). **In the eighteenth-century English garden the eye is an instrument less of geometry and more of art** (we are moving closer and closer to Blake's famous instruction which wants us to look "through not with the eye"): **it incises**

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[32] *Ibid.*, p. 127.

the smooth surface of the objects making them scriptible and legible – what we read is a writing of our eye upon "trees", "ground", "lakes", the secret of whose placing is beyond our comprehension.

The eye is not separated from the world it sees, does not belong to another realm, but looks at what it creates and forms. Like in Nietzsche there is no radical fissure between language and reality, so in the Leasowes and in the eighteenth-century *Lustgartnerei* there is no gap disjoining the eye and the world. The limits of my eye are the limits of my world: "Wittgenstein was of the view that we do not have, as it were, the world on the one side and language on the other, but rather that language in some ways shapes reality . . . Experience is indelibly linguistic".[33] The visual, as theorized by the landscape gardening in Leasowes, is deeply engrossed in the linguistics of the eye and syntax of sight.

VIII

The garden is a scene of spirit. Yet the operations and demands of spirit make it also a scene of luxury. Not only do we speak of a luxury of finances (although Dr. Johnson complains in his biography of Shenstone that the Leasowes estate ruined its owner), a prosperity of a land proprietor; we want also to point at a certain luxury within spirit itself. Its position is, as we have seen, that of a power which "demands" thus turning us into "domestics" of the realm of spirit; its paths are not engineered so as to obey the principle of minimum investment of energy coupled with the maximum turnout but follow capricious and whimsical turns of one who does not have to meet the necessities of life (the roads are *detournees*); its operations lead to "collecting", the activity which has always been associated with prosperity and accummulation of objects and financial means allowing for their purchase. One should note carefully, it is art which performs the "collecting" in question, and it is "nature" which becomes the object of collecting. The luxury of spirit runs contrary to the luxury of merely wasteful entertainment; the views which are approached obliquely on the winding path of spirit cannot be appropriated, reified, and displayed as a part of social game of power, they must remain ethereal images sealed off from the merely curious. The realm of spirit is not only that of the eye but also of the foot, and thus it calls, "demands", an expenditure – or investement – of energy. Remy Saisselin grasps this movement away from the geometrical luxury of the eye to the locomotive luxury of the eye and the foot well: "The end of Baroque . . . implied the etherealization of the concept of art, its purification and dissociation from mere luxury, mere entertainment, and mere desire, the distancing of art from . . . the frivolous curieux,. . . the fashionable women and the idle rich".[34]

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[33] A. Danto, "Description and the Phenomenology of Perception", in N. Bryson, M. A. Holly, K. Moxey (eds.), *Visual Theory* (London: Polity Press, 1991), p. 204.

[34] R. Saisselin, *The Enlightenment against the Baroque* . . . ., p. 15.

The eighteenth-century garden offered a system of the luxury of spirit which, on the one hand, was a step towards a Romantic theory of nature but, on the other hand, (as it is evident in the work of Repton) allowed for concealing the reality of labour. The luxury of spirit was purchased at the expense of the labour of the eye and the foot; the misery of the body (of a tenant, for instance) remained outside its scope.

IX

When Le Notre pretends he sees a system of nature and thus fashions his Versaille, Shenstone thinks that he sees merely a series of views which must be obliquely approached. The garden is a medium where the discontinuity of nature is disclosed: "We perceive many breaks and blemishes, several neglected and unvariegated places in the part . . .".[35] This perception is accompanied by a desire to complete what has been left uncompleted and correct nature's mistaken placings. As we read on in the same fragment: ". . . we might as rationally expect a snail to be satisfied with a beauty of our parterres . . . as that man shall be satisfied without a single thought that he can improve the spot that falls to his share". This discourse of satisfaction brings us back to the "slender satisfaction" resulting from changes of perspective in the seventeenth-century garden and helps us to understand the use of the adjective: the satisfaction is "slender" because it is a fragment of a situation where human desire for the whole has no room to manouver; it is a desire-less space which can only be looked at but does not leave open a possibility for action.

In the anthropology Shenstone's garden is a part of, man presents himself as fronting the fragment or ruin while his thought moves simultaneously in two directions: first, it recognizes the world in which his intellectual grasp must fail and the luminosity of his eye must be dimmed (the order of nature to which we have no access), and, second, it offers a temporary and provisional project of filling the gaps left out by nature and correcting its "mistakes". While operating within the domain of the ruin, man thinks a whole which, in fact, may not be a whole at all but merely a temporary profiling of a figure to be replaced by another profile revealed by consecutive stages of our march through the winding paths of the Leasowes. This sends us back towards the problematic of epitome as incision on the surface of things: the work of the dislodged, de-placed eye working in conjunction with the foot, ruins objects, transforms them from even homogeneous surfaces to uneven, broken, ruinated arrangements of details. **The garden is an epitome of ruination which always occurs in the act of reading, of an attentive study of the detail.** In a ruin, thought works towards a completion of details opened to the labour of thought by a previous intervention of the de-placed eye. Shenstone clearly marks both operations: “Ruinated structures appear to derive their power of pleasing, from the irregularity of surface, which is variety; and the latitude they afford the imagination, to conceive an enlargement of their dimensions, or to recollect any events or circumstances appertaining to their pristine grandeur . . . . ”[36] In other terms, the garden as a structure of ruination transcends the limits of the private property and opens up a perspective upon the national: to talk about a ruin is also to construct a certain image of the historical past which goes beyond the confines of the private. The garden as a ruin both points at the national identity and undermines it from within. On the one hand, it suggests a possible reconstruction of the past glory, on the other, it tells us that the greatness of this glory was merely a passing episode; the garden of ruins (particularly in a situation when history of art refers to it as the “English”, i.e. of a nationally defined, garden) offers a commentary on the transcient character of not only English but generally human power: “The ruin provides an historical provenance for the conception of the British nation as immemorially ancient, and through its naturalization subsumes cultural and class difference into a conflated representation of Britain as nature’s inevitable product. But at the same time, ruin imagery cannot help asserting the visible evidence of historical and imperial impermanence, for the ruin has been traditionally associated with human and cultural transcience.”[37]

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[35] *The Works* . . ., p. 127.

If the garden is literally and figuratively a ruin, then – to be consistent – Shenstone can write and think about it only in aphoristic fragments of thoughts; all the passages quoted here come from his work called “Unconnected Thoughts on Gardening”. If “Philosophy is the ruination of deconstruction; deconstruction leaves philosophy in ruins”,[38] then the garden of which Shenstone writes is a ruination of the philosophy of geometrical optics, although the writing of the garden is itself already ruinated by a new thought which can think the garden only in ruins. The garden in aphorisms, the garden of aphorisms. In Derrida we read: “Despite their fragmentary appearance, aphorisms make a sign towards the memory of a totality, at the same time ruin and monument.”[39]

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[36] *Ibid.*, p. 117.

[37] A. Janowitz, *England’s Ruins. Poetic Purpose and the National Landscape* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), p. 4.

[38] N. Royle, *After Derrida* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), p. 124.

[39] J. Derrida, “Fifty-Two Aphorisms for a Foreword”, in A. Papadakis, C. Cooke, A. Benjamin (eds.), *Deconstruction Omnibus Volume* (London: Academy Editions, 1989), p. 67.