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ز نسق رخت تو دیده ام
به نسق کمر تو نوشیده ام

ARCHITECTURAL ASSOCIATION
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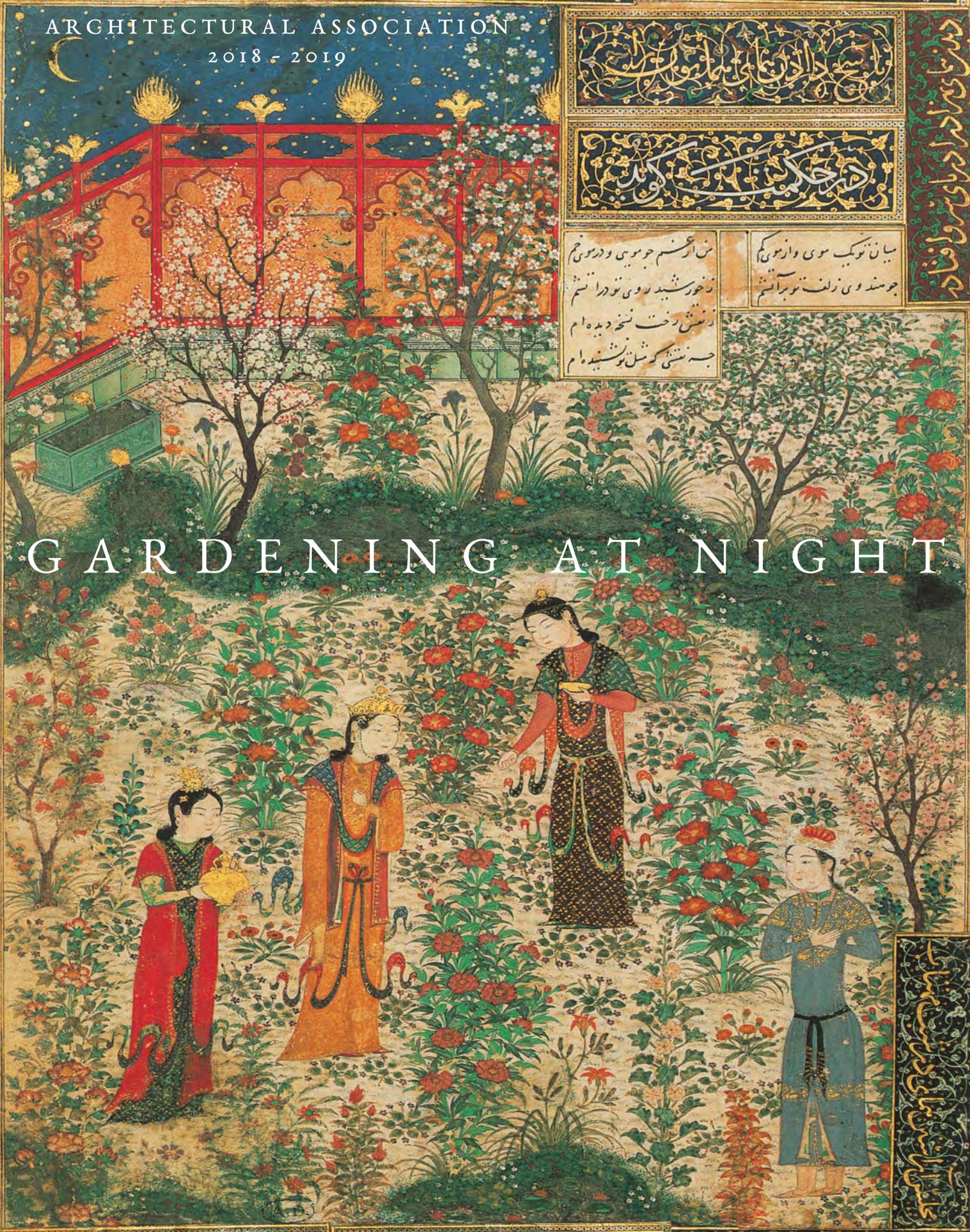
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GARDENING AT NIGHT



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DIPLOMA 14

سین تو یک سوی و از سوی کم
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Architectural Association School of Architecture
Academic Year 2018-2019

G A R D E N I N G A T N I G H T

Revisiting the Architecture of the Garden

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Diploma Unit 14

Pier Vittorio Aureli & Maria Sheherazade Giudici

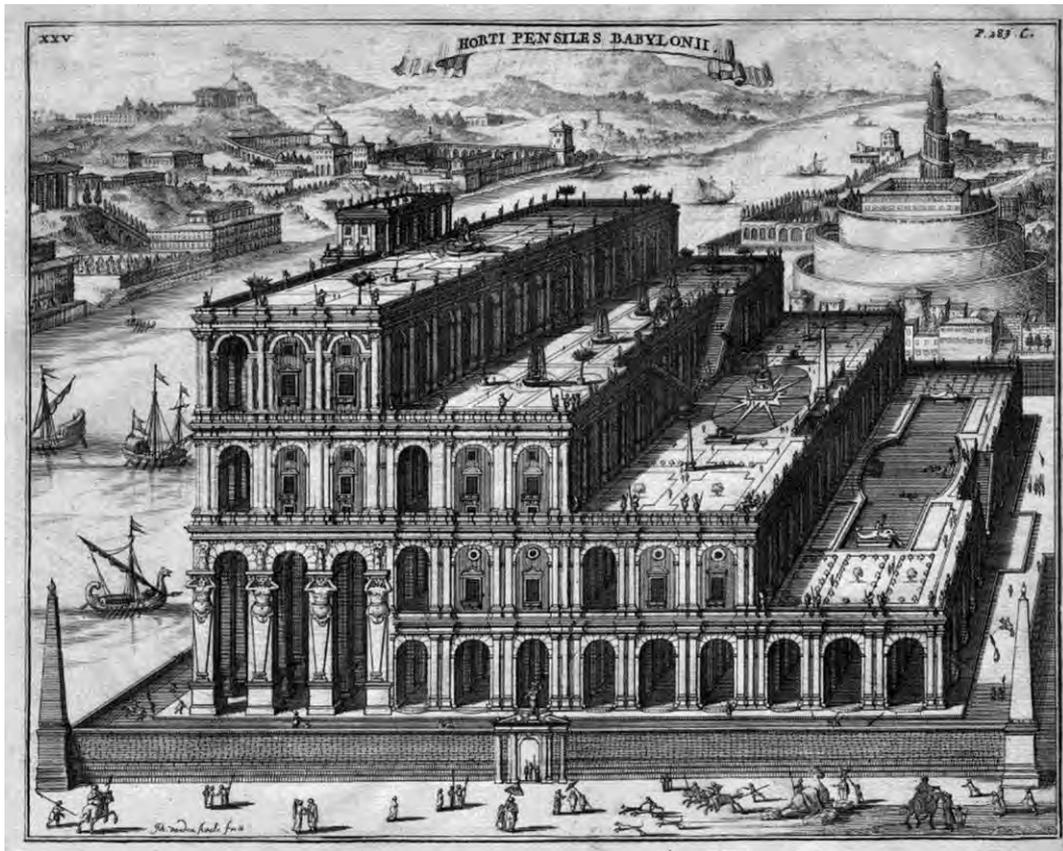
Introduction

The Garden is one of the most influential architectural archetypes of both Eastern and Western civilizations. Originally a walled estate, the garden can be understood as a piece of land adjoining a house, used for growing flowers, fruits, or vegetables. For this reason, even when gardens are public spaces they retain a domestic character. The history of gardens thus coincides with one of the most controversial processes of human history: the domestication of society. Early sedentary communities did not just build homes, but started to define their own territory domesticating forests, building boundaries, and enclosing spaces. Gardens therefore embody the original ambivalence of the domestic space as both a way to give stability and orientation to life and as instruments to mark land property. This ambivalence permeates the whole history of gardens as protected places of care as well as displays of ownership. From *Hortus Conclusus* to communal orchard, gardens conjure images of pleasure, but also appropriation. It is precisely this mixture of delight and control that made gardens the reference for the most ideological forms of western domesticity: the villa and the allotment. These two forms reduced the ambiguity of the garden and made it a potent symbol of privatization of land.

However, the garden is also a space of experimentation where nature was reinvented and manipulated – in turn, a blueprint for the organization of the world outside its walls, or a deliberately idiosyncratic alternative that radically opposed the surrounding reality. This year Diploma 14 will critically revisit this legacy; to twist the garden archetype, we will explore the way the making of a garden blurs the traditional distinction between design and construction that since the Renaissance has ruled our discipline. From this perspective, gardens question the very idea of architecture as predefined imposition and can open up a space for communitarian self-valorisation against the increasing commodification of public space. Ultimately, we will rethink the idea of garden as a way to envision new rituals and institutions of collective life.

Even if the garden can host production, it is not (only) a productive space: it is a projection of a life ambition that, in history, has gone well beyond mere work to aim at pleasure, meditation, agonism, debate, hedonism, love, spiritual retreat, play, art, friendship, and many more aspects of human experience that are often devalued today, when economy is the ruling paradigm of our existences. From this point of view, gardens are idle, almost useless in the contemporary city – and can therefore represent a challenge to the status quo. It is our hope that to reimagine a garden will also mean, for the unit, to rethink what we believe makes life worth living.

I. Garden and Domestication



Jan van den Aeveelen, *The Hanging Gardens of Babylon* (1685).

Early forms of gardening consisted in the selection of plants species that settlers performed in order to make their environment inhabitable. As such, like dwelling, gardening seems to respond to a trait of the human species which is its lack of specialized instincts and its chronic feeling of not being ‘at home’.

We can therefore understand gardening as the way in which humans domesticate the environment by giving it a form. Gardening can be considered as a way to make a ‘world’ endowed with a sense of familiarity and orientation. Gardening is thus the primary act of inhabiting an area such as a forest, a river-bank, or a wet foothill by modifying its environmental conditions. Beside the selection of species, gardening implies the making of boundaries; it consists in demarcating areas of possession, access, and trespass alongside rules for rights of use, occupancy, and circulation. This idea of gardening survives even in the modern word ‘garden’. This word is a descendant of the Old English term *geard* which referred to the concept of fence and closure. It is in this sense that the garden can be considered an extension of the domestic realm, making the latter not just an indoor refuge but also an outdoor enclosure. As such, the garden is always characterized as a bound area, clearly distinct from its surroundings. It is

possible to argue that it is precisely its enclosed state that makes the garden a dialectical form: even if enclosed the gardens always exists in relationship with a context. The garden symbolizes, allegorizes and often sublimates power conditions that define the territory at large within the microcosm of a finite form. It is, at the same time, a blueprint of things to come, and an alternative to the reality of the surrounding reality; while it can have a pragmatic purpose, such as the provision of foodstuffs, it is never purely a pragmatic device, but, rather, an attempt to construct a model, a form of life that is not (yet) possible outside its walls.

This tendency is especially visible in the early form of monumental gardens of Mesopotamia, such as the one narrated by Sargon II in his *Annals*. Sargon II's garden was an attempt to gather within the boundaries of Dur-Sharroukin – the capital of his kingdom – all the vegetal species found in the mountains of Amanus in contemporary northern Syria. The archeological reconstruction of this city shows an area of land neatly enclosed by a quadrangular wall perimeter as the city itself is a gigantic garden. The plan of Dur-Sharroukin can be interpreted as an archetype in which city and garden becomes the same thing: a bounded area in which the manipulation of the environment is explicit and ostensible. This example shows the most essential ideological trait of gardens, that is to say the theatricalization of inhabitable space as a space that that can be controlled and thus dominated. It is for this reason that a link can be established between gardens and the concept of sovereignty. While sovereignty stands for the ruler's authority to govern a territory, the garden with its clearly artificial, man-made order, is meant to symbolize how such authority is embodied in the physical maintenance of the space.

These political implications are perhaps at the core of the Persian gardens built since the era of the Achaemenid Empire. What these gardens celebrated was not greenery per se, but, rather, the presence of water. Given the harsh environmental conditions of the ancient Persian landscape, the garden, with its lush vegetation, required a sophisticated system of water provision and irrigation. Bringing water to an inhospitable place was in itself the utmost representation of sovereign power. In this way the garden became the embodiment of the idea of 'paradise', a term whose very etymology refers to the act of enclosing an estate. The estate contrasts to its surrounding because it offers the possibility for human life to flourish in a hostile condition, as it is visible in the famous illustration of terrestrial paradise by the Jesuit priest Athanasius Kircher.

It is for this reason that, from being just a means of irrigation, water became the symbolic protagonist of gardening through the archetype of the fountain. Since the ancient Persian gardens, the fountain becomes the centerpiece of gardens; by distributing water, and putting the very mechanism of distribution on display, fountains were used as a fundamental sign of land domestication. The early Persian garden took its form from the very logic of land irrigation, as a system of intersecting channels ordered its layout to distribute water from the center to the

whole enclosed area. This ancient Middle-Eastern gardening tradition would inspire both the Western gardens of antiquity, as well as the Persian classical garden or *chaharbag*. With its quadripartite layout, the *chaharbag* – literally, four-garden – represents a clear attempt to translate the original logic of irrigation into an increasingly geometricized and ostensibly ornamental design.

Within the history of gardens, indeed, geometry and ornament cannot be considered as separated issues, as they are one and the same: a process through which the environment is constructed as *artifive*. It is precisely the idea of artifice that is at the core of one of the most influential episodes in the history of gardening: the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, built by Nebuchadnezzar II during his reign. Although no physical evidence of their existence has yet been discovered, the Gardens are described in a number of ancient texts that made the concept of a pensile greened space enduringly popular through the centuries.

In the hypothetical reconstruction engraved by Jan van den Aveelen in 1685, the Dutch artist shows the Hanging Gardens as a large stepped building whose main feature is an ascending sequence of wide terraces, each marked by a specific character and enlivened by specific vegetal species. This image strikingly celebrates one of the most important archetypes of gardening: the terrace. Terraces can be interpreted as the further and subtler evolution of the enclosure wall. While the wall completely secludes the garden from its surrounding territory, the terrace opens up the enclosed area to its surroundings, making, in fact, the garden a vantage point from which one can visually confront the territory.

While the Hanging Gardens might have never existed, terrace-like gardens abounded in antiquity – from the terraces of Niniveh built by the Assyrian King Sennacherib, to the stepping groves of the Roman sanctuary at Praeneste and the elaborate *Horti* of Sallust. In all these cases, terraces emphasized a fundamental purpose of ancient gardens: their functioning as ritual places.

Rituals are series of actions performed by a community. As such, the ritual ensures the communication and transmission of a religious content by means of repeated gestures. The repetition of specific actions often relies on their being performed in a space that gives form to the ritual by assigning to each gesture a specific place; terraces and steps ritualize movement by giving to it an emphatic sense of direction. Moreover, terraces and steps underline the garden's essential nature as theatrical device, where every gesture is augmented and amplified as a collective praxis. The subject's act of walking, passing through, stopping, turning, ascending, descending, exposing, hiding is registered on the ground through paths, steps, terraces, thresholds, walls, fountains and pavilions.

II. Garden and Ideology



Andrea Mantegna, *The Triumph of Virtue* (1502).

The idea of translating human movement into sequences of specific spaces and objects was at the heart of ancient Roman gardening. It was with this civilization that the western garden became more and more organized as a promenade that brought together different landscapes and spatial situations. Unlike the Persian garden, which unified its content by means of a centralizing geometry, the Roman garden represented a collection of different spaces. The main archetype of the Roman garden was the domestic peristylum, a courtyard enclosed by a portico and secluded from the street through a sequence of atriums. Hidden at the most private end of the *domus*, the peristylum was meant to celebrate the pastoral ideal of the house as a space of retreat; yet, its monumentality also addressed an ostensible public dimension as it was the place where the homeowner entertained its guests. It is possible to argue that the whole tradition of patrician Roman architecture addressed the theme of the garden as an attempt to naturalize the very idea of family house, making it look intimate and idyllic while hiding the fundamentally asymmetrical character of a household largely composed of slaves.

In spite of its reputation as a city-making civilization, ancient Rome – both the city and its empire – was rooted in agricultural life. With the rise of its military power, Rome was torn apart by a

social conflict between classes that culminated in a century-long civil war. This situation led rulers such as Augustus – the first Emperor – to radically restructure the Empire by empowering aristocrats to control rural territories with the establishment of large estates. Land cultivation under the Empire was increasingly centralized and directed by powerful landowners who made use of the most prized loot of Roman conquests: slaves. The gentrification of the Roman countryside forced the native population to abandon this territory, and starting from the 1st century AD rural land – first in the peninsula, and later throughout the Empire – was a mosaic of large estates often controlled by luxurious villas, the retreat of the wealthy who would do business in the city while enjoying *otium* (leisure) in the countryside.

It is here that the western myth of the ‘countryside’ was born as a pastoral idyll (affordable only to the rich), masking the intensive exploitation of rural resources for the sake of an overgrown metropolis. At the center of this political and ideological operation were two architectural devices: the *villa urbana* and the *villa suburbana*. While the *villa urbana* functioned both as place of production and retreat, the *villa suburbana* was mostly devoted to the *otium* of the landowner. Precisely because of its highly ideological function, the Roman villa developed as a complex aggregation of buildings and pavilions whose purpose was to expand the domestic realm into the landscape, constructing a totalizing experience. A major example of this tendency are Hadrian’s Villa near Tivoli, and Maxentius’ Villa on the Appian Way; in both cases, a wealth of diverse architectural objects are clustered together in a composition that might at first glance seem arbitrary, but which is in fact the simple formalization of the topography upon which these villas were built.

Here gardening becomes equivalent with architecture itself, to the point that not just buildings, but also plants were cultivated, shaped, and formalized as architectural elements. The Romans invented what they called *ars topiaria*, that is to say the technique of trimming shrubberies and trees in order to give them a geometric form. As Pierre Grimal has observed, the purpose of *ars topiaria* was to make the garden a translation of a pictorial image in order to reinforce its narrative function. Within Roman civilization, gardening was understood as the construction of a totalizing painted illusion aimed at the sublimation of a territory increasingly marked by violence and exploitation. It is for this reason that with the fall of the Roman Empire the culture of gardens declined in Europe, to reappear in the Middle Ages in the less celebratory form of the orchard.

Unlike the Roman garden, the medieval orchard was not an aesthetic artefact, but, rather, a productive space. It was largely made of fruit trees and it developed first within monastic compounds, from which it was soon adopted by feudal lords as a complement to their castle or manor. Unlike the ancient garden, the orchard was far less monumental and adaptable to difficult

topographic conditions. Yet it is within the cultivation of orchards that a taste for using greenery as architecture developed again as a patrician appropriation of the landscape. The fabrication of pergolas and other forms of carpentry helped domesticate outdoor areas and it can be understood as an attempt to formalize the orchard as an extension of the house. As such the orchard can be seen as the direct precedent of the Renaissance resurrection of the Roman villa which dominated the architectural scene in 15th century Italy.

The villa reappeared in modern history in a political and social situation that is similar to the condition that fostered its emergence in Roman times, when – due to the increasingly conflictual ethos of late medieval cities – wealthy merchants adopted the countryside retreat as pastoral version of their home in the city. The Renaissance villa can be understood as the alter-ego of the *palazzo* and their respective architectures were often similar. Yet, while the palazzo emerged as a self-contained block, the villa opened up towards the landscape with the use of emphatic openings, such as the loggia of Villa Medici at Poggio a Caiano designed by Giuliano da Sangallo. The loggia is perhaps the most important architectural element of the Renaissance villa because it theatricalizes the villa's appropriation of the landscape. A deep terrace rhythmized by columns, the loggia blurs the distinction between inside and outside and transforms the spectacle of the landscape itself as an extension of the patrician household.

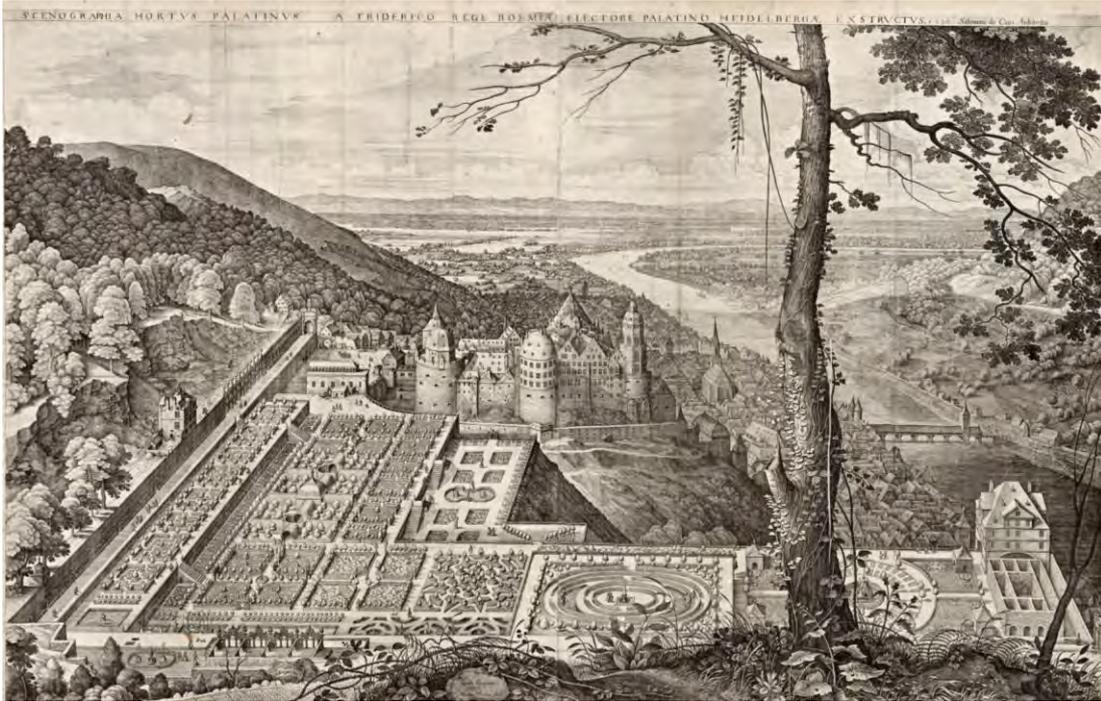
The blurring of architecture and landscape is at work in one of the most influential texts in the history of western gardening, *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* published in 1499 and attributed to Francesco Colonna. The text narrates the adventures of Poliphilo who, in search of his love Polia, finds himself lost in a dream-like landscape. The culminating moment of the story takes place in the island of Cythera, which is in itself an immense garden. The author gives such a precise architectural account of this island that it can be easily reconstructed. The island is perfectly circular and it is concentrically subdivided into a series of rings and wedges; each different quadrant contains a specific landscape – forest, maquis shrubland, orange grove, meadow – organized in layers, from an outer, less formalized layer containing larger trees, to the inner, geometrically ordered garden, populated by smaller species. The concentric rings are thus divided into rooms whose enclosing elements are both vegetal and mineral. Steps and balustrades become the main architectural elements that define the spatial arrangement of the island. This vision shows the transformation of the medieval orchard into a geometrically ordered composition in which even the vegetation assumes an architectural character.

This idea of gardening animates in a very explicit way the *Triumph of Virtue* painted by the Mantua-based artist Andrea Mantegna in 1502. The background of the eponymous allegorical scene is dominated by a curious portico made of shrubs and trees which is a clear example of the way in which, in the Renaissance garden, natural elements were formalized as architectural

motives. The purpose of these motives was ultimately to define theatrical stages in which action was meant to take place. Indeed it is possible to argue that, in spite of its monumentality and formal elaboration, the Renaissance garden was more of a framing device than an artifact to be contemplated in itself. For this reason, the Renaissance garden can be conceptualized as a series of platforms in the form of loggias, terraces and belvederes which served as a form of stage design for the events that took place within their boundaries.

This tendency garden is best represented in the project of Donato Bramante for the Vatican Belvedere (circa 1506), a gigantic enclosed courtyard and garden complex that connected the Vatican Palaces to Pope Innocent VIII's Villa. The main architectural theme of the Belvedere is the sequence of ramps and terraces that articulate the transition from the lower courtyard to the upper garden. Inspired by the monumental sequence of ramps and terraces at the Roman Sanctuary of Fortuna Primigenia in Praeneste, in the Belvedere project Bramante enclosed these elements within the finite form of a rectangular palace block. In this way, the Belvedere expresses the contrast between the finite and the infinite that is characteristic of many Renaissance gardens. It is precisely this contrast that the evolution of gardens will eventually undermine between the 17th and 18th century when the expansive character of landscape design took over the finite nature of architecture, as it becomes evident in the Baroque Garden.

III. Garden and Dispossession



Salomon de Caus, *Hortus Palatinus of Heidelberg* (1620).

The formal creativity of the Renaissance garden reflects the ambitions of an age when architecture emancipated itself from the act of building to become a full-fledged form of knowledge. The gardens of the 15th and early 16th century expressed an attempt to construct alternatives to the outside world; however, in the course of the 16th century gardens ceased being simply delightful theatrical microcosms to increasingly assume the role of actual territorial projects aimed at the control of the surrounding landscape. In this transition we can read the traces of the progressive privatization of land that, in the west, started with the Renaissance.

Until the 16th century, the concept of private property as we understand it today applied only to part of the land in Europe and was virtually meaningless in most of the rest of the world. However, the 17th century saw a progressive codification of different regimes of ownership and use in the west which was paralleled by an unprecedented colonial expansion of the main European nations. In Europe, the privatization of lands that were previously held in common by the local inhabitants took a few centuries to complete, and it assumed the character of an internal colonization – a violent expropriation of resources that became the testing ground for mechanisms of juridical and social control that would be exported to the colonies. In this context, the creation of the massive aristocratic private gardens of the 17th century – such as the many projects completed by André Le Nôtre in France or the works ordered by Philip IV in the Buen Retiro of Madrid – can be read as the expression of the ultimate mastery of man over land,

an explicit example of the ideal land organization that nations aimed at spreading throughout their territories.

The so-called Baroque garden inherited from its Renaissance precedents a penchant for geometry, water games, and for the aggressive hybridization of natural and artificial elements, as well as a taste for the theatrical. However, it radically scaled up all these known features, loosening the relationship between buildings and garden and achieving a more homogeneous, controlled environment. The Baroque garden became a transparent mirror of what the elites hoped the Baroque city would be: monumental, symmetrical, criss-crossed by imposing avenues. The garden, which had once been a microcosm – intimate, utopian – was now being conceived as the model for reality at large. Perhaps the most striking example of this transition is Salomon de Caus' *Hortus Palatinus* begun in 1612 for Frederick V in Heidelberg; in a series of geometrically organized precincts, de Caus planted an encyclopedia of sorts of vegetal forms suspended between the esoteric symbolism of its Renaissance predecessors, and the scientific ambitions of a botanical garden. In the decades that followed, the broad, regularly planted *parterres* of de Caus and Le Nôtre became less of an exercise in escapism than a proactive attempt to create and spread an aesthetic based on order and repetition.

Not surprisingly, such a serene and rigorous geometric layout was impossible to export outside of large estates, where the juridical ownership of land was bitterly fought over. The 17th century was a low point for European peasants, dispossessed of the use of common land and decimated by famine. England represents perhaps the best-known case study of what has come to be known as the 'age of enclosures', as, in the space of a couple of centuries, small-scale subsistence agriculture was eradicated in favour of sheep farming for the export of wool. This transition saw a dramatic change in the actual form of the landscape, with the disappearance of farmed fields and the physical enclosure of stretches of land for the control of privately owned herds, privately owned land, and privately owned wool mills. The geometrization and parcelization of the working landscape mirrored, albeit in a rather chaotic way, the principles developed in the Baroque garden. Well before the rise of industry or the invention of the modern factory, the Baroque garden was a laboratory for the architecture of the generic, with its regular plantations, straight perspectives, and standardized green elements which slowly constructed the new cultural trope of man's complete control over nature and made aesthetically acceptable the radical appropriation and reorganization of the whole territory of Europe.

By the 18th century, European cities were swelling up with disenfranchised peasants looking for work opportunities; in England, the enclosures were also fueling a budding industrial production based on wool cloth. As urban centres increasingly grew overpopulated, dirty, and, eventually, plagued by the pollution of factories, the very idea of western garden shifted again: this time, away from the artificial, the geometric, the symmetrical, and towards a carefully staged recreation of an idea of wild 'nature'. If the Baroque garden had been a radical proposition for a future to come, the Picturesque garden would be a regressive, compensatory fantasy looking back to an originary nature that perhaps never existed.

This phenomenon started in England long before other European countries, and indeed, even before industrialization itself; as early as the 1710s Capability Brown designed estates meant to appear as ‘gardenless’, that is to say, artlessly put together as if they were presented in their ‘natural’ form. As Will Jennings remarked, Brown’s projects still owed much to Le Nôtre’s expansive vistas – free-flowing, almost infinite straight perspectives – and were quite rigidly scripted and constructed. However, they abandoned most signs of heavy-handed design to trick the visitor into assuming what he or she saw was unadulterated nature. Self-effacing, but all the more present for it, Brown’s architecture was a matter of earthworks, invisible water engineering, seemingly random planting of clusters of trees. To achieve this effortless look took an enormous amount of human labour; to control such vast estates took enormous power. And yet Brown’s understated style concealed all the strife, exploitation, and conflict needed to affirm such an asymmetrical power condition.

More than any other architectural invention, the *haha* embodies this attempt to naturalize a condition that was not natural at all: by carving a ditch in the land, the elite was afforded unimpeded views while allowing control over the movement of animals without resorting to unsightly fences and walls. The *haha* is the dialectical counterpart of the enclosures: they both fence land, establish private ownership, mediate movement and use. While the enclosures took in most cases the form of stone walls, *hahas* hid their conflictual nature by simply disappearing in the landscape. If we can still read the *haha* as a terrace of sorts – enclosing space, yet opening up vistas – its very invisibility makes it into a different product altogether, one that starts to mutate the garden from readable symbolic form into mere device for control.

Brown’s restrained style was often misunderstood by later generations as lacking pathos, but it effectively broke with many of the constraints of the Baroque era and it paved the way for those who would, later on, conceive their gardens as the explicit foil of the early industrial city. To offer, once again, a dialectical alternative to reality, late 17th century English garden designers turned their back to the regimented rigidity of the Baroque, and experimented, instead, with the construction of three-dimensional vistas that would exalt variety, abrupt change of atmosphere or scale, contrasts of colour and textures. The debate over the aesthetic power of nature was popular at least since 1757, when Edmund Burke published *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, and by the 1790s no theorist could discuss the subject without addressing the architecture of gardens, often filed under the rubric of Picturesque, a term definitively made popular by the work of Sir Uvedale Price and Richard Payne Knight. Remarkably, this is one of the rare moments in western history when architecture actually spearheaded a cultural shift. But the condition to which the Picturesque reacted was, in fact, a dire one; the more English gardens were constructed as gorgeous romantic tableaux, the more the actual territory was plundered, exploited, and polluted. Of the famed beauty of the English countryside very little remained, but an enduring rhetoric used to aestheticize the private gardens of the upper classes.

IV. The End of the Garden



John Constable, *The Dell at Helmingham Park* (1830).

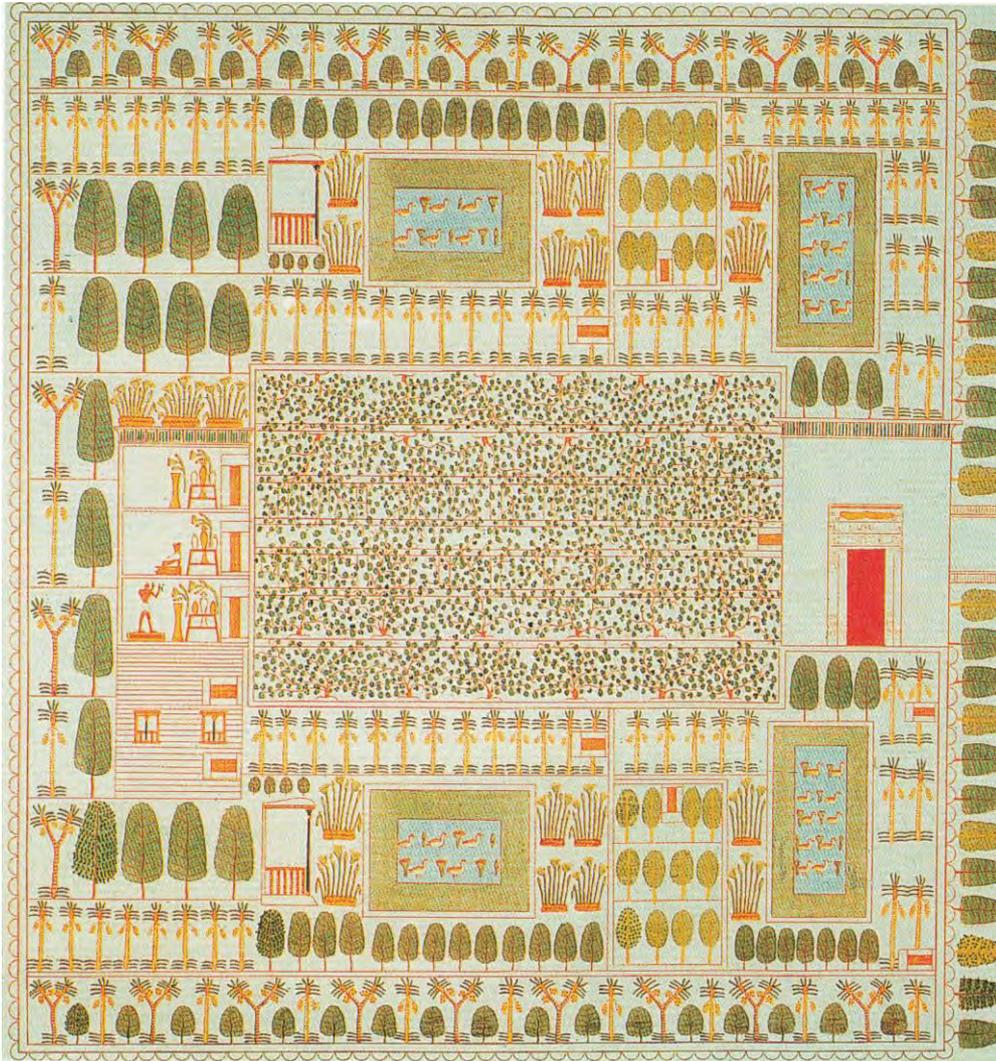
By the mid-18th century industrial cities suffered from terrible hygienic conditions and the idea of providing state-maintained green spaces became popular in all the major centres as a compensation for the poor quality of life and as pedagogical device to offer the working classes an acceptable form of leisure. As we have seen, this was not the first time in Western history that the garden was used as inspiration for city-making; however, it is in this conjuncture that the very concept was applied in such a way that it lost some of its critical power. The garden as type started to be supplanted – and often confused – with another emerging urban form: the park. The garden's staged character had never really been in question – even the 'natural' looking Picturesque referred explicitly in its name to the construction of a (fake) image. However, the park as type distinguishes itself from the garden not only because it looks natural, but because, in theory, it should actually be a natural space. While it is difficult to claim that gardens are by definition private and parks public, in most historical cases parks tend to be far larger, less intimate, and marked by a more permeable boundary towards the city; when parks became a diffused urban form, their aim was to cater to a large part of the population, a condition that

never applied to gardens, which were usually designed with very specific users in mind, and therefore contained, in their architecture, specific references to the habits, rituals, and beliefs of those users. From the mid-1800s, parks were designed to be as blank as possible in order to offer a pleasant backdrop to all citizens, while gardens had, historically, always had a partisan agenda, and not only in the west; just to make the most famous example, the outstanding gardens of private villas built between the Northern Song and the late Qing dynasty in Suzhou, China, were sophisticated embodiments of the very philosophical, political, and religious position of their owners, not differently from de Caus' Rosicrucian allegory. The very idea of garden suffered from its popular overlapping with the idea of park, losing its specificity by being depleted of its most controversial features: its symbolism, its artificiality, its very architectural form, its ritual character. Most importantly, from the 1800s onwards, it lost entirely its ambition to embody in the most radical way a different life, a different architecture, a different cosmos; it lost the antagonism that fueled some of the most interesting historical examples, from the seclusion of the Cistercian monks' herb pharmacy at Casamari Abbey in the 13th century, to the exuberance of the queer social life sheltered by the Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens in the 17th century.

Many interesting gardens have still gone on to be realized in the 19th and 20th century; indeed, we can say that the garden triumphed with the rise of the rhetoric of nature first, hygiene later, and most recently sustainability. But when this term became so to say institutionalized it somehow lost its critical edge to become a mere umbrella word to signify anything related to greenery. Perhaps the most enduring trope of late modern city-making is, not by chance, the Garden City; it is yet unclear whether this concept signifies the victory of the garden over the city, or, rather, of the city over the garden.

Therefore, to reread the history of the garden is for us important as it offers us an opportunity to acknowledge the fact that this category has become increasingly blurry and confused; the brief genealogy we traced is an encouragement to broaden this research to extra-European examples and continue refining a possible outline of what a garden is, does, and represents.

V. Thesis



Wall painting of a garden in the Tomb of Sennefer, Thebes (Reign of Amenhotep III, XIV century BCE).

We assume the garden not as sui-generis manifestation, but as the quintessential embodiment of architecture. We believe that gardening is not peripheral to but foundational to the tradition of architecture. If we assume that gardening is about domestication and enclosure we immediately realize how the garden manifests – for better or worse – the fundamental characteristic of architecture itself.

To reconsider the idea of garden, our preliminary hypothesis is that a garden is a finite, enclosed, clearly manmade architectural form created with building materials as well as vegetal elements of various kinds. Its form, layout, architectural language, and visual character should respond to a specific agenda: the garden always means something, and it always presents a symbolic meaning which can be more or less readable or precise depending on the cultural context. In other words, gardens are ritual places: they are meant to foster a range of intended uses by a range of intended

users. They can cater to a large number of people and be very inclusive and generous, open places, but they are not generic spaces that should fit a generic ‘anyone’.

We see the very specificity of the garden as an opportunity to broaden our imagination: we would challenge the unit’s participants to rethink the garden as a social space in which new rituals can be formed.

In a time when many citizens are skeptical of the agency of the public administration, and representative democracy is undergoing a systemic crisis, the overtly public character of the park can be often problematic as it represents the presence of the state’s power. But the garden is a far more complex artefact, which, we imagine, can confuse the existing juridical categories: a common ground, neither public nor private, owned by nobody, not even the state. We encourage the participants to imagine the garden as a way to profanate the idea of private property.

Gardens can contain production, but they are not defined by it; in a culture like ours, where work has risen to become the paragon of all value judgment, the idleness, even uselessness of gardens stands as a rejection of the prereceived idea of what makes human life worth living. In history, the makers of great gardens sometimes favoured pleasure over production, love over gain, meditation over performance: their value systems, analyzed today, are actual insults to the way we structure our priorities. It is not our place to pronounce further judgement, but we believe working with the garden will offer the Diploma 14 participants to set their own priorities and perhaps unsettle our conventional understanding of what matters in life.

Moreover, we believe that to study gardens means first and foremost to question the status of the architectural profession itself. In the last centuries the production of architecture has been defined by an increasing division of labor that has further divided ideation from realization. Gardening seems to have resisted this tendency by constantly blurring design and building. This has to do with the very nature of the garden in which time plays a fundamental role. The lifespan of a building is an important topic in the current debate, often addressed through the fine-tuning of software that allows projections and collaborative design. But we know that the actual working reality subdivides this long-term work in a multitude of short-term tasks assigned to different specialists who often care little about the rest of the process.

The design of a garden can be seen as a paradigmatic example of a working process that develops with time: it does not happen all at once but it is constantly performed as the garden evolves through the years and the seasons. It is possible to say that gardening is more about maintenance than execution and we feel this is a valuable lesson for the way we conceive our job as architects. The gaze of the gardener – as French designer Gilles Clément would say – has to take in all the elements of the space he takes care of; it sees what is there today, what will be there tomorrow. It

sees plants, animals, humans, inorganic material. It works with pollution, accidents, changes of plan. It is perhaps fitting that Clément, who defines himself a gardener, has become an influential voice when it comes to contemporary architecture at large, as his texts encourage us to recognize how partial and limited our view of space often is.

For us, the unity of design and execution that a garden demands can be a stimulus for experimentation in two different ways. On the one hand, it can become an encouragement to think about a project that changes and modifies with time. We welcome scenario-based projects that seek ways to work with form while allowing us to confront processes that architecture cannot and should not control – from natural growth to social shifts. A project can retain a great integrity and a strong message while being able to adapt with time and evolve.

On the other hand, we believe that the labour subdivision we are witnessing in the construction industry is the source of great social injustice and exploitation, and we hope that this year's projects can imagine other frameworks such as cooperatives of designers and workers, alternative funding, self-building, cross-disciplinary collaborations, and any type of experiment that would question the status quo.

As feminist author Silvia Federici has remarked, community gardens and urban allotments are becoming in many cities a fulcrum of political activity, serving as catalysts not only for cultural activities but also for debate, alternative education, social solidarity, and even new forms of labour. We believe that far from being a marginal condition, these experiments represent the outlet of a diffused aspiration to new forms of life which architecture should not ignore but support.

Throughout its history, the garden has always been a laboratory for forms of otherness. As a protected, limited microcosm, it has been the ideal testing ground of new technologies – hydraulics in Islamic palaces, plant hybridization in Medieval monasteries, synthetic materials in the Victorian pleasure grounds. While it has often been used as sign of power and dominion, as its beauty needs care to be maintained, it has also fostered social forms that needed a haven from a hostile environment, welcoming and protecting, in turn, children's play, women's discussion, heretics' worship, dissenters' meetings, and forbidden love of all kinds.

This is the garden we invite the Diploma 14 students to explore this year. A radical experiment that will reject separation of labour and private property; that will rethink the art of building from its very root, manipulating both nature and technology; that will work with form and architectural language in an explicit manner; that will imagine new rituals for new citizens; that will, ultimately, challenge us to question what is our idea of a good life.

VI. Studio Structure



In the first term each student will conduct an individual research on the history of gardens. Each student will select one or two paradigmatic examples of gardens on which they will gather bibliography and archival material (original drawings, maps). Subsequently each student will work on a critical close reading of these historical examples by means of text and drawings.

At the end of the first term, the drawing of an ‘analogous map’ – a portrait of the case study investigated – will allow each student to summarise in one drawing the spatial, material and symbolic themes that define the essence of the case study.

In the second term each student will propose a garden for a chosen site that critically assumes and eventually modifies the main aspects of the historical case study. The case study and the proposal do not need to be geographically consistent; we are looking for a thematic link rather than a literal continuity between the two projects. The choice of both case study – or case studies if a comparison is needed – and project site is up to the individual participant, as is the scale and character of the proposal developed in the second term. At the beginning of the second term, we will define not only the individual site but also the overall brief for the proposal, that is to say the scale, the intended users, and the vocation of the garden (domestic, productive, monumental, and so on). Who will use the garden? Who will build it? What kind of life can we imagine in it? Does it serve or support an institution or a house? Can it be a place of work? All these questions will help the participants define their intentions. In some cases, the design will have to include a proposal for neighbouring buildings; in others, the garden project can be just the redefinition of a

void, either nestled in existing built tissue, or simply separated from a natural context. While the presence of an architectural 'edge' of the project will depend from case to case, we would ask all the participants to engage with the design of an open-air space.

We aim at constructing strong theses backed by a conceptual argument that will tie together the different phases of the project; in this sense the first term is, in our view, already projective, although no conventional design outcome is requested. In the second term we will focus on the actual design proposal through the composition of a set of traditional architectural drawings. In the third term we will curate the representation of the project as well as the construction of a final book that organizes all the elements of the thesis into one coherent piece of work. We believe that these different components and media are fundamental to the thesis, and that drawing has as much of a conceptual value as text; conversely, we see the writing of the research essay as a project in itself.

This year perhaps more than in the recent past, we ask individuals to commit to formal decisions that might not always be easy: gardens require clear aesthetic choices and will demand a high level of design intensity and precision. This means that projects will likely have distinctive individual architectural features.

However, we believe that the work of the unit is also very collective: no matter how diverse and personal the theses are, some of the challenges will be shared by the whole group, and for us discussion and collaboration are quintessential aspects of your diploma experience.

Every Tuesday afternoon we meet for a unit pin-up and we review every participant's work collectively; these meetings give us the opportunity to further the unit's research and share our findings. On Thursdays we are available for individual desk tutorials.

To 5th year students, Technical Studies offers a unique space to develop in depth specific aspects of the design with the help of specialists. It will be a fundamental part of the thesis as it will allow the graduating participants to become more experimental with a broad range of technical aspects. We want to underline the fact that the TS module is deeply connected with the conceptual themes outlined in the first term, and that it should be seen as a creative endeavour rather than an exercise in detailing. We will hand-in with the late option, and most of the actual production will happen during term 2.

We do not know where this experiment on gardens will lead us, but we imagine that this theme will open up possibilities to work with an idea of common space which we have long felt could contribute to the contemporary political debate. The very concept of common is rooted in the idea of people being together – living, thinking, performing together. It is our sincerest hope that our shared work in the unit can represent a first small example of what constructing a common could mean in real life.

The unit trip will take place at the beginning of January; the destination will be in Europe. Students will book their own flight and accommodation; prices might vary but from experience we know the expense can be contained to £500 or less.

Black and white printing will be required in term 2; in term 3 some colour printing will be needed. The school's print shop offers competitive prices for both.

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