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École d’architecture de la ville & des territoires  
(Marne-la-Vallée)

# **From the Art of Memory to the Art of Hope: A Little Odyssey**

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## Sébastien Marot - Short biography

Born in Paris in 1961. Educated as a philosopher and Ph.D. in history at the *École des hautes études en sciences sociales* (EHESS). General delegate of the *Société française des architectes* (1987-2002), before he has enlivened the *Tribune d'histoire et d'actualité de l'architecture*, and founded and directed the magazine «Le Visiteur» (1995-2003). Founding member of the *École d'architecture de la ville & des territoires* of Marne-la-Vallée, where he is now assistant professor of history and theory, he also taught at several schools of architecture or landscape in Europe (*Institut d'architecture de l'Université de Genève*, *Architectural Association School of Architecture of London*, *École nationale supérieure du paysage de Versailles*, *Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule Zürich*) and in North America (*Harvard*, *Cornell*, *University of Pennsylvania*, *Université de Montréal*). His essays and research on architecture and landscape, had led him especially to the *Canadian Centre for Architecture* (2005), where he has been honored with the *Médaille de l'analyse architecturale* (2004) and with the *Prix de la recherche* (2010), both awarded by the *Académie d'architecture*. Author of *L'Art de la mémoire, le territoire et l'architecture* (La Villette, Paris, 2010) and editor in chief of the journal «Marnes: documents d'architecture», he is preparing the publication of his Ph.D. thesis: *Palimpsestuous Ithaca: un manifeste relatif du sub-urbanisme.*\*

## Sébastien Marot - Profilo biografico

Nato a Parigi nel 1961. Di formazione filosofo, dottore di ricerca in storia presso l'*École des hautes études en sciences sociales* (EHESS). Delegato generale della *Société française des architectes* (1987-2002), ha prima animato una *Tribune d'histoire et d'actualité de l'architecture*, e poi fondato e diretto la rivista «Le Visiteur» (1995-2003). Membro fondatore della *École d'architecture de la ville & des territoires* di Marne-la-Vallée, dove è attualmente ricercatore di storia e teoria, ha anche insegnato presso diverse scuole di architettura o di paesaggio in Europa (*Institut d'architecture de l'Université de Genève*, *Architectural Association School of Architecture of London*, *École nationale supérieure du paysage de Versailles*, *Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule Zürich*) e in Nord America (*Harvard*, *Cornell*, *University of Pennsylvania*, *Université de Montréal*). I suoi saggi e le sue ricerche su architettura e paesaggio, lo hanno condotto in particolare al *Canadian Centre for Architecture* (2005), dove ha ricevuto la *Médaille de l'analyse architecturale* (2004), e il *Prix de la recherche* (2010), entrambi assegnati dall'*Académie d'architecture*. Autore di *L'Art de la mémoire, le territoire et l'architecture* (La Villette, Paris, 2010) e redattore capo della rivista «Marnes: documents d'architecture», sta lavorando alla pubblicazione della sua tesi di dottorato: *Palimpsestuous Ithaca: un manifeste relatif du sub-urbanisme.*\*

\* Traduzione di Cassandra Cozza



# **From the Art of Memory to the Art of Hope: A Little Odyssey.**

## **Summary of the lecture.**

by Sébastien Marot

Some 12 years ago, I wrote an essay called *L'Art de la mémoire, le territoire et l'architecture* (published in English as *Sub-urbanism and the Art of Memory*), where I reflected on the ways in which contemporary projects might activate the memory of sites and situations. Ever since the book was published, I've nurtured the idea of producing a symmetrical essay on the *Art of hope* in contemporary architecture, urban and landscape design. But even though it has been on my mind for so long, I have not yet written the first line of that book. One of the reasons for that prolonged delay is that I embarked on an extended space-time journey to write a *relative manifesto for sub-urbanism* which I am about to publish. While presenting the content of that manifesto, I'll try to justify it as a necessary Odyssey between Memory and Hope.

About the "*relative manifesto*":

In 1978, while Colin Rowe and Oswald Mathias Ungers respectively publish *Collage City* and *Berlin: The City as a Green Archipelago*, Rem Koolhaas issues *Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan*, a theoretical and poetical masterpiece which can be considered the manifesto for contemporary *super-urbanism*: the program invents the site. Strangely enough, those three urban manifestos, equally fascinated by their fetish metropolises (Rome, Berlin, New York) share a common "*distance point*" in the little town of Ithaca NY, seat of Cornell University where their authors all weaved their ideological plots. Moreover, it happens that this little frontier town, located on the inlet of a lake which can be seen as the negative of Manhattan, was precisely founded by geographer Simeon De Witt, best known for having designed the 1811 grid of New York. Exploiting those coincidences, and embarking into the *laudatio urbis* of a hyperlandscape where the poetical adventures of Robert Smithson, Gordon Matta-Clark and Vladimir Nabokov all found their north-west passage, our ambition is to reverse the demonstration of *Delirious New York* and produce a *relative manifesto for sub-urbanism*: the site invents the program. In short, to quote Fitzcarraldo in Werner Herzog's film: "*I am planning something geographical*".

# Dall'arte della memoria all'arte della speranza: una piccola Odissea.

## Riassunto della lezione.

di Sébastien Marot\*

Circa 12 anni fa ho scritto un saggio intitolato "*L'Art de la mémoire, le territoire et l'architecture*" (pubblicato in inglese come "*Sub-urbanism and the Art of Memory*"), nel quale riflettevo sui modi in cui i progetti contemporanei possono attivare la memoria dei siti e delle situazioni. Da quando è stato pubblicato il libro ho pensato di scrivere un saggio simmetrico sulla *Art of hope* nell'architettura contemporanea, nel progetto contemporaneo urbano e relativo al paesaggio. Ma, anche se trascorso molto tempo, non ho ancora iniziato a scrivere il libro. Tra le ragioni di questo ritardo prolungato è che mi sono imbarcato in un lungo viaggio spazio-temporale per scrivere un "*relative manifesto for sub-urbanism*" che sono in procinto di pubblicare. Mentre presenterò il contenuto del manifesto, proverò a giustificarlo come una Odissea necessaria tra Memoria e Speranza.

Riguardo al "*relative manifesto*":

Nel 1978, mentre Colin Rowe e Oswald Mathias Ungers pubblicavano rispettivamente *Collage City* e *Berlin: The City as a Green Archipelago*, Rem Koolhaas pubblica *Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan*, un capolavoro teorico e poetico che può essere considerato il manifesto del *super-urbanism* contemporaneo: il programma inventa il sito. Stranamente, questi tre manifesti urbani, ugualmente affascinati dalle loro città *fetish* (Roma, Berlino, New York) condividono un comune "*distance point*" nella piccola città di Ithaca NY, sede della Cornell University dove gli autori hanno tessuto le loro trame ideologiche. Inoltre, accade che questa piccola città di frontiera, situata sull'insenatura di un lago che può essere visto come il negativo di Manhattan, era stata fondata con precisione dal geografo Simeon De Witt, meglio conosciuto per aver disegnato la griglia di New York del 1811. Sfruttando tali coincidenze, ed imbarcandoci nella *laudatio urbis* dell'iper-paesaggio dove le avventure poetiche di Robert Smithson, Gordon Matta-Clark e Vladimir Nabokov trovano tutte il loro passaggio a nord-ovest, la nostra ambizione è quella di invertire la dimostrazione di *Delirious New York* e produrre un *relative manifesto for sub-urbanism*: il sito inventa il programma. In breve, per citare Fitzcarraldo nel film di Werner Herzog: "*Sto progettando qualcosa di geografico*".

\* Traduzione di Cassandra Cozza

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**Sub-Urbanism and  
the Art of Memory  
1. Introduction\***

\* SÉBASTIEN MAROT, *Sub-Urbanism and the Art of Memory*, AA Publications, London, 2003, pp. 1-22.



# SÉBASTIEN MAROT

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AND THE ART  
OF MEMORY**

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**The great question in the field once known as urban design is no longer that of Alberti's day – how to choose the site where a city or a given programme will be built – but how to accommodate sites that have now all been subsumed, in one way or another, by the suburban condition.**

This new situation entails a complete role reversal between the two major categories of reasoning involved in any given project: site and programme. While the methods and routines of urban design have traditionally mimicked those of architecture, thereby perpetuating the dominance of programme (and of an approach that goes from programme to site), the suburban condition calls for an inversion of this hierarchy, in which site becomes the regulatory idea of the project.

**For this alternative approach and its critical concerns, which today come most clearly into view in the realm of landscape architecture, I propose the name 'sub-urbanism'.<sup>1</sup>**

It should thus be clear that by sub-urbanism I do not mean a regional kind of urban design but, literally, a subversion of urbanism, redirecting emphasis from programme to site – site as the matrix of design, and programme as a tool to explore, read, reveal, invent and ultimately represent the site.

I have elsewhere ventured to describe four attitudes firmly rooted in the culture of garden design that in my view characterize this alternative approach: an active regard for the memory of the site; a vision of site and design as processes rather than products; an *in-depth* rather than merely planar reading of open spaces; and a conception of site and design as fields of relations rather than as arrangements of objects.<sup>2</sup>

I regard these four principles not as inflexible rules of ethics but rather as the precepts (themselves essentially relative) of a preliminary and therefore imperfect code of conduct that, to borrow from Descartes, 'can be followed by way of provision, so long as one does not yet know any better'. The situation of an architect who embarks upon a new project can often be compared to that of a man dropped by parachute into the middle of a thick forest. In the absence of a map or other devices likely to orient him with certitude, a few plausible principles (such as always moving in as straight a line as possible) may help him find a way out of his predicament.

This is how these four heuristic principles may be considered. They form a travel kit to aid navigation through the tangle of a project's beginnings, but at the same time they act as a critical instrument for a retrospective analysis of the way a project relates to the site – the way it translates and represents it.

The ambition of this book is to foreground certain implications and resonances of the first of these principles. The idea of memory in architecture – architecture as an instrument of memory, memory as a material or as a dimension of architecture – is a fairly commonplace theme. What instigates me to revisit it here is the idea that, by positioning it in the context of the suburban condition, this old concept may be given new depth.

Though not a flight of fancy, neither will the path I take be strictly demonstrative. I have juxtaposed four reflections in an order moving gradually from past to present, from architecture to city, and from city to territory. They are inspired by four distinct 'objects', which are somewhat like the successive elements of an improbable charade. The first is a book published in 1966 by an English historian of ideas. The second is a metaphor coined in 1930 by the founding father of psychoanalysis. The third is the

While this neologism may lack grace, it undoubtedly has several advantages. First, it directs attention to the third territorial estate, found between city and country, where most of us experience the unfolding of daily life, and where architects and designers are most likely to be called upon to intervene. Second, it brings into question the concept of urbanism (itself a neologism, a century ago), which has remained almost etymologically tied to models of the centred city. Third, sub-urbanism recognizes suburbia as the historical hotbed of garden design – its concrete utopia, the very place from which landscape architecture has envisioned the world and locally undertaken its transformation – thereby reclaiming a whole alternative tradition of design and thinking which has seldom been revisited up till now. And finally – and most importantly – sub-urbanism points at the substrate of our practices of territorial development and improvement, revealing site, setting or landscape as the ultimate *infra-structure* whose meaning is put into play in every project.

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account, told by an American artist, of a suburban stroll in 1967. And the last is a small park created by a Swiss architect in a suburb of Geneva in the 1980s.

Even if I have indicated along the way a few hidden doors or switches allowing the reader to pass from one to the other, these reflections are relatively independent. They are rather like four different planes or parallel sections of the same theme. My hope is that their juxtaposition will stimulate the reader's thoughts to move through them all and to circulate in their interstices. The final element of the book – a more programmatic conclusion – attempts to establish a connection among these different planes and to highlight, in memory, a precept that is not just useful for the current practice of architecture but essential to its renewal.<sup>4</sup>

The concept of sub-urbanism is not planted here as just another flag for just another missionary groping behind the spirit of the times, but as a critical tool to help reflect on what a lot of architects, landscape architects and urban designers actually do, and on the historical context in which they do it.

I am well aware that, for more than 20 years now, urbanism and planning have been subject to another, symmetrical subversion coming from architecture, which I call super-urbanism, and whose canvas is not suburbia but the metropolis. Whereas sub-urbanism would be an approach to design in which programme is the site itself, in which the invention of the programme is entirely relative to the exploration and representation of the site, super-urbanism is the exact opposite: an approach to design where site is the programme; where site is produced through the manipulation, unfolding and representation of programme (with its own layers, complexities and contradictions); where programme, in other words, is envisioned, shaped and built as site, with all the mapping techniques literally transposed onto building concepts. Super-urbanism, even when it assumes all sorts of other names, is a relatively identifiable trend in contemporary architecture, and its main poet and theoretician – or ghostwriter, as he himself once put it – is Rem Koolhaas.

In my view, the strange thing is not so much the overwhelming influence this trend has lately had on architecture and design as the fact that its inspiration has been left desperately unchallenged for so long, at least in critical discourse. With this in mind, it may be worth noting that contemporary super-urbanism first reached its theoretical expression as a retroactive manifesto for an American metropolis. This does not mean that a prospective manifesto for sub-urbanism should necessarily revolve around a tour of an American suburb. Yet, in a way, this book can be considered a retaliation: a tale cannot be challenged, except with another tale.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. 'Sub-urbanisme et paysage'; programme of the 1996-7 series of the *Tribune d'histoire et d'actualité de l'architecture*, Société française des architectes, November 1996, where I proposed the following definition for a future encyclopaedia of the twenty-first century:

<sup>2</sup> Sub-urbanism: n. derived from suburban (cf. suburbia) and distinguished from urbanism. Geotechnics specifically developed in the suburbs, whereby the latter have given shape to their particular spaces and physiognomies.

<sup>3</sup> Discipline of architecture initially inspired by suburban situations, and where the hierarchy that urbanism has established between programme and site (imitating the genuine to architecture) is overturned, such that the site becomes the regulatory idea of the project, cf. landscape design.

<sup>4</sup> Theoretical and critical hypothesis, not necessarily exclusive of its opposite, which reads territorial development as a movement 'from the outside inward', from the outlying areas towards the city. By extension: historiographic approach that considers these suburban experiments, their landscape techniques and in particular their gardens as veritable laboratories for urbanism and for territorial development.'

<sup>1</sup> Cf. 'L'alternative du paysage', in *Le Visiteur provisoire*: *Principes de la philosophie*, pref. C. Discours de la méthode, part III. Although opposed in their emphasis and in their dialectics of programme and site, sub-urbanism and super-urbanism are not necessarily exclusive of one another, but rather symmetrical and complementary subversions of urbanism. While current urbanism is mainly concerned with the extent of cities and with organizing and planning their extension in the territory, sub-urbanism and super-urbanism both address the depth of situations, the first from below and the other from above. Both are attempts to enlarge the present of sites and situations and increase their depth, the one by addressing the site as palimpsest, the other by exploring the programme as hypertext. In other words, my hypothesis is that the jurisdictions of sub-urbanism and super-urbanism overlap and that they represent two genuine and parallel approaches to landscape and urban design in the twenty-first century.

<sup>2</sup> About the use of the notions of palimpsest and hypertext in this context, cf. André Corboz, *Le Territoire comme palimpseste et autres essais* (Paris: Les Editions de l'Imprimeur, 2001), and my introduction to it, 'Du palimpseste à l'hyperville: André Corboz, webmaster de la ville et des territoires, and La Suisse comme hyperville', in *Le Visiteur*, November 2000.

<sup>3</sup> Descartes beautifully names it a 'moraie provisoire': *Principes de la philosophie*, pref. C. Discours de la méthode, part III.

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<sup>1</sup> About the use of the notions of palimpsest and hypertext in this context, cf. André Corboz, *Le Territoire comme palimpseste et autres essais* (Paris: Les Editions de l'Imprimeur, 2001), and my introduction to it, 'Du palimpseste à l'hyperville: André Corboz, webmaster de la ville et des territoires, and La Suisse comme hyperville', in *Le Visiteur*, November 2000.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. 'L'alternative du paysage', in *Le Visiteur provisoire*: *Principes de la philosophie*, pref. C. Discours de la méthode, part III.

<sup>3</sup> Descartes beautifully names it a 'moraie provisoire': *Principes de la philosophie*, pref. C. Discours de la méthode, part III.

<sup>4</sup> Although opposed in their emphasis and in their dialectics of programme and site, sub-urbanism and super-urbanism are not necessarily exclusive of one another, but rather symmetrical and complementary subversions of urbanism. While current urbanism is mainly concerned with the extent of cities and with organizing and planning their extension in the territory, sub-urbanism and super-urbanism both address the depth of situations, the first from below and the other from above. Both are attempts to enlarge the present of sites and situations and increase their depth, the one by addressing the site as palimpsest, the other by exploring the programme as hypertext. In other words, my hypothesis is that the jurisdictions of sub-urbanism and super-urbanism overlap and that they represent two genuine and parallel approaches to landscape and urban design in the twenty-first century.



'Thus I came to a woodland  
full of briars and brambles....  
Seeing no indication of a viable  
footpath or trodden way, I was  
much confused and dismayed,  
and went even faster....'

Francesco Colonna, *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*

The essential features of our current knowledge about the art of memory as it was practised by the ancients, and about its evolving status in the history of western culture up to the seventeenth century, were exposed by Frances Yates in a book that remains the major reference on the subject.

#### SPACE AND MEMORY: THE REDISCOVERY OF A FORGOTTEN ART

'Few people know that the Greeks, who invented many arts, invented an art of memory which, like their other arts, was passed on to Rome whence it descended in the European tradition. This art seeks to memorize through a technique of impressing "places" and "images" on memory. It has usually been classed as "mnemotechnics", which in modern times seems a rather unimportant branch of human activity. But in the ages before printing a trained memory was vitally important; and the manipulation of images in memory must always to some extent involve the psyche as a whole.'<sup>12</sup>

Yates's book reveals the degree to which the art of memory, far from being merely an annexe to the edifice of classical culture, played a crucial structural role, interrelated with all the other major divisions of rhetoric. As a practice, it was so pervasive that its importance tended to go unstated in the texts, with the result that it can be easily overlooked by the contemporary reader, who no longer makes use of it. In our day, the philosophy student will no doubt consider it a curiosity that certain of Plato's works depict individuals capable of reciting, from beginning to end, a dialogue overheard and then memorized. While the references are rare and their interpretation is not always crystal-clear, we do have a few relatively concordant sources that allow us to reconstruct the mechanism of the *ars memorativa* as it was transmitted from Greece to Rome. The major ones are the anonymous treatise *Ad Herennium*, Cicero's *De Oratore* and Quintillian's *Institutio Oratoria*. By analysing these treatises, and comparing them to other canonical texts from the history of philosophy – whose interpretation she thereby clarifies – Yates is able to describe the general principles of the art of memory:

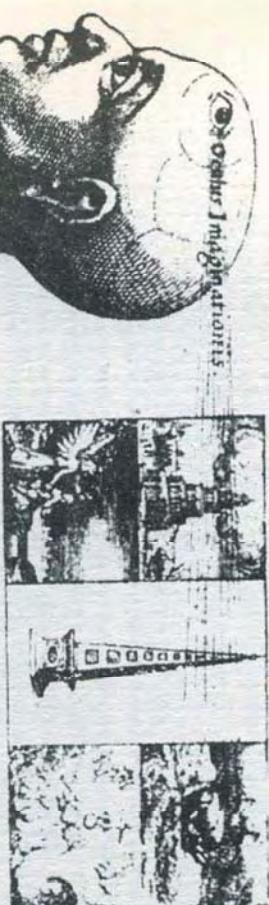
'The first step was to imprint on the memory a series of loci or places. The commonest, though not the only, type of mnemonic place system used was the architectural type. The clearest description of the process is that given by Quintilian. In order to form a series of places in memory, he says, a building is to be remembered, as spacious and varied a one as possible, the forecourt, the living room, bedrooms, and parlours, not omitting statues and other ornaments with which the rooms are decorated. The images by which the speech is to be remembered... are then placed in the imagination on the places which have been memorized in the building. This done, as soon as the memory of the facts requires to be revived, all these places are visited in turn and the various deposits are demanded of their custodians. We have to think of the ancient orator as moving in imagination through his memory building whilst he is making his speech, drawing from the memorized places the images he has placed on them. The method ensures that the points are remembered in the right order, since the order is fixed by the sequence of places in the building.'<sup>13</sup>

The sources give similar recommendations on the rules to be observed for the formation of the places (their number, proportions, lighting, etc.) and for the fabrication of the images (size, expression, etc.). They differentiate between images according to whether they involve the memorization of things (notions or arguments

<sup>12</sup> Frances Yates, *The Art of Memory* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), p. xi. A few years before, in 1960, Paolo Rossi published his *Clavis Universalis*, focusing on the history of the arts of memory in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The second edition of his book in 1983 owed a great deal to the

research of Frances Yates, and was dedicated to her memory. Paolo Rossi, *Clavis Universalis, Logic and the Art of Memory: The Quest for a Universal Language*, trans. Stephen Gluckas (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000). In two lectures given at the AA, Yates herself addressed the possible relevance of her research to contemporary architects: 'So I leave you with the thought that buildings may be less solid than they seem, existing invisibly in the mind of the architect before they are born; remembered invisibly down the ages in the memories of the generations.' F. Yates, 'Architecture and the Art of Memory', *AA Quarterly* 124, 1980.

<sup>13</sup> *The Art of Memory*, op. cit. p. 3.



of the speech) or the memorization of words (expressions or even sentences that will be used to evoke the things). One after another, they outline the framework of a mnemonic founded on a spatial and figurative metaphor of speech (describing its movement, its moments). Yates has demonstrated the consistency between this metaphor and certain major assumptions of ancient philosophy, such as the primacy given to the sense of sight – perceptible in the very etymology of *idea*, which in Plato designates the essence of things, or in the Aristotelian thesis holding that 'the soul never thinks without a mental picture'. Indeed, classical rhetoric and syllogistics, as codified by Aristotle, seem to be profoundly governed by this assimilation of *logos*, or speech, into a space that has been structured into places (*topoi*) that represent so many 'problems' or 'common' debates, whose identification and description is the concern of topics. Stretching the metaphor to insist on the coherence of ancient thought in this regard, one could say that topics, the theory of the commonplaces of discourse, provides a map of this mental space where the orators construct their edifices of memory, each according to his own will.

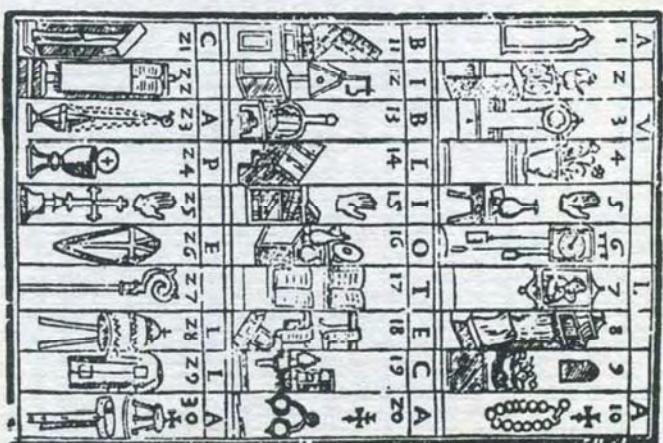
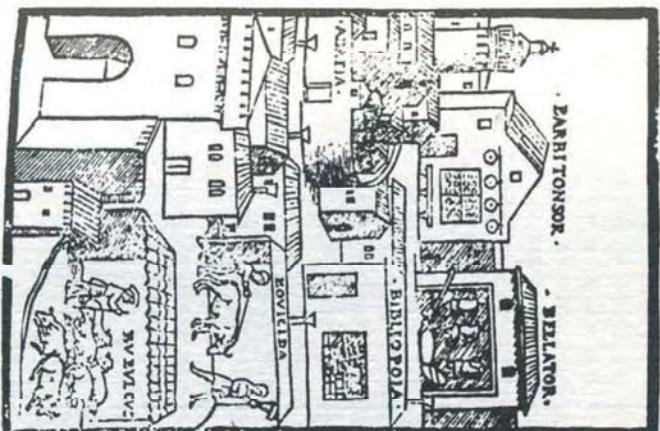
### FROM ARCHITECTURE TO THE ARS MEMORATIVA, AND BACK AGAIN

Concerning the nature and operations of these memory places, the reading of the sources yields as many questions as answers.

1. – First of all, as we have seen, the most common systems of mnemonic places are systems of architectural places, i.e., groups of spaces constructed or planned by man.<sup>7</sup> The example most often given is that of a house, with its articulation of open or closed rooms, but there are also references to public buildings (baths, for example), building complexes (an abbey), urban sequences or cities. Quintilian even speaks of a long road. Crucially, the configurations and relations between the places are in each case established and governed by one or several fixed itineraries. This seems from the outset to eliminate less structured spaces – spaces man is less likely to have organized – where the relations between places are not determined in advance. In short, artificial memory calls for a landscape that itself is relatively artificial.
2. – On the other hand, the memory of places precedes that of images, for which it serves as a framework and a support medium. It is a memory that 'helps another memory'. As a syntactic schema of structure and order, the articulation of places therefore must be easily distinguishable from the furnishings of images or figures that will be lodged there according to the orator's needs. Even if a place of memory is not just a 'void' defined by structural limits, but rather a place that decorative elements can help to identify (statues, for example), one can still suppose that the principle of convenience again tends to eliminate nonarchitectural spaces, where the distinction between structure and object (place and image) cannot be clearly assigned.

A question arises, however, as to the possible correspondence between mnemonic systems of places and mnemonic series of images: could affinities be established between kinds of places and kinds of speeches? We are told that orators could make use of several systems of memory places, and this permits several hypotheses. Did they do so to memorize a number of speeches simultaneously? Did one need more

<sup>7</sup> Among the other systems of memory places, research by Mary Carruthers has revealed the importance of books themselves, particularly for the Middle Ages. Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge University Press, 1990).



An abbey memory system and the vocabulary of images to be used in it; from Johannes Romberch, *Congestorium Artificiale Memorie*, Venice, 1563.

or less expansive and complex buildings, adapted to speeches of differing length and sophistication? Could a building become too small and be saturated by overuse? Did the orators feel the need to store certain series of images inside the buildings to which they had initially been confined, and to distinguish the new ones by the choice of other places?

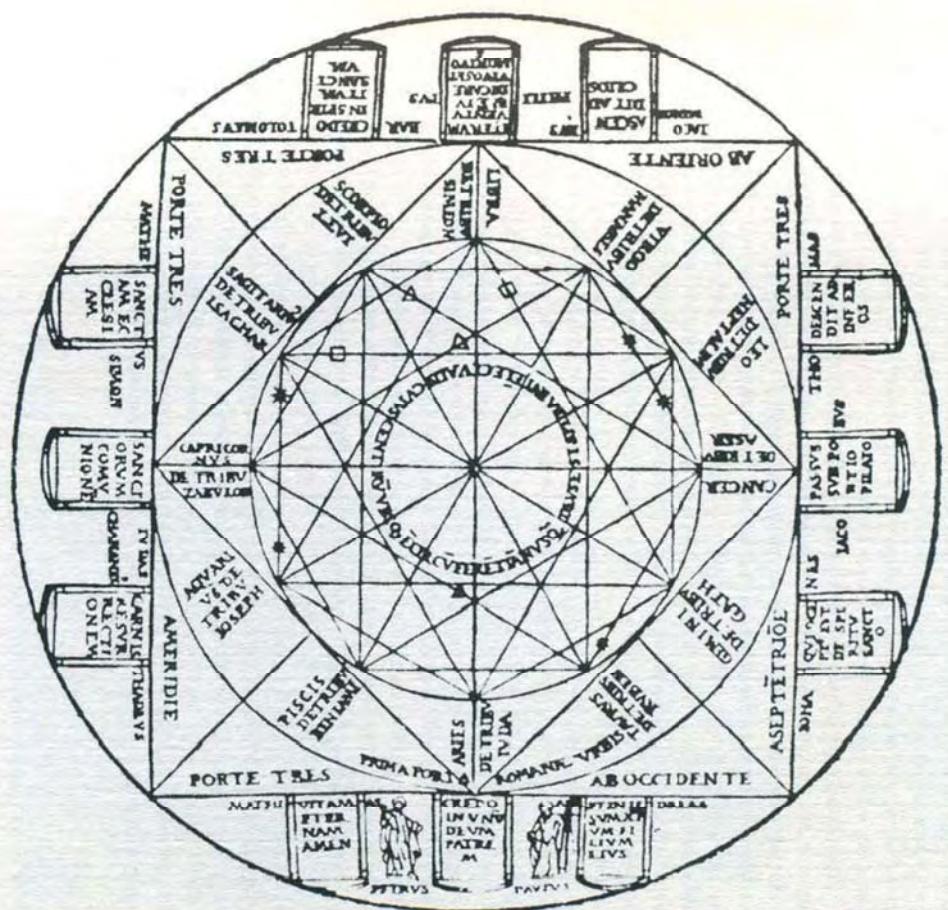
All these hypotheses are no doubt simultaneously plausible.<sup>8</sup> But it is equally possible that the possession and mental manipulation of several systems of places may have gradually answered the need to assign different types of speech to different spaces, and that an affinity of theme or genre may have governed this division. One can then imagine that forms of correspondence, administered by conventional rules, may have been sought between the places and their furnishings or symbolic figures, opening the door to a differential semanticization of places according to their nature (house, public building, district of a city, outskirts, countryside), and reciprocally to a contamination of the figures by their frames. This hypothesis would lead us to examine the role that the art of memory may have played in distinguishing scenes (tragic, comic, satirical) and genres (pictorial, literary, etc.) by their appropriate decor. In any case, one clearly sees how the common practice of the *ars memorativa* must have led to a form of encrustation of the images in the memory places.

3. – Additionally, the mnemonic places could, according to the sources, be either real or imaginary: either articulations of existing spaces that the orator has first chosen, then patiently observed and memorized, or fictional articulations that he has mentally conceived and constructed at his convenience, following the rules that the authors recommend concerning the number, proportions, distances and lighting of these places. Most plausible is the idea that the systems of mnemonic places would have been a little of both, and most often would have consisted of real arrangements revised and corrected by the imagination – enlarged, simplified, connected – in order to satisfy the orator's needs. Thus one can picture the built reality of the cities of antiquity being continually rebuilt, recomposed in the imagination of their inhabitants and repopulated with symbolic figures and landmarks of memory. This daydream opens up important questions: what relations did these analogous cities and buildings entertain among each other and with the real city? One can indeed wonder what influence this practice of artificial memory, which makes the orator not only an imaginary stroller but also an imaginary architect or urbanist, may have had on the reading and conception of real places. To ask such questions is to reflect on the reciprocal borrowings between classical rhetoric and classical architecture.

4. – Finally, this artificial memory is principally described as a technique that individuals exploit at will, choosing their own places and shaping their own images.

Yet one can easily imagine how the generalization of this practice and the diffusion of its teaching through scholarly exercises, recommendations and examples must have led to the gradual constitution and transmission of a stock of conventional images and places. This form of standardization or partial collectivization of mnemonic tools, which obliges us to enquire into the relations between the art of memory and the descriptions and productions of art in the strict sense (literature, painting, sculpture, architecture), is in any case a major feature of what Yates calls 'the medieval transformation of the classical art of memory'. Christian culture, as she

<sup>8</sup> St Teresa of Avila uses a similar approach in *The Interior Castle* to describe the soul's successive movements to increasingly large edifices, corresponding to heightened degrees of spirituality. In *L'âge de l'éloquence* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1994), p. 421, Marc Fumaroli has also shown that Loyola's spiritual exercises make use of techniques derived from the *ars memorativa*.



Ideogram of Rome as Jerusalem, from Matteo Salviaggio, *De Tribus Pelegrinus*, Venice, 1542.

explains, brings about a profound mutation in the *ars memorativa*, shifting it from the domain of rhetoric to that of ethics. The Christianization of the art of memory can be seen at work in the texts of thinkers from St Augustine to Albertus Magnus and St Thomas, who elevated memory from the rank of a faculty to that of a virtue (a subdivision of Prudence). The result was to transform a technique used by the orator to recall that which he wished to remember into a didactics designed to impress upon the soul of the faithful that which they ought to remember. Artificial memory, whose classical rules are revived and readjusted to this end, is mobilized in the service of the contemplation, meditation and observation of Christian doctrine. Hence the places and images, referring as they do to the discourse of revealed truth that forms the communal tie, now take on the status of shared symbolism ('a system of images') and almost of a language serving to commune in this truth, and to impress upon the souls the notions or intentions that are to govern their conduct in this world. The conception and fabrication of the mnemonic devices no longer simply appeals to the secret recipes of an orator, but becomes part and parcel of the representation and communication of speech itself. In this way, all the conditions are present for these mnemonic places and images to begin existing concretely – to be described, painted, sculpted and finally constructed.

'And though one must be extremely careful to distinguish between art proper and the art of memory, which is an invisible art, yet their frontiers must surely have overlapped. For when people were being taught to practise the formation of images for remembering, it is difficult to suppose that such inner images might not sometimes have found their way into outer expression. Or, conversely, when the "things" which they were to remember through inner images were of the same kind as the "things" which Christian didactic art taught through images, that the places and images of that art might themselves have been reflected in memory, and so have become "artificial memory".'<sup>9</sup>

As Yates herself demonstrates, in several examples, this hypothesis of an overlapping of the art of memory and the art, architecture and imagery of the Middle Ages proves fruitful for enlarging and renewing our understanding of the period. Yates thus casts new light on the supposed predilection of the Middle Ages for the grotesque and the bizarre in painting, statuary and manuscript illumination, which may only be an effect of the classical mnemotechnic rules recommending the use of expressive images, because they are easy to remember.<sup>10</sup>

She completely renews the interpretation of literary monuments such as *The Divine Comedy*, inviting us to read the spatial arrangements they describe (Hell, Paradise) as mnemonic systems.<sup>11</sup> Finally, and most importantly, she offers new frameworks for appreciating the structure and decoration of constructed edifices, extending Erwin Panofsky's hypothesis of a point-by-point correspondence between Gothic architecture and scholastic philosophy (basilica of St Denis = *Summa Theologica*),<sup>12</sup> and thereby lending new pertinence to Victor Hugo's famous phrase, 'Ceci t'aura cela' ('the one will kill the other'), which designated the printed book as the gravedigger of the built book, i.e., the cathedral.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>9</sup> *The Art of Memory*, op. cit. p. 81.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. p. 104: 'This inner art which encouraged the use of the imagination as a duty must surely have been a major factor in the evocation of images. Can memory be one possible explanation of the mediaeval love of the grotesque, the idiosyncratic? Are the strange figures to be seen on the pages of manuscripts and in all forms of mediaeval art not so much the revelation of a tortured psychology as evidence that the Middle Ages, when man had to remember, followed classical rules for making memorable images?'

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. p. 96: 'The Divine Comedy would thus

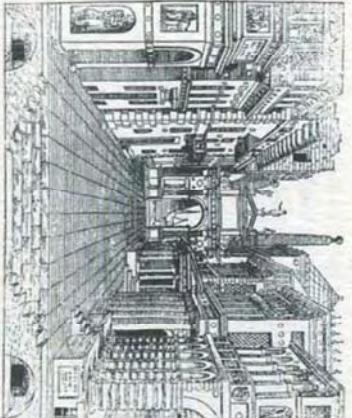
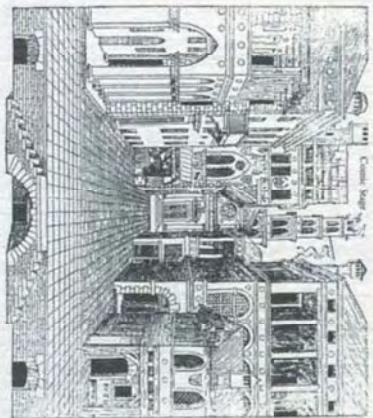
become the supreme example of the conversion of an abstract *summa* of

similarities and examples, with Memory as the converging power, the bridge between the abstraction and the image.'

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. p. 79, referring to Panofsky's *Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism* (London, PA: Archabbey, 1951).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. p. 124. Readers desirous to better grasp the influence of the *ars memorativa* on the architecture and religious painting of the Middle Ages can usefully consult the 1996 special issue of the *Cahiers de la Villa Gillet*, 'Lieux ou espaces de mémoire?', ed. Jean-Philippe Antoine (Paris: Editions Circé, 1997), and particularly the articles by Mary Carruthers, 'Locus-Tabernaculum mémoire et lieu dans la méditation monastique' and Jean-Philippe Antoine, 'Invention spaceuse et scène de la parole: les fresques monumentales en Italie au tournant du Duecento et du Trecento.'

Serlio's tragic, comic and satiric scenes: the distinct connotations of city, town and suburb.



### ART OF MEMORY, ART URBAIN, ART OF GARDENS

Since the publication of Yates's book, other research has confirmed how fertile the hypothesis of overlapping can be, and in particular how stimulating it is to extend it beyond architecture, to those other dimensions of the making of places: urbanism on the one hand, the art of gardens on the other.

As to art urbain first of all – so as not to leave the Middle Ages too abruptly behind – one can wonder whether religious processions are not to be interpreted as a collective practice of *ars memorativa*. The city could be likened to a mental map where the relative localization of the consecrated places and the itineraries of the processions themselves inscribe landmarks and mnemonic schemata. In an essay entitled 'The City As Temple',<sup>14</sup> André Corboz does not formulate this hypothesis explicitly, but lends it very powerful arguments by showing how the analysis of many medieval city plans and their cartographic representations reveals the *in situ* inscription of trinitarian, cruciform or other such configurations whose significance quite plausibly involves religious schematization. But the history of cities and of urbanism, enlarged to other epochs and contexts, undoubtedly furnishes many further examples in support of a vision of urbanism as an art of collective memory, applied to bring order and orientation into the urban settlement, that confused, saturated and living *theatrum memoriae*. By taking advantage of what modern sociology has learned about the 'social frameworks of memory', we should be able to understand cities better: no longer only as passive, conditioning memories (that is, as particularly dense accumulations of traces and recollections), but also as active and conditioned memories – as systems of constructed mnemonic places.<sup>15</sup> And this also holds, to a certain extent, for the landscape in general. Which brings us to the question of gardens.

The theme of the *ars memorativa* can open up rich perspectives for the hermeneutics of gardens, as the recent publication of the symposium 'The Garden as Art and Place of Memory' has amply demonstrated.<sup>16</sup> Let us note that the tradition of the pleasure garden presents it as both the privileged domain of *schole* (a place for leisure as well as meditation) and the territory of choice for strolling, for a pathfinding that articulates and associates places. This combination alone would allow us to suppose that the art of memory must have found a particularly appropriate terrain of expression in the garden, and even that the great historical transformations undergone by the *ars memorativa* (as well as its various offshoots) could be distinguished behind the major periods or the different 'styles' that the history of gardens teaches us to recognize. Indeed, from the medieval *hortus conclusus* to the creations of the baroque period and beyond, one can cite numerous examples of parks and gardens whose symbolic, emblematic and figurative apparatuses resemble systems of mnemonic images. Their scenographic arrangements may derive directly from the *theatrum memoriae*, as in Boboli and Valva, or from a sophisticated itinerary through situations whose every aspect (location, pavilions, 'statural', choice of trees) helps charge them with more or less abstruse meanings, as in Bomarzo.

Indeed, this close relation between the *ars memorativa* and the art of gardens is confirmed by the number of spiritual fathers their respective family trees hold in common. From Democritus to Petrarch or Colonna (author of *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*), one is continually struck by the way these authors distinguish themselves in

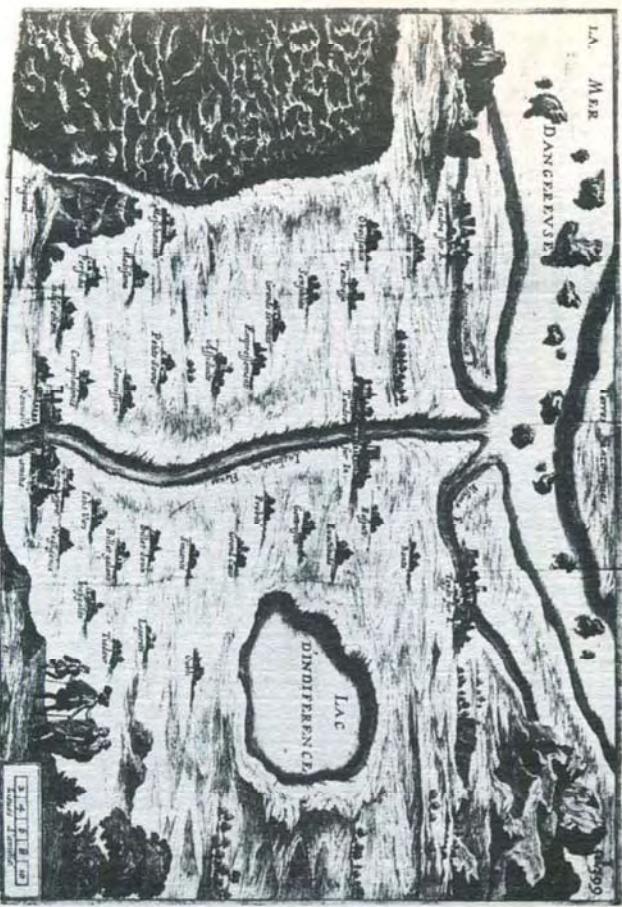
<sup>14</sup> André Corboz, 'La ville comme temple', in *Comparaison* 2, 1994, reprinted in *Le Territoire comme pallimpseste et autres essais*, op. cit., pp. 31–62.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. M. Christine Boyer, *The City of Collective Memory* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1998). This book contains a chapter expressly entitled 'The Art of Collective Memory': '...city spaces and architectural landscapes often have been the active

systemizers of memory. How did they suddenly become in the nineteenth century such passive retainers, such plastically arranged panoramic vistas concealing heterogeneous reality from view?' p. 137.

<sup>16</sup> Monique Massé and Philippe Nys, eds., *Le Jardin comme art et lieu de mémoire* (Paris: Éditions de l'Imprimeur, 1995). To find one's way among the wealth of contributions to this volume, see Jean-Philippe Antoine, 'Les pas de la mémoire', *Critique* 613–14, Spring 1998, pp. 327–35.

Carte du Pays de Tendre, after Madeleine de Scudéry, 1654. A map of the Land of Feeling showing, among other things, how the River of Indifference leads to the dangerous Lake of Indifference. A topic made into topography.



both domains, thus revealing the profound affinity that links the art of cultivating one's memory to the art of maintaining one's garden.

Thus, it becomes quite tempting to propose a more fundamental explanation of the phenomenon, drawing attention first to the ancient definition of the garden as *ars topiaria*, the art of place.<sup>12</sup> As shown by the historian John Dixon Hunt in his Interpretation of the humanist concept of 'third nature', the pleasure garden was conceived, until the seventeenth century at least, as an art of representation whose referent is the territory, in a state of 'intact' nature or of nature transformed by man for his immediate needs.<sup>13</sup> We should understand that the art of gardens, relatively free of the obligation to satisfy any need other than pleasure, would consist of the *in situ* representation or imitation of the elements, motifs and patterns of wild or transformed nature as they were found in the territory surrounding the site. Certain engraved views from the baroque period bring explicitly into relief this process of transposition or translation, whereby a wood corresponds to a forest, a fountain to a spring, a grotto to caves, a canal to irrigation ditches, and the parquetry of flower beds to the divided plots of cultivated fields. Understood in this way, the garden appears as a medium for the semanticization of the land, lending to nature the status of a landscape organized into spaces. Thus, too, an imitation could gradually become a model, as is shown by gardens such as Versailles. By offering themselves as an abbreviated map of a given state of the larger territory in the process of being designed, literally informed, gardens were also seen as both the laboratories and the focal points for this physical transformation.<sup>14</sup>

It is clear that the garden has long been understood as a place where the geography of the mind meets that of the earth, just as the art of gardens has been conceived as a conscious elaboration of this encounter, to the point where one could retrospectively describe the underlying stakes of *ars topiaria* as the interplay and reciprocal formation of topics and topography. From the early Middle Ages at least, the garden has not only been a privileged domain where systems of mnemonic images found a space in which to develop, but also a major space where the art of memory, threatened with marginalization in the overall economy of knowledge, found both a refuge and a possibility of renewal. In the perspective I am adopting here, the territory's transformation into landscape, as effected in the art of gardens, can be compared to the project of constituting systems of places and making them available for individual and collective memory. *Ars topiaria* seems to have been this great laboratory for the semanticization of the territory: an art 'applied to making the earth more habitable',<sup>15</sup> easier to appropriate by language, transforming it into something like a palette – or a stage – where thought can lodge its own signs and display the full range of its different states or moods.

According to John Dixon Hunt, the idea of the garden as a theatre of memory disappeared quite naturally when the art of gardens ceased to be explicitly conceived as an art of representation,<sup>16</sup> that is, when, with the English picturesque, it began to dream of identifying itself with nature or with the landscape 'as is'. Which does not mean that the question of memory has abandoned that of the garden – nor that a new discipline or art of memory could not be reinvented there today.

<sup>12</sup> For the original meaning of the expression *ars topiaria*, I refer to the introductory chapter of a magnificent, unpublished diploma paper by Georges Farhat, devoted to the optical plot of the *Parc des Sceaux: Optique topiaire*, diploma paper, École d'architecture de Paris-Belleville, 1993.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. John Dixon Hunt, *L'Art du jardin et son histoire* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 1996). In this little book, the author's thesis of the garden as *terza natura* or art of representation is developed with particular clarity. See also chapter 3 of his *Greater Perfections: the Practice of Garden Theory* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000): 'The Idea of a Garden and the Three Natures'.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. John Dixon Hunt, *L'Art du jardin et son histoire* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 1996). In this little book, the author's thesis of the garden as *terza natura* or art of representation is developed with particular clarity. See also chapter 3 of his *Greater Perfections: the Practice of Garden Theory* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000): 'The Idea of a Garden and the Three Natures'.

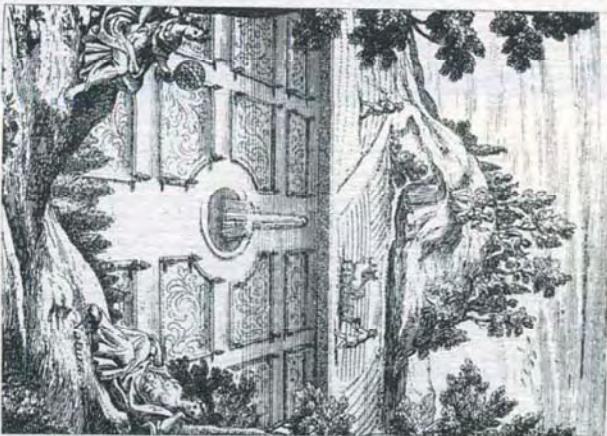
<sup>15</sup> Adopting a much more theoretical tone, with an artificialist viewpoint inspired by Oscar Wilde, Alain Roger in his *Court traité du paysage* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987) has proposed the term *artificialisation* to account for the process whereby the land is transformed into landscaper, *artificialisation* can be carried out *in situ* (painting, literary description, photography, cinema, etc.) or *in situ* (garden, landscaping,...). Although the emphasis it lays on the artistic origin of the notion of landscape is quite stimulating, this conception appears reductive, indeed rather dangerous, when it leads the author to disqualify, on principle, geography and the environmental sciences: 'from any competence for the "treatment" of the landscape. In my view the notion of representation, though more traditional than that of "artificialisation", is also richer, more subtle and less complacent, allowing one to establish more circumspect viewpoints on these issues. For an eminently reasonable critique of Alain Roger's book, see the review by Jacques Dewitte, 'L'artificialisation et son autre', *Critique* 613-14, 1998, pp. 348-66.

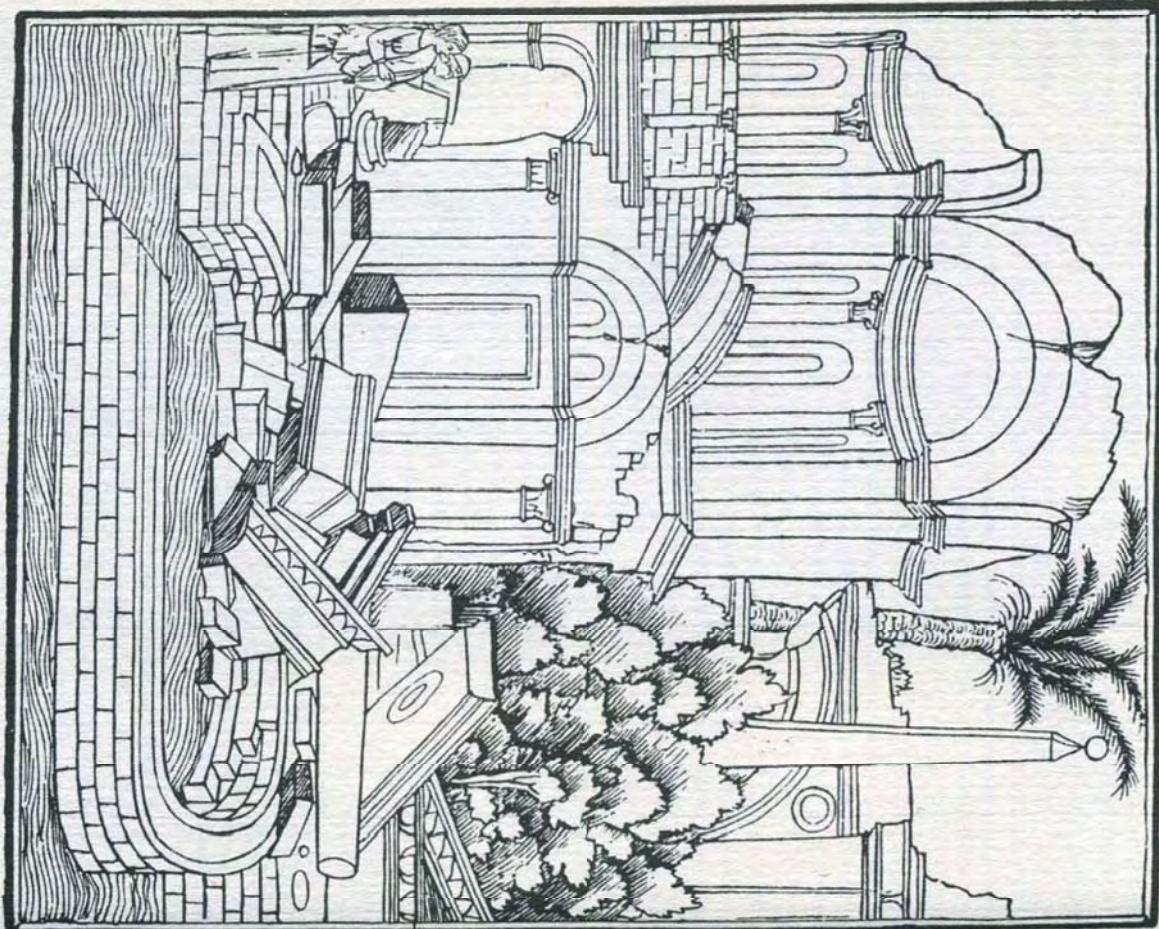
<sup>16</sup> Cf. Thierry Manjane, *L'Univers de Le Nostre, ou les origines de l'aménagement du territoire* (Spiral: Mandragore, 1997), and Leonardo Benevolo, *La Cattura dell'infinito* (Rome: Laterza, 1991).

<sup>20</sup> I borrow this expression from Patrick Geddes, who defined his concept of *geotechnics* as 'applied geography'. The idea of sub-urbanism may stand, in a way, as a reactivation of the idea of geotechnics.

<sup>21</sup> In his essay 'Landscape As Theater', in *The Necessity for Ruins and Other Topics* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980), J.B. Jackson precisely situates, between the late fifteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the period when the metaphor of the theatre governed the perception of landscapes and the construction of gardens in Europe. Although this classical metaphor has progressively lost its validity ever since, we have not been able to fully replace it either: '...with the final rejection of the Classical metaphor of landscape as theatre the search was on for a new and more vivid way of defining the landscape. We are still searching....' See also 'Gardens to Decipher and Gardens to Admire', in the same book.

Frontispiece of Pierre Le Lorrain de Vallemont, *Curiosités de la nature et de l'art et son histoire*, (1703), from John Dixon Hunt, *L'Art du jardin et son histoire*.





2

'Due to the devouring time,  
the decay of age and negligence,  
this building had collapsed onto  
the damp earth, leaving here and  
there a shaft without a capital,  
or a headless trunk of some  
immense column of Persian  
stone...'

*Hypnagogia Poliphili*