

THE PRISON AND THE GARDEN

by David Bell

Pour tout membre de la civilisation occidentale, chaque jardin est un rappel du paradis dont l'homme fut banni lorsqu'il perdit son innocence. De même, chaque prison est un testament de cette chute et de la perte de liberté associée à sa faute. A cause de ces évocations, le jardin et la prison sont deux côtés de la même médaille. L'essai qui suit examine l'attitude de l'homme face à l'objet et aux relations spatiales entre ces objets en tant que composantes de la nature et de l'histoire, et ceci dans le contexte de l'utopie.

For members of western civilization, every garden is a reminder that man was banished from paradise when he lost his innocence and every prison is a testament to that fall and the loss of freedom associated with guilt. Because of these powerful human implications, the garden and the prison as institutions appear perhaps as two sides of the same coin. Unquestionably, they signify much about man's attitude toward both the object and the relationships among objects in space as facts of nature and history. The present essay intends to examine these two tendencies to form not in terms of any one particular utopia, but with regard to what they imply for the utopian impulse in general.

In 1755, a powerful earthquake struck Lisbon. The effects of its devastation, however, extended far beyond the great loss of lives (50,000) and of property to violently shake the confident and optimistic world-view which had been promulgated throughout much of Europe during the first half of the 18th century by Leibniz, Lord Shaftesbury and many others. This optimism centered around the belief that a divine reason guided the workings of the universe. The sublimity of God's balance was believed to be convincingly manifested by Newton's formulations in mathematics, optics, mechanics

and astronomy. But this natural catastrophe in Lisbon (which had been preceded by a less disastrous, but still serious quake in Lima, Peru in 1746), this most unreasonable of events, provoked Voltaire in *Candide* to demand of the "optimistic" spokesmen for God's grand design an explanation for this capricious cruelty.

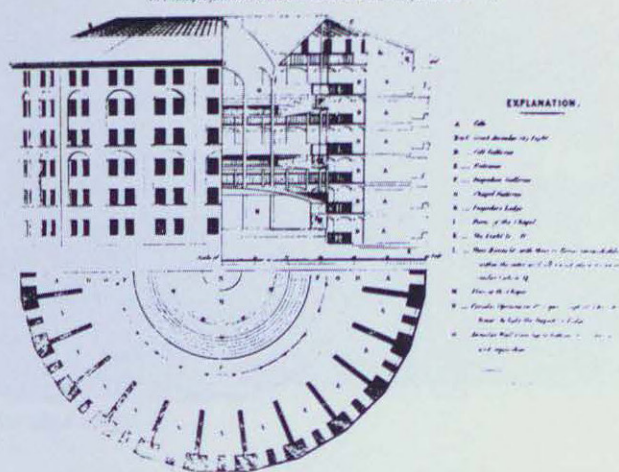
In addition to these natural precipitators of intellectual ferment in Europe, there were several cultural auguries of pending cataclysm. In the 17th century, Blaise Pascal viewed with some alarm the fact that space as a bounded entity, in which man anchored his identity and existence, was becoming redefined as another natural phenomenon to be subjected to the remorseless lens of scientific scrutiny. Experience within space, he feared, would be reduced to formulae referred to a homogeneous, endlessly extensive, abstract referential grid, a simulacrum of life space. Upon realizing the imminence of this impasse in western thought, Pascal's words—"the silence of these infinite spaces frightens me"—might easily have been a caption for any one of a number of the Carceri drawings, Giovanni Batista Piranesi's haunting architectural *capricci* (Fig. 1). These drawings, their distorted perspective suggesting both a potential disintegration of architectural form and three-dimensional space, also represent what seems to be an impossible combination of infinite space and the instruments of incarceration. Is it not a contradiction that the prison, the instrument for the restriction of one's being, can exist in a state of infinite spatial expanse?

With such prophecies and natural omens, a profound re-orientation in thought began in Europe and America of the latter-18th and early 19th centuries, with subsequent new



(fig. 1)

A General Idea of a PENITENTIARY PANOPTICON, as an Improved Jail or Prison (See Engraving) Engraved: After the Original Reference to Plans, Ellevation & Sections, being Plans referred to as (A, B, C, &c.)



(fig. 2)

manifestations of power and techniques for its application. A need also emerged to make sense out of the rapidly multiplying and confused variety within the progress of events. The art of making architecture and cities was significantly affected by these changes. It was perhaps at this time that these essences began to change and that their abilities to radiate meaning began to atrophy. They no longer could act with complete authority as the visible, tangible representations of the entirety of the power which motivates a society and its culture; they became instead instruments for the exercise of that power.

The thinkers of the Enlightenment had sought to banish darkness, superstition and mysticism from man's affairs with the physical world through the clarifying instrument of human reason. Visibility and transparency, the ideas that all men and all things ought to be revealed in their complete truth, were essential to this. When these values were applied to human affairs, one of their immediate consequences was the articulation of everyman's right to the "pursuit of happiness". Attending the late 18th century rise of the fruits of Enlightenment thought—i.e., emergent democracies, industrialization, the redistribution of wealth and the broadening of the arena of scientific investigation—was a focussing of this proliferation of knowledge on man as an individual and social phenomenon. To accommodate this dramatic increase in the corpus of knowledge and serve the numerous aspects of this newly discovered entity, man, its various components became institutionalized. These institutions took forms similar to those of the past, such as schools, asylums, hospitals and prisons. However, with the proliferation of each as discrete functions of society, their programmes changed radically to concentrate on the values implicit to the *apothegm* "pursuit of happiness". And in order to improve, cure and reform more effectively those committed to their care, these institutions had to develop an efficient technology for both observation and discipline. Intimate knowledge of every detail of the lives of their charges became an imperative.¹

In many ways the attitudes taken toward the incarcerated in this era underwent the most radical change and had the

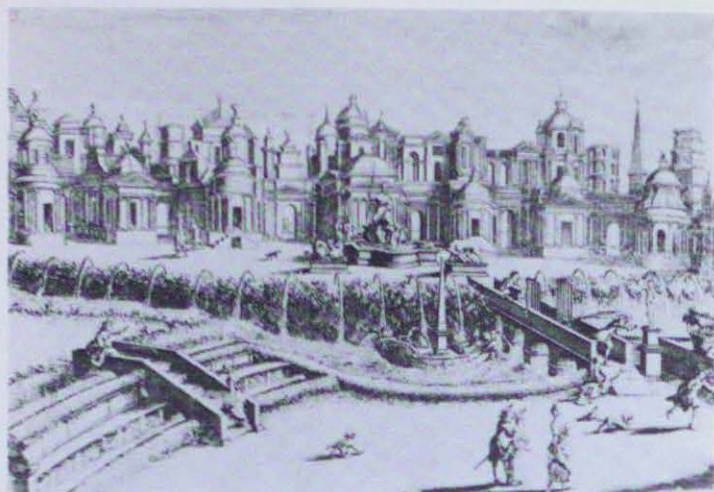
"Everyone is entrapped in such a device, those who exercise power as well as those over whom it is exercised."

most dramatic ramifications for the whole of society. If this social whole was to become improved so that there would be the greatest good for the greatest number, then the criminal element could not simply be punished by being deprived of liberty for a period of time commensurate with their offense, because in prison they are in constant fraternity with other criminals. They must be purged of their desire to do wrong. A sense of conscience that they may never have had or that was weak must be inculcated into them. But it was also in the prison that the forces of society had total legal access to a healthy individual 24 hours a day. The prison was the ideal laboratory for the development of the techniques of a *felicific calculus*, an enlightened approach developed by Jeremy Bentham for the handling of human affairs and the general improvement of mankind by applying rational methods to the measurement, analysis, evaluation and reformation of the human soul. The Panopticon (Fig. 2), invented by Bentham, was the quintessential implement for applying the techniques of relentless, cold-blooded observation and discipline to achieve these ends. Ostensibly, here every action of the subject is maximally visible and the motivations of his soul completely transparent to the gaze of whatever anonymous eye occupies the central viewing platform. Further, the observation tower is so arranged that the penitents never know when they are being watched and have to assume that surveillance is constant. The idea of the Panopticon is to impress this sense of being watched so profoundly on the prisoner that it stays with him after his release into society. The insatiable thirst that such a machine has for knowledge about every square inch of the prisoner's body is diabolical because it demands that the watchers also be watched. Theoretically, the agency which empowers the Panopticon is democratic and, despite the centrality of it as an architectural form, power cannot be invested in a single individual. Everyone is entrapped in such a device, those who exercise power as well as those over whom it is exercised. Because the Panopticon presumes a social order wherein power is distributed with relative uniformity over the body of mankind, power cannot be isolated at any one point and its instrument, the Panopticon,

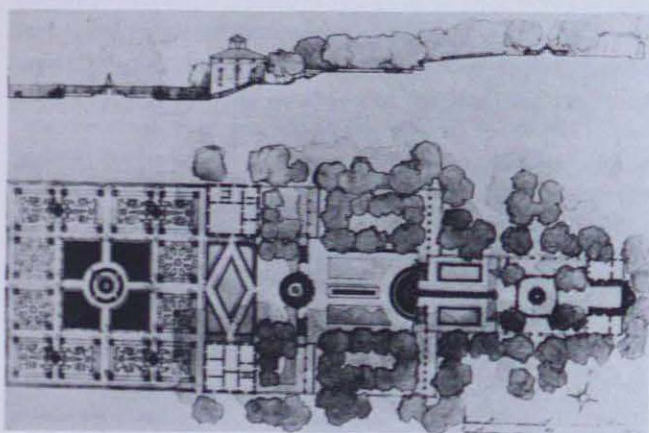
is "an apparatus of total and circulating mistrust".² This device which, both in theory and in practice, is intended to contribute to making each man whole and which, simply by its presence in a society, is supposed to lead men continuously to a repatriation with that society, is ironically the source and symbol of everyone's alienation. Where man was found as a discursive object, by the system of forces represented by the oppressive observational humidity of the Panopticon, was precisely where he was lost as a flesh and blood reality.

More than merely part of a utopian vision, the Panopticon was actually the description of an existent social situation. Despite the glibness of easy generalizations, it is all the above qualities of the Panopticon that make it, for Michel Foucault, who gave it a thorough examination in *Discipline and Punish*, so startlingly like life in the modern world: life that seems to be unremittingly subjected to a kind of scrutiny where all the objects that make it up are ceaselessly objectified, continually inspected, re-inspected and dissected to provide the knowledge upon which the exercise and maintenance of power in the modern world depends.

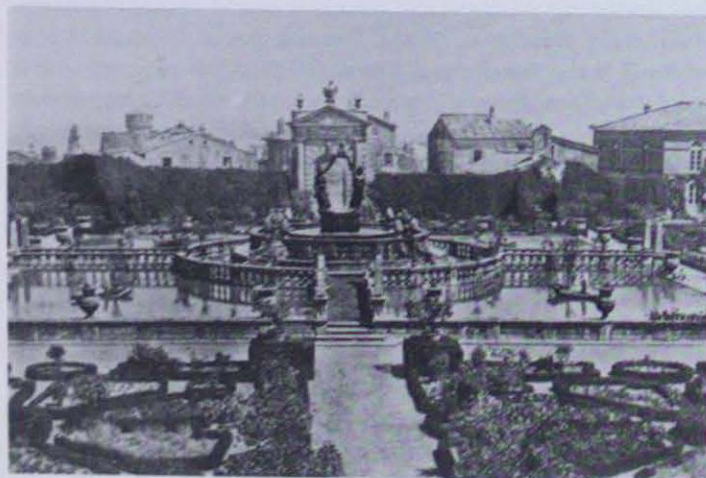
The quantity of knowledge in the modern world is prodigious. No one person can comprehend or control it, no cul-



(fig. 3) Villa d'Este



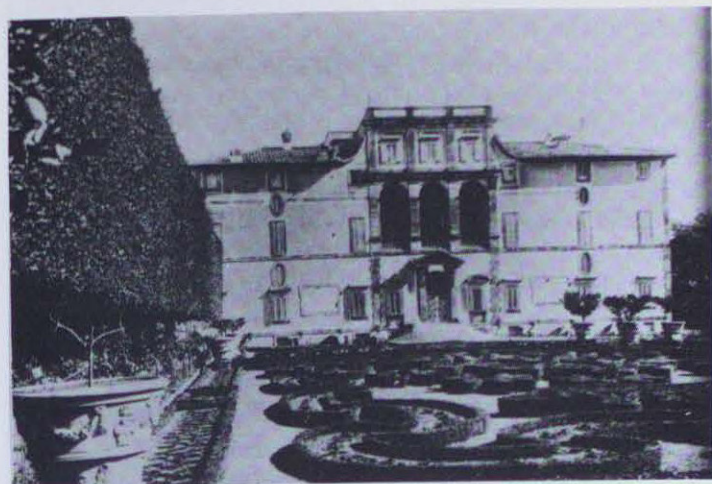
(fig. 5 and 6) Gardens of the Villa Lante



ture can contain it. Like power its chief characteristics are to be diffuse and be applicable equally at every point in space. Yet it is never visible, never tangible, never concrete and never capable of becoming permanently invested in any single monument, building, city or landscape. Francis Bacon's utopian literary invention, "New Atlantis", an island of scientists with one secret eye always trained on the affairs of the world outside and the other turned inward to order the nature within its borders with comprehensive instrumentality, was in principle not unlike Bentham's Panopticon. This 16th century English philosopher summed up this situation clearly and concisely: "knowledge is power".

While the Panopticon was insinuating itself more securely into the world and gradually transforming its objects into tokens of knowledge to play out the endless games of power, the landscape, as a physical fact of geography, became, in the 18th century, synonymous with the practice of gardening, heretofore a finite activity.

The garden of the Italian Renaissance and its theory were the primary inspirational sources for most of the formal gardens to be carried out in Europe from the 16th to the 19th centuries. Much of what Alberti in his 15th-century treatise *De re aedificatoria libri decem* recommends for villa gardens are values which he believed necessary to recouperate from antiquity. Alberti, like Pliny, whose first century A.D. descriptions of the gardens at his country villas were well-known to him, seems to be in favour of thinking about the garden as a place where the entire human sensorium is stimulated. He also recommends for reasons of classical precedent that there be "Grottoes and Caverns with all manner of rough work", some of these to be dawbed with "Green Wax in Imitation of the mossy Slime which we always see in moist Grottoes". The garden should include, in addition to nature and nature-like formations, historical remembrances such as statues of gods, goddesses, nymphs, etc. from classical antiquity. Built in the mid-16th century, the Villa d'Este in Tivoli boasts the Rometta, a fanciful replica of ancient Rome (Fig. 3).



(fig. 4) Villas Lancelotti

Yet, whatever their extent, the collection of things in the garden should be well ordered and as Alberti recommends composed of "those Figures that are most commended in the Plans of Houses, Circles, Semicircles and the like". Also, the villa garden should be walled, i.e., clearly delimited. The whole thing, villa and garden, should be situated on a slope both to catch the sun more advantageously as well as to be able to look out of the garden to the pleasant prospects of the surrounding countryside.

Throughout the Renaissance and Baroque periods, the attitude that the garden should have specific limits prevailed. Even Versailles, despite its enormity, was very specifically limited by its organization within a broad shallow depression of landscape, a conscious choice that would augment the illusion that its limits coincided with those of the world. In Italy, the garden was conceived as a work distinguishable from "arbitrary" nature by its organization into various parts, *parterre*, *bosco*, *giardino segreto*, an articulation of parts that was authorized by antiquity.³ The villas of Frascati in the Roman campagna epitomize this (Fig. 4). In Italy, the villa and its garden taken as a whole were not an attempt to manufacture an artificial cosmos distinct from the natural world as at Versailles, but were more of a brief insertion or interlude in nature without necessarily being an interruption in its continuity. The gardens of the Villa Lante (Figs. 5-6) at Bagnaia by Vignola, because they are a continuous transformation from *selvatico*, or untamed nature, to the town and also because the architecture of the villa is not centralized into one mass, but distributed into two identical casinos, represent this idea clearly. All these events at the Villa Lante seem to qualify its gardens as an entity distinct from architecture, nature and the city.

Except in the singular case of Versailles, the garden prior to the 18th century was not consciously intended as a direct reflection of the prevailing world view, nor was it indicative on a polemical level of man's understanding of the relationship between nature and himself. Without belittling the marvelous and varied garden works of the 16th and 17th centu-

ries, the garden during this period was in many ways a diversion, a bibelot plucked out of nature as one might pick a rare flower to display in a vase. But the subtleties of creating such pleasures can have consequences far beyond immediate gratification. Frequently the garden has been the site of formal experiments which ultimately influenced developments at the urban scale. An early and significant example of such experimentation can be found at the Villa Montalto, near Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome, done by Domenico Fontana in the 1570's for Cardinal Montalto. Here can be seen diverging from the main gate three avenues in the form of a trident (Fig. 7). In 1585, the Cardinal ascended to the Papacy as Sixtus V, mastermind of the visionary reorganization and remapping of Rome. One of the key features of this plan was the strengthening of the reading of the three existing Roman streets (Via del Corso, Via di Ripetta and Via del Babuino) as a trident by marking with an obelisk their point of divergence at the Piazza del Popolo where the Porta del Popolo, the main entry to the city from the north, occurs (Fig. 8).

John Locke, physician and political advisor to Anthony Ashley Cooper, 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury, was among the earliest and most influential of the Enlightenment thinkers. He



(fig. 7)



(fig. 8)

was literally a philosopher of common sense who believed that knowledge comes to us as an impingement on the senses. By holding that the study of one's own nature will lead to true knowledge, he defined the principal Enlightenment viewpoint—that the dark mysticism of metaphysical speculation and stratospheric hypothesizing of the theologians led to epistemological casuistries incompatible with a rational understanding of the world. Locke attempted to demonstrate that all we know comes from our reflection on the world outside us, i.e., the sensible objects of the world, in a word, nature, and takes form in the mind as ideas. Locke's epistemology was essential to 18th-century man's rediscovery of nature.

As the natural world became a central intellectual concern in this era, the art of gardening, an activity obviously rooted in nature, came to be linked significantly to thought in a way never before nor since seen. In his writings, the Earl of Shaftesbury celebrated nature as an absolute good and proposed a kind of pantheism. His advocacy of the concept "genius loci", along with Joseph Addison's desire to found a theory of aesthetics based on sensual appreciation, inaugurated a belief which lasted throughout the century that man's role in the world is to be the improver of nature.

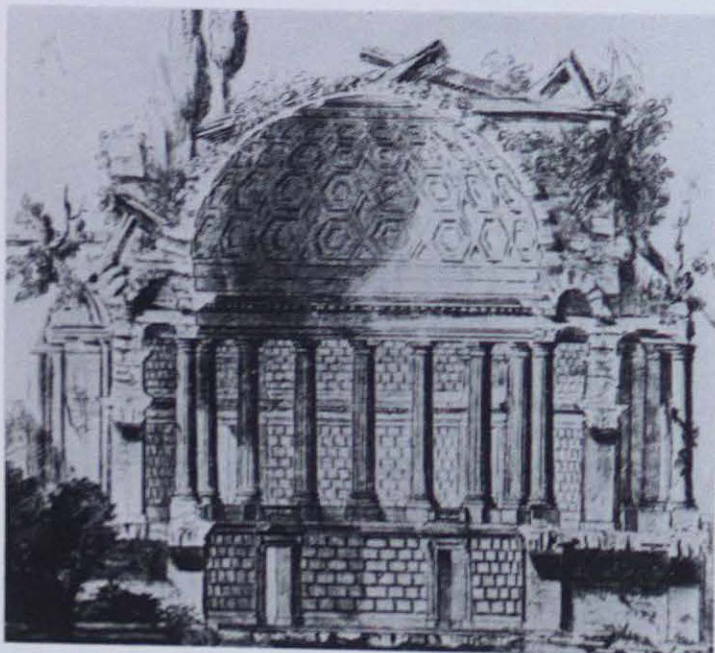
The dream landscape containing strange and terrifying creatures and the remnants of the mathematically perfect architecture of a lost civilization which Francesco Colonna described in his 15th century book, *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, albeit thoroughly retrospective, is somewhat an inadvertent prophecy of the 18th century European landscape.

The development of the English garden was greatly influenced by the Italian garden which, despite its unambiguous boundaries, always allowed views to untamed nature. And, like the Italian garden, the English garden was a collection of objects and stimulating sensations, rare and exotic plant materials, sculpture, antiquities, etc. With the invention of the ha-ha (Fig. 9) in the early 18th century the English garden could extend into the landscape without obvious visible interruption. This new accessibility to the landscape, coupled with the contemporaneous popularity of Claude Lorrain's

paintings of the Italian landscape, permitted the nature of the garden to be redefined to extend it into a landscape now conceived as a collection of pictures, like Claude's, idealizing the Italian countryside. The vistas of these gardens were populated with some of the accoutrements of the paintings, i.e., reminiscences of lost order, freshly fabricated classical buildings either whole or in ruin. The construction of ruins (Fig. 10) came to be popular because they could more forcefully evoke melancholia and nostalgia for a lost order as well as appreciation for the power of nature. Further, the sinuous and variegated profile of the ruin was a significant fact for aesthetic theories based on Locke's epistemology.

At Leasowes, William Shenstone transformed the landscape into a narrative. At every significant view in this park there was an accompanying literary reference engraved in stone or otherwise displayed nearby which was a hint, message or allusion to what one should feel or think while surveying the prospect.⁴ In the latter-18th century Lancelot "Capability" Brown amalgamated all the ideas discussed above and created landscape parks noted for their unity as spatial wholes. Taking advantage of the principle of ambiguous boundaries, he made subtle changes in existing natural features to make them appear more natural and detailed obviously man-made features in favour of a wilder appearance. Inspired by the landscape's *genius loci*, he was therefore capable of making the landscape park, the domain of man, appear to extend infinitely.

During this period, landscape development on the continent was seized with *anglomanie*, an intensification of English efforts to populate the countryside with innumerable symbols, indigenous and non-indigenous, of human and natural history. Entire parks like Hohenheim near Stuttgart were developed over extensive constructions, made to look like the ruins of an ancient city. At Desert de Retz, near Marly, where de Monville had constructed his famous ruined column house, he also built fantastic grottoes complete with larger-than-life torch-carrying satyrs. Here, one could experience directly the wild, primitive, frightening and overwhelming qualities of the sublime; while at Worlitz near Dessau, a work-



(fig. 9)

(fig. 10)

ing, smoke and fire-belching volcano was built.⁵ Through the 18th century, the landscapes of England and Europe gradually filled up with objects imported from all over the world, antique reconstructions, replicas of nature and narrative events; they were being converted into receptacles for knowledge, encyclopaedias of collected objects and experiences.

It is perhaps significant that one of the earliest manifestations of the Panopticon model discussed above appeared several years before Bentham actually articulated its theory. It is significant also that it appeared not as a prison or even as a single building, but as a community of workers under the aegis of the state. It is further significant that it appeared as a landscape event. The Royal Salt Works, the Arc-de-Senans at Chaux (Figs. 11-12) designed by Claude-Nicholas Ledoux in the 1770's was portentous in many ways. Despite not having the rigid programme of the prison, it still had a strict discipline. Knowledge was registered, activity regulated and power emanated from a central observation point in the semi-circular plan (originally it was planned as a square, then an oval, then a circle). The *raison d'être* of this worker city and its regulated society epitomizes modern man's unique attitude toward the natural world: the scientific extraction of wealth directly from nature. Ledoux continued to work on Chaux as a utopian project long after its actual building stopped. It was during these explorations that he developed some of his most unique architectural visions. He proposed that buildings, and their various parts, be articulated in this city as large-scale symbolic statements of their functional purposes. This kind of environmental legibility seems consistent with a Panopticon-like programme and was a clear premonition of future efforts to conceive of the city as a planned and completely readable text, an instrument of economic development and social control.

Throughout the 19th century, one can find, both in theory and practice, the development of other worker communities within the landscape. In many cases the physical form of these is conceived purely as an implement to serve an economic end. Two notable ones are New Lanark developed by Robert Owen, who had once been in partnership with Jeremy

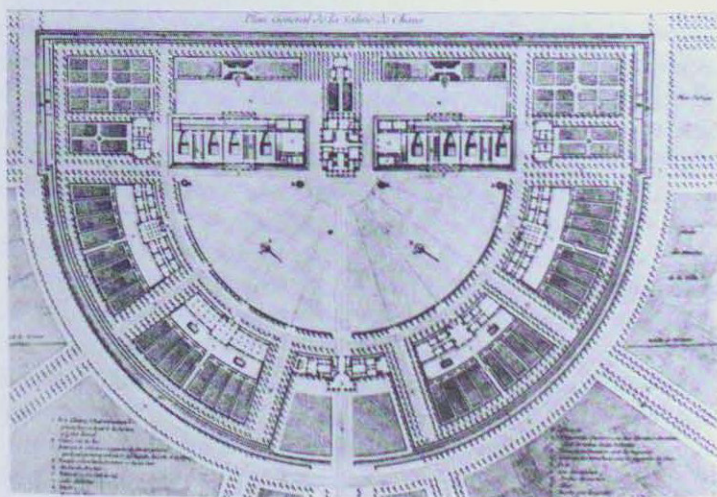
Bentham on several ventures, and the phalanstery of Charles Fourier. The latter community was never realized in any of its proposed states by Fourier. Fourier had, however, conceived of the idea of the garden city and hoped that his worker communes of limited scale would some day cover the earth.

In 1816, Claude Henri de Saint-Simon forecast a hierarchically-ordered industrialized society controlled by an elite class of managers who were independent of political processes. Just about one hundred years later Le Corbusier developed the essential formal models for the twentieth-century city, the Ville Contemporaine and Ville Radieuse. These epitomized and recollected not only the social ideals expressed by Saint-Simon but combined these with the landscape garden to form an urban prototype expressive of the ideology of knowledge. For here, architectural objects were to be so abundantly clear in their ability to communicate their functional essence that the need for symbolic formations could at last be declared dead. The city and its architecture in the twentieth century had been able to fulfill the Enlightenment promise of transparency. The garden and the prison had become fused.

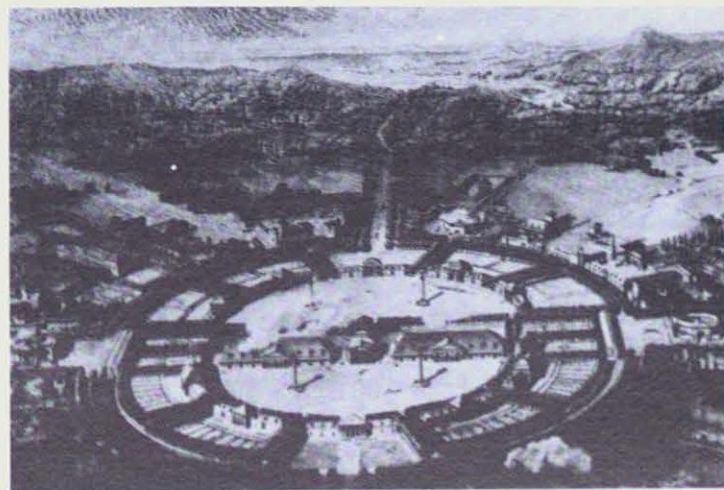
NOTES:

1. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, translated by Alan Sheridan, Vintage Books, New York, 1979, pp.195-228.
2. ———, *Power/Knowledge*, translated by Colin Gordon et al., Pantheon Books, New York, 1980, p.158.
3. For example, such gardening concepts are referred to, but not specifically articulated, in Pliny's letters to Gallus about his Laurentine villa and to Domitius Apollinaris about his Tuscan villa.
4. See William Shenstone's *Unconnected Thoughts on Gardening*, p.128 and also R. Dodsley's *A Description of Leasowes*, pp.335-336, p.340. Both were published for R. and J. Dodsley, London, 1764 and republished by Garland, New York, 1982 and edited by John Dixon Hunt.
5. Marie Luise Gothein, *A History of Garden Art*, Volume II, edited by Walter P. Wright and translated by Mrs. Archer-Hind, Hacker Art Books, New York, 1966, pp.303-304.

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(fig. 11) The Royal Salt Works



(fig. 12) The Arc-de-Senans

“The garden and the prison had become fused.”