Os and *Bucca*: Communicative Disorder in the Italian Mannerist Garden

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This article examines the relationship between meaning and experience in the Italian Mannerist garden, using two different aspects of the mouth: the mouth as *os* and the mouth as *bucca*. The tension between communicative order and disorder is conceptualised and clarified as expressed in the Mannerist garden.

To the Renaissance ideals of beauty, balance and proportion, Mannerism counter-proposes principles such as unresolved tension, frustration, paradox and disturbed balance.[1] Mannerist works of art attempt to express these terms on a communicative level, taking on multiple layers of meaning which initiated visitors are to read.[2] In this context, the Mannerist garden becomes a communicative medium, producing and maintaining in tension two different ways of articulating meaning: first, the enunciation of narratives, and second, the constitution of sensorial experiences. Due

1 Creighton Gilbert, review of Wylie Sypher *Four Stages of Renaissance Style: Transformations in Art and Literature 1400-1700* (1955), *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 14:3 (1956), 394-95 (p. 395).
2 Ernst Gombrich, *To chroniko tis technis (The Story of Art)*, trans. by Lina Kasdagli, (Athens, Morphotiko Idryma Ethnikis Trapezis, 1998), pp. 361-62.

to this unresolved tension, the production of meaning and, consequently, communicative order and disorder are constantly left seeking for balance.

Mannerist gardens narrate: they articulate incessant speech, implying the presence of a speaking mouth. Through the correlation of sculptures with, and through, sequences of spaces and mythological narrations, a discourse is established in the garden. It is, in fact, a theatrical play which takes place before the eyes of the visitors. On the one hand, the garden speaks with a mouth which, though not visible, was audible to the initiated. Understanding the narration of the garden demanded knowledge, either of texts from Roman antiquity like Virgil's *Aeneid*, the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid, the letters of Pliny the Younger, or of texts more or less contemporary to the gardens, like the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili,* Dante's *Divine Comedy* or Petrarch's *De Vita Solitaria*. On the other hand, sculptural depictions of mouths appear again and again in an obsessive manner. Here, the function of the mouth as verbal agent is subverted, and instead another kind of mouth is promoted—a mouth more primitive and primordial than that which speaks, a mouth that either effuses water constantly, in a vomiting-like manner, or gapes open ready to scream, to eat or to swallow. The mouth of the garden does speak, but it does other things, too. These two aspects of the mouth, verbal agent and bodily orifice, suggest 'the distinction of the mouth between *os* and *bucca*, the latter being more primitive than the former'.[3] *Os*, from which the word 'oral' is derived, refers to a mouth capable of articulating speech. The garden as *os* speaks a language, and as Ferdinand de Saussure puts it, every language presupposes a contract between the members of a community.[4] The garden's *os* cannot be understood by everyone. *Bucca* refers to a mouth capable of communicating sentiments in a way both sensorial and pre-verbal, yet universal. We may recall Darwin's book *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals,* where he emphasises the universality of the communication of facial expressions.[5]

It is fairly well-known that the binary of nature and art, which in Renaissance gardens was in a state of resolved repression, is accentuated by Mannerist gardens, producing a constant ambivalence.[6] Through this opposition, the gardens constitute a third term, which the humanist monk Jacobo Bonfadio and later Bartolomeo Taegio named 'third nature'.[7] *Bucca* and *os* parallel this binary of nature and art: *bucca* is the 'natural', the primordial mouth, while *os* is the artificial, the cultural construct. Mannerist gardens establish a hybrid communicative medium: they construct a third mouth, where the two modes of communication are intertwined.

In order to understand the changes that were introduced by the Renaissance and later by the Mannerist garden, a brief historical examination is necessary. The great shift brought about by the Renaissance

3 Derrida, *On Touching–Jean-Luc Nancy*, trans. by Christine Irizarry (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), pp. 20-21.
4 Ferdinand de Saussure, *Mathimata Genikis Glossologias* (*Course in General Linguistics*), trans. by F. D. Apostolopoulos (Athens: Papazisi, 1979), p.44.
5 See Charles Darwin, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*.
6 Grazia Gobbi Sica, *The Florentine Villa: Architecture, History, Society,* trans. by Ursula Greigh (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), p. 72.
7 Thomas Beck, 'Gardens as a Third Nature: the Ancient Roots of a Renaissance Idea', *Studies in the History of Gardens & Designed Landscapes*, 22:4 (2002), 327-34.

garden was the conceptualisation of both the villa and the garden as constructions subject to common organising principles.[8] This brought to an end the irreconcilability of architecture and nature as well as the notion of a garden as a succession of fragments lacking a coherent composition. During the Renaissance, the development of the natural sciences revealed nature as rational, and as an expression of an imperceptible yet accessible order. This contrasts with the medieval conception of nature as absolute disorder, the patterns of which were chaotic and unpredictable.[9] In this new notion of order expressed by the garden, the ground occupies a preeminent role since it is the surface on which the plan is projected, and upon which the geometrical rules which govern both the villa and the garden are established. Through geometry and proportion, nature is formalised and, it is presumed, expresses its hidden principles; analogously, by means of perspectives, the visitor's visual experience could itself be designed and predicted.

Gardens have been appendages to villas since the High Renaissance; they have a complementary role and are subject to the organisational principles of the villa. In Mannerism, this condition is inverted: the villas are integrated into the garden's organisational principles, as the latter defines the narrative and sensorial frame of perception. While the Renaissance garden is an affirmation of the owner's sovereignty with undisputed emphasis on geometry over the organic, on art over nature, on order over disorder, in Mannerism, the garden is imbued with ambiguity and ambivalence and interest shifts to the tension between the binaries instead of promoting one term over the other.[10] In this system, the villa may maintain its centrality in stabilising meanings; at other times, it becomes just a term in a binary system; and yet at other times it is significantly absent.

Two examples will guide us through our investigation, both of which take 'communicative disorder' to the extreme: the Villa Medici di Castello, one of the first Mannerist gardens, and the Sacro Bosco in Bomarzo, the culmination of Mannerist garden experimentations. The former, although seemingly a very ordered garden, introduces spatial innovations which imbue the garden with communicative ambiguity; the latter, grounded in these innovations, is the manifestation of organisational and communicative disorder.

GARDEN OF VILLA MEDICI DI CASTELLO

Villa Medici di Castello is located about ten kilometres northwest of Florence in the foothills of the Apennine Mountains. The construction of its garden started in about 1538. It was designed mainly by the sculptor, architect and hydraulic engineer Niccolo Tribolo, although Bartolommeo Ammannati was also involved in the design. The garden today has been

8 Sica, *The Florentine Villa*, p. 72.
9 Clemens Steenbergen and Wouter Reh, *Architecture and Landscape: The Design Experiment of the Great European Gardens and Landscapes*, rev. edn. (Basel: Birkhauser, 2003), p. 22.
10 Sica, *The Florentine Villa*, p. 72.

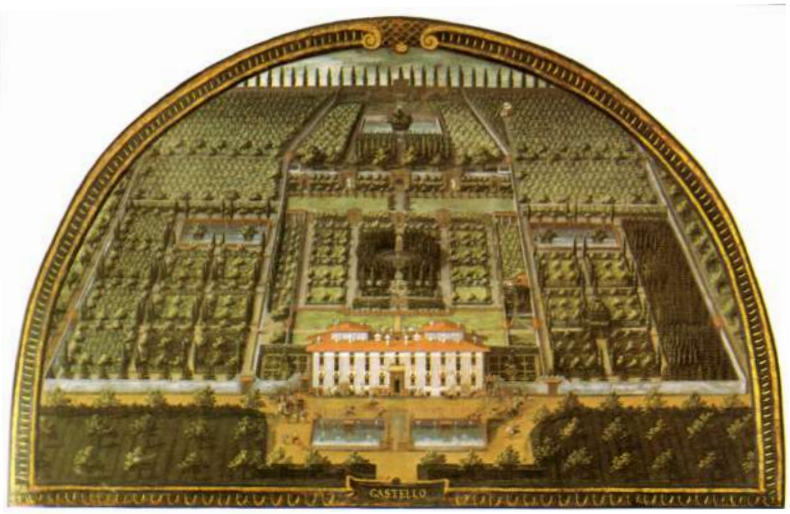


Figure 1: Giusto Utens, *Villa Medicea di Castello*, c. 1588, Petraia Villa Medici. Wikimedia Commons [accessed 24 April 2018].

drastically altered; thus our analysis will be supplemented by the extensive description of Giorgio Vasari and by the bird's-eye painting of Giusto Utens (Figure 1).[11]

The garden consists of three sequential and discrete parts, each of which is located on a higher level in respect to the former. The first part is a square garden divided into square compartments and dominated by a circular labyrinth, in the centre of which there was a sculpture of Venus. The second one is an elongated rectangle, with its main axis vertical to the garden's axis. It is located about one metre above the previous one, the two separated from one another by a retaining wall. A second retaining wall runs along the other long side, supporting the third garden. In the middle of this wall—at the end of the main axis and below the third garden—sits an excavated *grotto*. The third part is dominated by the *bosco*, while a pool collects and utilises the water of the aqueduct designed by Tribolo. In the centre of the pool, there is a sculpture by Ammannati, depicting Appennino with his arms around his body as though shivering.[12]

Villa Medici di Castello is one of the first Mannerist gardens; hence, before we try to understand the dialectics of communicative order and disorder, we should understand its spatial innovations. First, it established a new garden typology, and second, it introduced the *grotto* (cave), the *bosco* (forest) and the labyrinth as central compositional motifs.

The first spatial innovation of the Villa Medici di Castello is that it establishes a garden typology where movement acquires a narrative and cinematic dimension. As one enters from the lower level of the garden there is a gradual revelation of spaces and exhibits; this contrasts with the organisational principles of the Renaissance gardens, where one could

11 Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors and Architects, Vol. 7 (of 10) Tribolo to Il Sodoma,* trans. by Gaston du C. De Vere (London: Macmillan and Co. Ld. & the Medici Society, Ld., 1914) pp. 1-38 <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/31845/31845.txt> [accessed 9 March 2018]

12 Claudia Lazzaro, 'River Gods: Personifying Nature in Sixteenth-Century Italy', *Renaissance Studies*, 25:1 (2011), 70-94 (p. 93).

survey the whole by entering from the highest level. In the course of this movement a gradual transformation occurs: from a highly formalised design where art imposes its formal laws on nature, to a more 'natural' one where the distinction between artificial and natural becomes blurred, and the artificial must disguise itself in naturalistic form. So, before looking for meaning in the garden's iconography, we must understand the meaning which this elemental syntax produces.

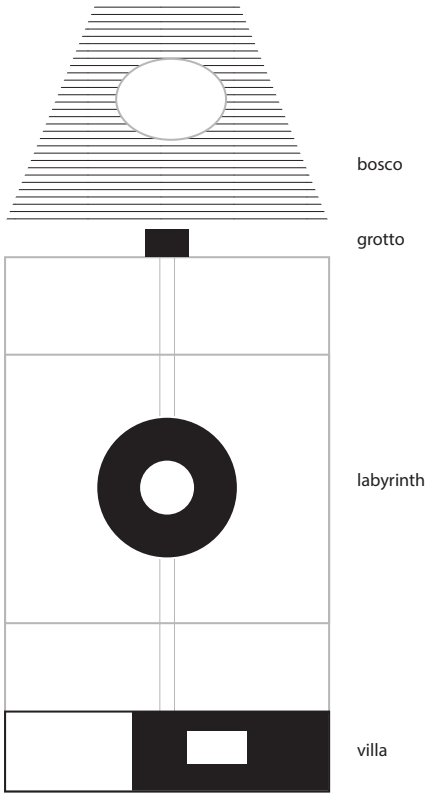
Based upon observation of a series of Mannerist gardens such as Villa Medici di Castello, Villa Lante, Villa Aldobrandini or Villa d'Este, we might condense the syntactic rules for the production of meaning to certain key principles. The aforementioned graduation along the central axis establishes the elemental narrative of transition from the artificial to the natural. Furthermore, there is a counterpoint along this axis, where an element is repeated or altered, or where it assumes a more 'natural' state. The counterpoint produces meaning through difference. In Villa Lante, for example, two *casini* (literally, 'small houses') welcome the visitors, whose itinerary ends up in a *nympheum* between two other *casini*, which have now been converted into caves. In Villa Aldobrandini there are also symmetrical counterpoints with the villa being the centre of symmetry, organising the generation of meaning.

The second spatial innovation was the introduction of the *grotto*, the *bosco* and the labyrinth. Integrated into and organised by the system of the garden, these three elements bring about topological complexity, density of meanings and a sensorial experience in which uncertainty and suspense are of primary importance. In the Villa Medici di Castello, not only are the same three elements introduced, but furthermore, they are located one after the other along the main axis (Figure 2a), perplexing sight, movements and meanings.

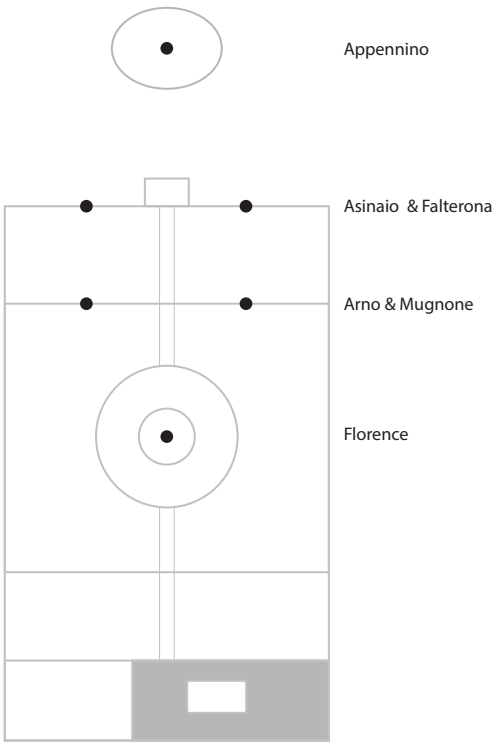
In contrast to the topological simplification of the medieval garden, which was designed as a wall-enclosed interior, the *grotto*, *bosco* and labyrinth pervade the Mannerist garden with a topological complexity. The *grotto*, as cave, is the inner interior which is externalised into the garden, while the *bosco*, as a part of a forest which is surrounded by the garden, is an exterior that has been internalised. The labyrinth, for its part, has an inherent topological ambiguity. As its boundaries keep folding in and out, it can be seen at the same time as both an interior and an exterior.

The *grotto*, the *bosco* and the labyrinth should not be considered 'untamed nature'—as it is typically put—but rather spatial metaphors which, through the negation of perspective, divest the visitor of any certainties.[13] The *bosco* creates a kind of uniform space, where orientation is rendered impossible, since the spatial image is almost undifferentiated in every direction. As the gardens keep developing, the *bosco* becomes all the more important. In Villa Lante, the *bosco* becomes an autonomous unity which surrounds the formalistic garden, while in Sacro Bosco, as its very name suggests, the whole garden has become a *bosco*. The *grotto*, in turn, is an artificial cave. Located more often than not at the end of an axis, it

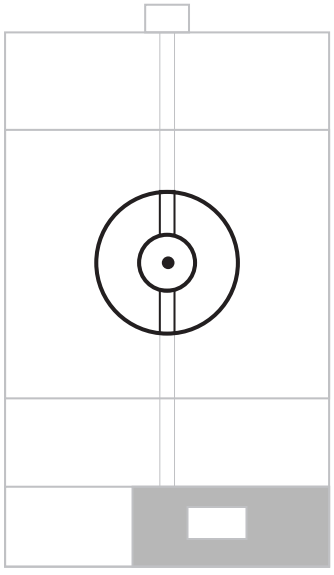
13 Steenbergen and Reh, *Architecture and Landscape*, p. 86.



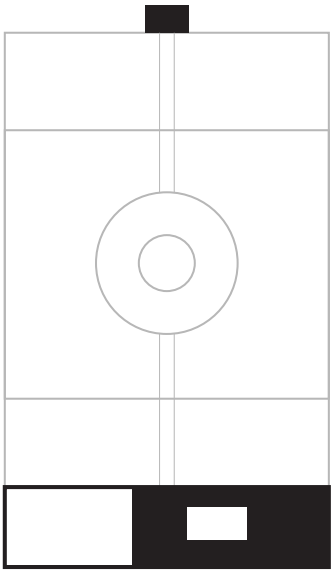
a. Sequence



b. Narrative



c. Central labyrinth



d. Dipole

negates the perspective horizon, since the vanishing point does not tend to infinity but instead disappears in the *grotto*'s dark hollow. In its interior, the absence of light and the dead-end claustrophobic space subvert the dominant role of sight, and instead the other senses assume the primary role. According to Battisti:

> [The] grotto is like a dome turned upside down, pointing to earth instead of towards the heavens. Its area of greatest interest is less the most luminous part than the darkest; the darkness we must move towards, while knowing this is not the road to knowledge but to mystery.[14]

In the labyrinth, sight once more is subverted since personal choices are rendered useless, a mere matter of arbitrarily selecting one path among others.

Having understood the spatial shifts that were introduced by Villa Medici di Castello, we now return to the narrative of the garden. As has previously been remarked by various commenters, in this garden one can find two narrative levels.[15] On a primary level the garden constitutes a model of Tuscan topography, where the sculptures personify geographical entities and are arranged in the garden in a way that emulates their actual spatial relationships. On the upper level and in the centre of the water pool there is a sculpture by Ammannati. It is Appennino, a personification of the Apennine Mountains, a dominant presence in the background of the garden. Water pours over his body from an outlet on top of his head, and he shivers. For the niches in the second retaining wall supporting the *bosco*, Tribolo planned, but never completed, sculpted fountains of two local mountains, the Asinaio and the Falterona. For the lower wall, in similar rustic niches directly below those intended for the mountains, Tribolo carved statues in sandstone of two local rivers, the Mugnone and Arno, which meet in Florence (Figure 2b).[16] Two water conduits were to pass from the sculpted mountains to the river gods, and then onto the fountain of Venus, which symbolises the city of Florence. On a secondary level, the iconographic program extolls the Medici family's predecessors and virtues, as well as Cosimo di Medici, the owner of the villa. On the main axis, just in front of the villa, a statue of Hercules crushing Antaios symbolises the victory of Cosimo di Medici over his political opponents for the rule of Florence. The garden was filled with statuary associating the virtues of ancient Rome with the power and virtue of the ruler of Florence.[17]

Nevertheless, this narration can only be perceived when one wanders off the main axis, and given that the axis is hierarchically the most important compositional element, one should ask what, if anything, the garden seeks

Figure 2 (opposite): Diagrams of Villa Medici di Castello. Authors, 2018. Created in reference to the Villa Medici di Castello entry on GardenVisit.com by Tom Turner [accessed 7 May 2018].

a. Sequence
b. Narrative
c. Central labyrinth
d. Dipole

14 Eugenio Battisti, *L'Antirinascimento: con un appendice di manoscritti inedita* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1962). p. 182; Sica, *The Florentine Villa*, p. 80.
15 Lazzaro, 'River Gods', pp. 86-87; Vasari, *Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors and Architects*.
16 Lazzaro, 'River Gods', pp. 86-87.
17 Helena Attlee, *Italian Gardens: A Cultural History* (London: Frances Lincoln, 2006), p. 240.

to narrate. The garden's narrative levels would be far clearer without the labyrinth or the *grotto*. We should ask ourselves what the placement of the Venus in a labyrinth connotes, and how the iconography of the *grotto* complements the rest of the garden's narrative. The movement along the main axis is constantly reversed. The labyrinth permits sight to penetrate to the other side but one must move peripherally through the labyrinth, where water jets unexpectedly drench the visitors (Figure 2c). Locating the labyrinth at the centre of the composition expresses a basic scepticism regarding man's ability to fully comprehend existence. The course of the labyrinth, which prevents any view beyond the imposed path, not only perplexes but removes any confidence one has in reality.[18] The labyrinth renders uncertainty and play motifs of the garden, producing a centrality which expresses scepticism about the idea of centrality as such.

Symmetrically opposed to the labyrinth, the villa and the *grotto* form a contrapuntal, dialectical relationship (Figure 2d). The counterpointing of the villa with the *grotto* is significant, and produces meaningful associations: cave opposed to house; firmly-founded building opposed to darkness; civilisation opposed to the untamed; art opposed to nature; and *os* opposed to *bucca*. On the one hand, the villa—the owner's residence—is the enclosed and secured space, and as such it is the representative of *os*. It is where speech can safely and freely circulate. On the other hand, the *grotto*, as the den of animals, is the space where *bucca* reigns. This links to later Mannerist gardens (f.e. Villa della Torre) where the *grotto* is explicitly adorned with gigantic depictions of mouths, thus intensifying the identification of *grotto* with *bucca*. The evocation of *bucca* is not only accomplished in an iconographic manner, but first and foremost by the spatial experience of the *grotto*. Here, once more, water jets surprise the visitors with a drenching while the entrance gate closes automatically, thus intensifying the uncertainty and suspense. The body is subjected to a violently sensorial attack, disrupting every attempt to articulate meaning. Although a host of interpretations have been proposed, the *grotto* subverts the two narrative levels of the garden in an ironic manner.[19] The animals represent Medici family members who are struggling to climb the ladder of power, while the ancestral landscape of Tuscany is replaced by a shadowy cave, the common ancestral womb of all humanity.[20]

The main axis constitutes a non-narrative perception of the garden. This playful and multisensory perception subverts the garden's intellectual and scholarly aspect. Along the axis, one is to abandon narration and interpretation in favour of play; that is, abandon intellectual perception in favour of bodily entanglement. Both in the labyrinth and in the *grotto* the body is forcefully compelled into contact with water. Along the main axis the garden opens its mouth in order to laugh or to scream rather than to speak. The body is left exposed and shivering, much like the naked Appennino.

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18 Battisti, *L'Antirinascimento*, p. 135.
19 See Claudia Lazzaro, 'Animals as Cultural Signs: A Medici Menagerie in the Grotto at Castello', in *Reframing the Renaissance, Visual Culture in Europe and Latin America, 1450-1650,* ed. by Claire Farago (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995), pp. 197-228.
20 'Florence', *Monty Don's Italian Gardens,* BBC Two, 22 April 2011.

SACRO BOSCO

Sacro Bosco is located in the valley below the village of Bomarzo, sixty-eight kilometres north of Rome. While the design is often attributed to the architect Pirro Ligorio, the owner of the garden, Vicino Orsini, greatly influenced the development of the garden.[21] Construction started in around 1552, and was completed between 1557 and 1563.[22] The death of Vicino's wife, in 1558, determined the intentions of the design: the garden became a sepulchral monument, a reflection on life and death, and an act of mourning. The garden is organised on four levels, each with sculptures dispersed in a seemingly random manner (Figure 3a). As its name implies, it is a *bosco* rather than a garden. Nature presents itself in a non-formalised, untamed way, while, ostensibly, every unifying geometrical principal is absent. The absence of a villa is also significant, since it deprives the garden of any symbolism of the power of its owner, a feature so prominent in the majority of other gardens.

In this garden, the impossibility of establishing a single and coherent narrative is manifest. The communicative disorder, which characterises Mannerist gardens in general, is displayed to an extreme degree in Sacro Bosco. Its mythological, literary and autobiographical references are very sophisticated, and the interweaving of space and language is more obvious than ever: there are elusive inscriptions dispersed throughout the garden. The relationship of the garden with texts such as Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, the poems of Petrarch, Virgil's *Aeneid* and the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* has been examined by various scholars.[23] Many of the sculptures have been carved out of stones existing in situ, a fact which undermines the notion of a holistic, preconceived design. As Luke Morgan explains, Sacro Bosco 'enables multiple and varying (even contradictory) experiences and interpretations. It can hardly be said to possess a coherent, unified narrative on the model of a conventional text or painting.'[24] It would suffice to collate the many interpretations that have accumulated around the garden to substantiate this assertion. Nevertheless, the study of Sacro Bosco has been marked by an obsession with understanding its iconographic program, focusing almost exclusively on the sculptures.

Unlike in typical Renaissance gardens, the majority of the sculptures here do not follow the syntactic rules of the garden. This disassociation produces an inherent incapacity to articulate a narrative. We might compare

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21 Torsten Olaf Enge and Carl Friedrich Schroer, *Garden Architecture in Europe 1450-1800: From the Villa Garden of the Italian Renaissance to the English Landscape Garden* (Cologne: Benedikt Taschen, 1992), p. 76.

22 Sandra Álvarez Hernández, 'El Sacro Bosco. Fuentes clásicas de la tradición grecolatina en el jardín manierista de Pier Francesco Orsini', unpublished paper, Academia.edu, <http://www.academia.edu/14729414/El_Sacro_Bosco._Fuentes_clásicas_de_la_tradición_grecolatina_en_el_jardín_manierista_de_Pier_Francesco_Orsini> [accessed 1 April 2018]

23 See Jessie Sheeler, *Le Jardin de Bomarzo, Une Enigme de la Renaissance,* trans. by Christine Piot, (Arles: Actes Sud, 2007); 'III. The Itinerary of the Sacro Bosco', *The Journal of Garden History*, 4:1 (1984), 11-72; Louisa Roquero, *Un Jardin Alquimico* (Madrid: Celeste, 1999).

24 Luke Morgan, 'Living Rocks and Petrified Giants in Vicino Orsini's Sacro Bosco', *Architectural Theory Review*, 20:1 (2015), 7-29 (p. 22).

Figure 3: Diagrams of Sacro Bosco. Authors, 2018. Created in reference to the Sacro Bosco visitor map at SacroBosco.it [Accessed 7 May 2018].

a. Sculptures
b. Sequence
c. Fields

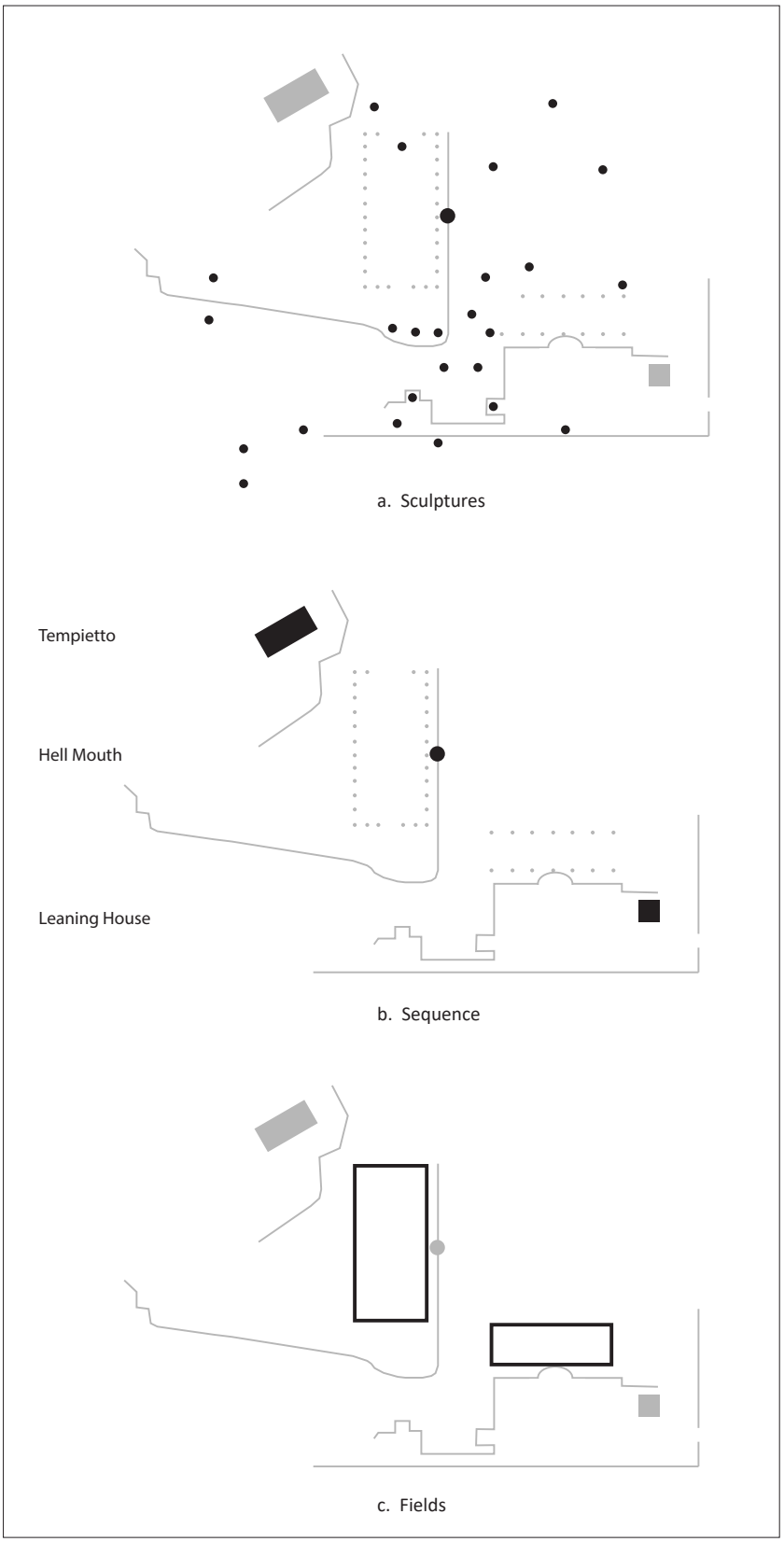
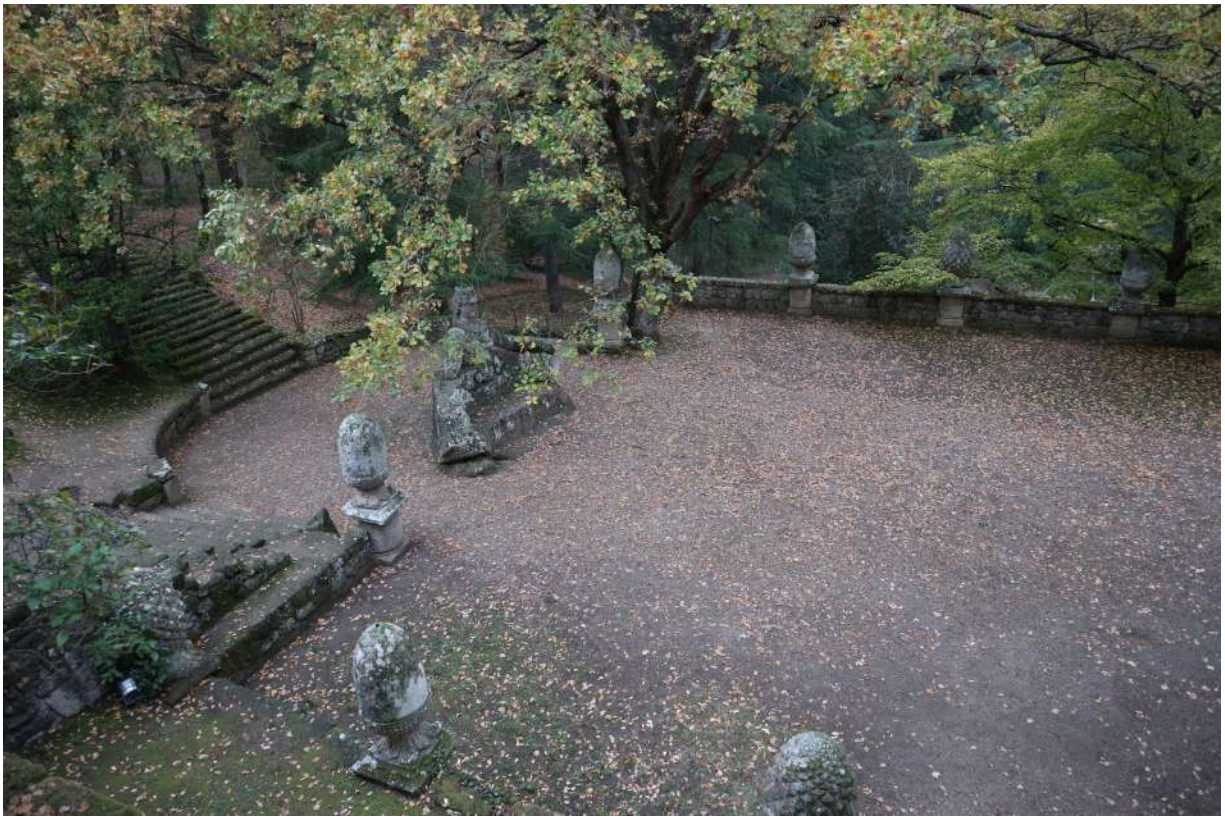


Figure 4: Hell Mouth, Sacro Bosco, 1552-1563. Authors, 2018.

the garden to a music score without a stave. Meanings emerge through the local relationships of the sculptures, not by a global iconographic narrative. Renaissance gardens usually provide the visitors with a sentence to read—a linear narrative along an axis. The meaning of the individual constituent parts may be unstable, but the syntactic rules are not. Sacro Bosco, on the contrary, is like a game where the visitor is able to recompose new sentences and thus construct new meanings. The sculptures are able to convey one or multiple meanings; when they are put together, the meaning is constantly elusive. It is language to be experienced rather than heard. The garden's mouth, like the Hell Mouth (Figure 4) remains open, and visitors are encouraged not to hear it but to spatially experience it, or to perceive the materiality of its voice rather than its meaning. The sculptures should not only be seen as signifiers to be interpreted, but also as material artifices to be experienced for their immense scale and volume, for the roughness of their texture and for the unexpected impression that an encounter with them produces. In Sacro Bosco, the fact that every sign is not only a conveyor of meaning, but first and foremost a formed material, is constantly laid out.

If we were to attempt to pinpoint a minimum stable narrative, a non-reducible remainder of meaning, this would be rendered possible by following the fundamental rules that we traced in Villa Medici di Castello. The movement poses an elemental transition, this time not from art to nature, but from uncertainty to calmness, from life to death, and above all from communicative disorder to communicative order. Between the two



pairs of levels (in the middle of which lies the Hell Mouth), a radical rupture takes place. The two upper levels are far clearer in terms of meaning. We could actually identify one central theme on each of the two higher levels, which are interconnected. On the third level there is the field of Persephone (Figure 5), the goddess of the underworld, preparing the visitor for ascent to the Tempietto; and on the fourth level the Tempietto itself, the sepulchral monument which, according to some researchers, houses the mortal remains of Vicino and his wife (Figure 6).[25] The two lower levels, in turn, are occupied by a multitude of sculptures; the communicative intentions seem to be blurred, giving rise to a continual play of interpretations. Thus, the garden is broken into two parts: one representing the earthly world and one the after-world. On the two lower levels one is to experience anxiety at the inability to articulate meaning; on the two upper levels, anxiety at the fact that death is the only meaning.

Figure 5 (opposite, top): Field of Persephone, Sacro Bosco, 1552-1563. Authors, 2018.

Figure 6 (opposite, bottom): Tempietto, Sacro Bosco, 1552-1563. Authors, 2018.

Despite its complexity and narrative instability, Sacro Bosco is more coherent spatially and experientially than Villa Medici di Castello. The garden's *os* may speak in a rambling manner, but its *bucca* does not. The ground, the *bosco* and the sculptures define a constant transitional experience from uncertainty to certainty. The *bosco*, as discussed above, induces a feeling of suspense—as does the ground in Sacro Bosco. The role of the ground as the organising infrastructure (a common convention in all gardens) is subverted from the very moment one enters the garden. A leaning building welcomes the visitors by removing their confidence in the firmness of the ground (Figure 7). The edifice bends backwards, suggesting that the ground is unstable or even fluid like quicksand. The image of the angled building subverts the role of architecture as the indisputable paradigm of organisation and order, encouraging the visitors to abandon their certainties. In the interior, the obliquity of the space deprives the visitors of their sense of balance as they stagger around, struggling to adapt to this new spatial sensorial condition. The most disturbing factor is that the building is neither standing nor collapsing, but hovering at a moment between these two conditions, frozen in a state of unstable stability. The impression of the instability of the ground is reinforced by sculptural depictions of sea monsters which come out of the earth as though emerging from a watery surface. On the second level of the garden, there is another edifice, a tower-like construction, which is not accessible and which is founded on a hollow rock. Here the foundations are exposed, revealing the chasm that lies beneath the building. At the top of the hill, where the Tempietto is located, calmness, certainty and order are established, as the firmness of the ground is restored and the *bosco* recedes.

The starting and the ending points of this transition—the first and fourth level respectively—are defined by two buildings forming a contrapuntal dipole (Figure 3b). The leaning house is opposed to the Tempietto as the only stable construction in the garden; the uncertainty and the vanity of the temporal world is opposed to the certainty of the after-world. From the top of the hill where the Tempietto is located one can—once and for all—look

25 J. B. Bury, 'Bomarzo Revisited', *The Journal of Garden History*, 5:2, (2012), 213-23 (p. 222).

Figure 7: Leaning House, Sacro Bosco, 1552-1563. Authors, 2018.

upon Bomarzo and Vicino's castle (Figure 8). Thus, a third building is added to the dipole of the leaning house and the Tempietto. The earthly residence forms a dialectic relationship with the funerary residence of the couple (with all the associations that this comparison entails), while the leaning house forebodes the inevitable end of every earthly construction, including that of Vicino's castle. The symmetrical counterpoint is continued on the two middle levels by two rectangular fields (Figures 3c). In both cases, the two elongated sides are defined by punctual elements forming a rhythmical motif, while the visual lines converge to a central figure. The perspective here, for once, acts to define a centre of reference. In the field of the third level, the centre of reference is Persephone. In the lower field, the centre of reference is a figure that has been identified either as Poseidon, or Pluto, or Proteas (Figure 9), while at the perimeter, additional sculptures intensify the communicative noise.[26] The fact that the central figure is characterised by such ambiguity and the impossibility to correlate and interpret the rest of the sculptures is suggestive of the meaninglessness of the temporal world.

At the centre of these symmetrical counterpoints, almost equidistantly located between the two buildings, is the Hell Mouth, a gigantic head where one can enter and eat, its tongue forming a table. In a similar way, at the centre of the composition of Villa Lante, in the middle of the transition between artificial nature and natural artifice, an elongated table constitutes part of the main axis (Figure 10). The tables are precisely the fields where the two aspects of the mouth are constantly opposed: a mouth that speaks and a mouth that tastes and senses, intellectual and sensorial perception, are in constant interplay on the table. The Hell Mouth, occupying and claiming the centre of the composition (in the retaining wall between the second and third level) poses the mouth—with all its associations—as the central question of the garden. The mouth of the garden both opens up and bridges the rupture between the two parts of the garden, the gap between

26 Sheeler, *Le Jardin de Bomarzo,* p. 82.

order and disorder, the chasm between meaning and its absence. The echo of the enclosed space intensifies but also distorts voices, transforming them into an unintelligible sound. Inside the Hell Mouth, the articulation of speech is denied. The visitor's *os* and *bucca* are blurred and mixed together.

CONCLUSION

The Mannerist garden is a mouth: a third mouth between *os* and *bucca*. As *os*, it articulates speech and narrates in a sophisticated language, which is not necessarily comprehensible to everyone. As *bucca,* it functions beyond an oral vessel, evoking meanings sensorially and addressing the body rather than just the mouth. Which of the two mouths establishes order—and which subverts it—remains equivocal, and it is from this ambiguity that all the dynamism of the garden arises. The garden hovers between an articulated narrative and an associative accumulation of meanings, opening up an incessant play of interpretations. It floats between a rational layout (which,

Figure 8 (top): View towards Bomarzo and the castle, 1552-1563. Authors, 2018.

Figure 9 (bottom): Field of Poseidon, Sacro Bosco, 1552-1563. Authors, 2018.

Figure 10: Table at Villa Lante, Bagnaia, Italy, 1556. Architect: Vignola. Authors, 2018.

by means of perspective, both designs and presages the spatial experience) and the invocation of feelings of uncertainty and suspense, which subvert any rationalisation of the experience. As a third mouth, it speaks a hybrid language, provoking a communicative disorder and posing the articulation of meaning as the constant issue at stake.

Villa Medici di Castello and Sacro Bosco take this communicative play to extremes. The gardens introduce elements and are organised so as to permit open-ended meanings. They do not pursue a single and coherent narrative but instead constitute a kind of open text. In the majority of gardens a centre orients and stabilises meanings. As Jacques Derrida states:

> The concept of centred structure is in fact the concept of a play based on a fundamental ground, a play constituted on the basis of a fundamental immobility and a reassuring certitude, which itself is beyond the reach of play. And on the basis of this certitude anxiety can be mastered, for anxiety is invariably the result of a certain mode of being implicated in the game.[27]

In the Villa Medici di Castello and Sacro Bosco the notion of centrality is questioned. In the former the centre is enclosed by a labyrinth, while in the latter dispersion is absolute. In both cases, the inability to construct a meaning becomes an experience in itself, while sensorial strategies which shake the visitor's certainties are examined.

27 Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. by Alan Bass (London and New York: Routledge Classics, 2001), p. 352.