

The term 'technofiction' arises first to describe visions of the future in which the familiar city of the present is transformed through various technologies. An inherent part of its project is comparative: that as opposed to this, then as opposed to now. The symmetry of this structure and its dependence on historical separation, a history that has yet to exist, might suggest that since the modern city is itself the result of similar transformations, the relation between the present and the past prefigures and thus validates the proposed connection between the present and the future.

Technofictions, therefore, are among other things representations of time and reflect ways of thinking about time, including the past, the present and the future. The present has to be seen as malleable and open to possibilities, and this quality supports its role as resultant or end, as well as stimulus or beginning. Thus, technofictions might be seen as arguments which reinforce certain symmetries between the future and the past and constitute the present as a mid-point or center. The idea is further reinforced by conceiving technology as the vehicle by which temporal transformations are realized. Is this process itself symmetrical? If the technology is removed, would this precipitate a reversion to an original condition and thus a sort of reversal of time?

The structure of time has occupied much speculation. For example, Kant has argued that the present cannot function as a mid point between an infinite future and an infinite past since a truly infinite past would never terminate, thus, never permitting the present to occupy.<sup>1</sup> Do technofictions only manifest themselves in eras in which there are particular conceptions about time? And do they, therefore, also serve inadvertently in themselves as models for these conceptions?

The very term technofiction leaves the locus of the fictive indeterminate. Does it refer to the uncertain, incomplete, and provincial nature of the general technological hypothesis, or in this particular resultant? Is it located in the predicting of the unpredictable (speculation=fiction), or is it situated in the unattainable but implicit presence of the future in the present? Or does it rest ultimately in the invention of a historical 'reality' which allows a type of future to be postulated within its framework?

Certainly, the concept of modernity requires that it be seen in comparison to something else from which its distance or difference is ascertainable, as the derivation of the word modern from „modus“ or „measure“ also suggests. If modernity is that which generally separates 'now' from a critically distanced 'then', to what extent is it a quality which can be found throughout history, not merely in our 'modern times'? Lyotard seems to suggest this when he writes modernity „in whatever age“ is the

shattering of belief and the „discovery of the 'lack of reality' of reality,“ together with the invention of other realities.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, if technofictions involve a particular type construction of history, one might ask if this is unique to the present age, or whether the phenomenon of technofictions can be found over a larger span of time than our own modernity. Can technofictions be understood as the modernity of tomorrow or must they must also reflect that period (today) in which they are proposed? And if they do, can they adequately reflect the impact of the technologies they espouse? Unintended outcomes litter the 'technofictionally' paved road to Hell, such as the automobile-oriented 'cities of tomorrow' of the 1930's, reflected as parody in contemporary American urban dysfunction. And rather than reinvent the future, technology can also be used to plunder the past, as evidenced by the fact that there is more faux marble on the internet than there was for the whole of the German rococo.

### The technique of the perspective

Pictorial perspective is a technology which has had an influential, if unpredictable, effect on historical development. An early manifestation was during the time of the Roman Republic. The first three styles of Roman wall painting developed in an orderly progression towards the realistic depiction of artifacts and space, but the fourth style re-incorporated versions of the more primitive devices in its depiction of fantastically ephemeral and unreal spatial constructions. Similarly, the re-invention of perspective in the Renaissance was at least partially motivated by a desire to represent 'reality', but the technique was soon employed by 16th century artists to depict alternate realities which were literally impossible. If the attempts at realistic representation the 1st and 16th centuries A.D. inadvertently inspired a search for antithetical effects, similar results may be expected of our contemporary efforts to develop computer tools that allow for perfect verisimilitude of reality. One should also consider the relations between the arts. Originally, the development of a 'correct' perspective technology required painters to produce 'normal' spatial effects in two dimensions, trapping them in the role of architect, whereas in the 16th century the technique was reversed, allowing painters to achieve 'unreal' space and forcing architects to complete in three dimensions what were really two-dimensional effects.

Technofictive projects begin to betray a certain progressive, perhaps Hegelian, framework though even within this framework, it is unclear as to whether the particular trace of a continuity will embrace its development or antithesis. The question as to whether a temporal framework is a momentary habit of culture rather than timeless category

of the mind is reflected in the re-examination and subversion of historical time as understood in modern thinking. Certainly romanticism loosened the connection between subjective experience and the categorical imperative of time, and movements from impressionism to surrealism and dada challenge the stability of the object and its independence from the processes of perception. In analogy to the transformation functions of perspective, here perception loosens the subject from the orthodoxy of the normative.

## Gestalt theory

Thus, from Duchamp to Tintoretto to the Villa of the Mysteries, strategies of figurality as well as the figure itself can be seen as critiques of systems of history. But there is another connection between the figure and history also connected to perception, one which emphasizes the fiction of history, of the past as well as the future. In 1912, a paper on the visual illusion produced by movies launched Gestalt psychology and the investigations that challenged the prevailing Structuralist views of perception largely based on elementarism.<sup>3</sup> Among the products of Gestalts experiments were the principles of figure/ground organization and Wertheimer's laws of grouping. It is interesting that the visual materials used to conduct these experiments often have the additional odd tendency of replicating various strategies found in 16th century paintings. Thus, Tintoretto's „Road to Calvary“ could be a textbook case for a figure/ground reversal, while his „Removal of the Body of St. Mark“ is a study of proximity and connectedness in a field of rotated gridded points.

The properties such as good continuation and Prägnanz, the principle which asserts that the visual system organizes sensory information to provide the simplest and most regular perception, encourages certain types of figures to be completed by the viewer. While certain ideas of the Gestaltists have been discredited, such as Kohler's electric brain field theory, the laws of grouping have remained with no serious challenge, and Kohler's theories about the organic origins of Gestalt structures have experienced 'resurrection by close analogy' in the investigations of neural networks.

Because of Prägnanz, a shape such as Figure 1, despite its complexities and incompleteness, tends to be idealized as a square. Shapes such as Figure 2 are often idealized as 'L's, reinforcing the reading of diagonal symmetry, and diminishing the impact of the figure's thickness. Other shapes, such as Figure 3, encourage a more complex reading. Although there is emphatic evidence that this is not a square, it is a common reading that it is a square but with a piece removed. Not only is it interesting that this figure is not read as



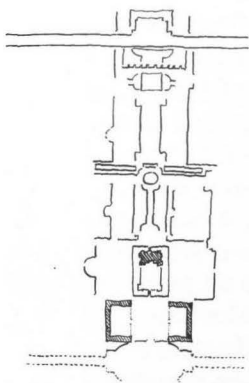
an „L“, a family to which it typologically and geometrically clearly belongs, but the interpretation of this figure proposes a historical reading, that one's observations of this moment are 'late' relative to a chronology in which this figure has been a historical participant. Thus, via processes of perception, shape itself seems capable of offering up alternative histories to the viewer in an operation in which, given the technologies of observation and cognition, the object and subject seem locked in an embrace in which they cannot be distinguished. Thus, perceptual physiology anticipates postmodern subjectivity.

While the dominant idea of history is in crisis from the postmodern critique and 20th century science, at the same time Gestalt effects offer an infinity of fragmentary histories based on figuration and the human systems of sensing and cognition. As history is removed as a permanent condition on the one hand, history in another form is promoted as such on the other, permanent in the sense of its embeddedness in the central nervous system of the subject. If technofictions are emblematic of 'modern' culture and of the historical forms which have evolved from the time of the Renaissance, then the locus in which they are situated is larger than the 20th century. It has been argued that modern historical consciousness evolved explicitly from Renaissance perspective.<sup>4</sup> If technofictions have any sort of formal component, then at least some aspect of their configuration is made available for interpretation through available Gestalt principles, which are by definition available for all forms which are visible. Perhaps it is not impossible to consider Gestalt as a modern manifestation of perspective theory which focuses on the organic rather than the optic.

## Vaux-le-Vicomte

In search of an early technofiction, one might want to look for an urban model, perhaps a utopian proposal. Basing a search strategy on the argument that the cities of the post-Renaissance era were based on or predicated by earlier garden models, the modern city itself might be seen as a prospective technofictive version of a garden, or that gardens have survived in mutated form as technofictions. Thus, the search might widen to include the technofictive possibilities inherent in gardens. One possibility would be to look for gardens which are based on developing technologies and thus might be seen as sites for 'test marketing' the impact of these technologies on future cities. If constructed perspective were the technology in question, Vaux-le-Vicomte would present itself as an ideal example.

Le Notre's first complete garden, Vaux-le-Vicomte was constructed quickly over only five years, being completed in 1661 (Figure 4). The social history of this garden is well-known and has tended



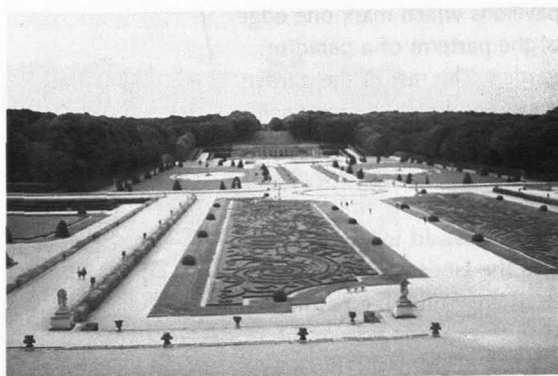
to divert attention from the garden itself. Such a usually steady guide as Marie Gotthein devotes a great deal of attention to the problems of the patron Nicolas Fouquet, the Minister of Finance, whom Louis XIV had thrown into prison shortly after attending the fête at the chateau which was remarkable at the very least for its ostentation. Although there was *nothing quite like it before*, Vaux-le-Vicomte became the model for

many subsequent French gardens and even the baroque garden in general.

The garden is famous for its optical effects, its surprises, its grandeur, and its simplicity, all of which together might seem not mutually inclusive. The simplicity is a result of the clarity of the overall configuration and the clear view one gets from the rear of the chateau from the windows or an adjacent terrace (Plate A). Here, the garden appears to be arranged as if composing a large symmetrical room, contained on the sides by clipped hedges and trees and terminated at the end by a large wall with arched openings containing grottoes. The wall is not a complete termination, however, as a narrowing green lawn, the *vertugadin*, extends up the hill above it, becoming an *allée* through the trees in the distance. The *grandeur* comes at least initially from the vast scale of the garden and the richness of its fountains and ornaments and parterres. Its surprises are largely the result of the optical effects which serve to continually transform one's impression of the basic structure of the garden and one's relative position in it, all the more surprising given the assumed simplicity of the garden. The optical effects are mostly concerned with the use of carefully constructed perspectives to equate, separate, distort, and hide various elements of the garden relative to other elements. The fact that a major element in the composition, the grand canal, is completely hidden from the observer moving through the landscape until practically upon it, is universally remarked upon by the garden's commentators. Weiss, who notes that this effect

was based on the tenth theorem of Euclid's *Optics*, shows the proper appreciation when he writes: „The extreme surprise and pleasure of this discovery is the thrill of a physical entry into a mathematical doctrine, established by the aesthetic discrepancies between the static view of the garden as seen from the chateau and the dynamic view as experienced by traversing the terrain. This garden is simultaneously a lyrical apparition and a mathematical demonstration.“<sup>5</sup>

Situated in a relatively flat landscape Le Notre manipulates subtle sectional differences which impact on the impressions of an earth-bound observer in fundamental and startling ways, while the relative flatness and large scale of the garden otherwise minimizes even the existence of these sectional moments. Hazelhurst offers perhaps the best description of these effects in his chapter on Vaux in *Gardens of Illusion*.<sup>6</sup> In addition to the series of surprises concerning the basic assumptions regarding the configuration of the garden, Hazelhurst documents the role which the chateau assumes as one moves through the organization. Relative to the observer, the building is seen to change position. From the entry gate along the road, the chateau seems to be closer than it actually is (Plate B). As

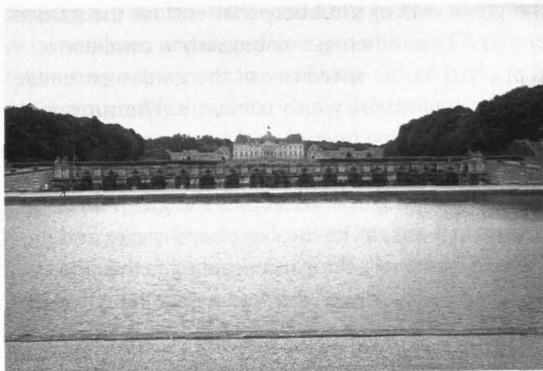


A View from chateau



B Front view from R.-Point

one approaches it, it gradually recedes. On the far side of the chateau, the opposite effect pertains. As the gardens unfold and enlarge in their complexity and extent during one's progress through them, the chateau seems to follow the observer. Its furthest



C Chateau at foundation



progress is recorded in the view from the canal, from which the building appears to hover just above the retaining walls for the Cascades, along the northern edge of the waterway (Plate C).

Hazelhurst also documents a rather startling feature of the gardens in the view from the hill above the far side of the canal, where the axis of the garden is reduced to a green sloping lawn, the vertugadin, and then a forest allée, there is a point at which the view back to gardens not only restores all the elements which had been removed for the observer by the section and the constructed perspectives, but presents the entire garden as though it were being tilted up on an inclined plane, as though the entire ensemble of chateau and garden were no more than insubstantial weightless treats being offered up on a desert tray (Plate D).



D View from Hercules

It's interesting that this astonishing effect is not mentioned within numerous discussions of the garden, especially as it continues the same formula of discovery and re-invention which marks the rest of the experience of the site as well as explaining to a large degree what the pay-off would be for trekking to this part of the garden, a destination that is requested from at least the first view from the rear of the chateau. Surprisingly, Weiss, for example, makes no comment about this feature, although he does mention the 'otherness' of the wooded park which surrounds the garden as the „not garden“ which is observed adjacently in the section at the canal, as well as numerous side views offered along the green wall of shrubbery that enclose the garden proper.<sup>7</sup> This 'otherness' is certainly a condition supported by the specificity of the garden ensemble and the boundaries which contain it. The surrounding forest seems to have a separate existence from the focus of creation centered on the world that the garden occupies. The view from the green lawn reverses all this. In its display of artificiality and state of 'removal', the garden seems fictive and alien, and almost overwhelmed by the forest which surrounds it.

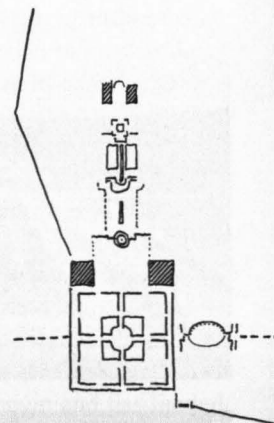
This quality by which, as one experiences the garden, it becomes larger, smaller, surprisingly

reconfigured, and various pieces mobilize or disappear is one of the most memorable aspects of Vaux. Moments which seem central to the entire scheme at one moment, such as the 'central' fountain, recede into the background or disappear. Others stretch and elongate as though in a Dali painting or the dream sequence in *Spellbound*. For example, what appears to be the second 'half' of the main garden, from the fountain to the grotto, 'becomes' twice as long as the first half. Other than the necessity of an observer, what makes this all possible is a continual application of two provisions. First, the technology to drive the illusions, and second, an alternative framework of a 'false' simplicity, the contrast to which makes the illusions all the more surprising. Thus, the presumed simplicity of Vaux is a necessary component in the complex structure of its success. By establishing expectations of structure which predict future experience, alterations to that experience become noticeable.

Of course, it's difficult to distinguish between what is and is not ultimately an illusion, since a great deal of Vaux is unstable, especially to the observer within it. This gives even more significance to the view back from the large sloping lawn which, by surveying the garden from above, dissimulates all the subtle sectional devices and gives to the garden the fixed structural reality of the plan. In contrast to this moment of stasis, it is the entire garden which is now mobilized into the fictive through the illusion of the tilted tray.

## Villa Lante

The severe separation of the garden from the forest, first by the edge of shrubbery and later by the 'tilting' of the garden plane, provides opportunities to differentiate the nature of these two landscapes. Typologically, of course, this division between landscape and garden is the signature of an Italian strategy by which a connection is made between the closed garden itself and the view across the enclosing wall into the larger landscape around and usually below. A particular variation of this occurs at the Villa Lante, where the villa is separated into two matching pavilions which mark one edge of the parterre of a paradise garden. The rest of the garden is surrounded by a high enclosing wall. The exception is the space between the two pavilions and it is here that the garden is allowed to expand out into the landscape beyond, 'contaminating' the natural with this overflow from the artificial (Figure 5). This is in many ways the most inventive



and renowned part of the garden, and might be interpreted as the intersection between, on the one hand, the domestic and artificial landscape of the 'central' garden and, on the other, the wild 'other' landscape of the forest.

This mingling allows a certain degree of mixing between the domestic and the feral, one result of which produces, or allows to be seen, a 'divine' landscape, the scene of the classical, which is strewn about with statues and pools, picnic spots and bathing pavilions. The park at the Villa Lante successfully predicts many aspects of the English garden of 200 years later. By rupturing of the special case of the garden, the fractured urbane domesticity of Villa Lante becomes the lens through which the spectacular is made visible in the surrounding forest. Thus, the garden becomes the median and mediator between the town of Bagnaia and the forest, *underscored by the symmetry between its opposing armatures*, one of which extends from the garden to the tower of the town hall and the other which extends in the opposite direction into the forest. But rather than merely operate as the negotiator between the limited domain of the town and the engulfing terrain of the landscape, as merely a 'villa suburbana', Lante invades the landscape and refracts it to reveal the mythological structure embedded within it, as the stained glass in a gothic church reveals the 'divine' embedded invisibly in natural light.

### Garden vs. nature

Vaux-le-Vicomte operates in a similar way. Here, however, rather than having the gardens illuminate the divine in nature, it is somewhat the reverse, where nature reveals the artifice of the garden. Here, rather than fill the surrounding park with pavilions and pools, the garden at Vaux is the primary locus of these features. One possible exception is the grotto wall which initially seems to mark the far boundary of the garden proper. This, however, is separated from the garden by the Grand Canal. On the garden side opposite it are the Grand Cascades, elevated by a structure which imitates the



E Grand cascade/Butresses

grotto with its bay system, but seems far more mundane in appearance, actually a series of buttresses (Plate E). It's actually an elaborated retaining wall holding back the earth and providing a strong resemblance to an excavated basement. Thus, to the south of the canal there is an elaborate grotto with classical sculpture. To the north there is a commensurate structure, but only in the form of a foundation wall. The canal seems to operate as a separatrix which differentiates the 'mundane world of the garden to the north from divine world of nymphs and satyrs on the south.

A similar device occurs at Lante where the landscaped park abuts the entry gate from the town, which bypasses the garden and enters the park directly. This is the entry the public would have used when the park was made available and therefore the 'opening' and extension of the paradise garden would not be available to signal the transformation. Here, between the lawn inside the gate and the domain of the park proper, is an oval pool which seems to have sheared along its major axis to form a barrier to passage and a boundary to the park. This 'shearing' has allowed to become visible a series of hermes fixed to the raised concave wall of the pool just under a balustrade which exactly duplicates that of the „undisturbed“ balustrade of the foreground. Presumably, the hermes would normally have been positioned under the water and would thus have been out of sight. The shearing allows the invisibly mythological, which is embedded out of sight in the world of the every day, to be exposed in a reversal which turns the 'real' world upside down. The 'weight' that the hermes would have supported, as defined by the surface just above their heads, would have been merely the surface of the water, indicating the divine machinations necessary to prop-up even the most banal features of the mundane world. The pool therefore becomes a signpost indicating that, beyond this edge, there is a startling differential in the norms of visibility. Here, the world behind the mundane would be revealed, casting the further landscape in the role of theme park to a mythological landscape.

The canal at Vaux and the pools which connect the grand cascade and the grotto reflect this same disjuncture. On the hill beyond the grotto, the grassy lawn seems unmanipulated and whole as it disappears into the forest, an Arcadian landscape which is strongly related to the garden formally, but strongly differentiated from it typologically. From the garden, it appears to be an extension of the garden itself, a deceleration zone for the major axis. From the grassy lawn looking back at the chateau, there is more a disconnection between the areas, the garden being a weightless bauble of artifice surrounded by the endless Arcadian wood.

But whose artifice? The separatrix of the canal, like that of Lante, proposes a world of the divine

and the world of the mundane. Should one to interpret the garden, then, as a construct of the gods? Is it thus a technofiction? Why a garden?

The answer might lie with the identification of the garden with creation mythology. Thus, the central parterre at Villa Lante can be understood to be a representations of 'paradise.' At Vaux, the Edenic is perhaps even more explicit. The observer in the garden sees the elements unfold, archegetically transforming and revising from the basic blueprint until, from the height of the green lawn beyond, one can look down and see the reassembled artifact in toto, but from the safety of a separate system, one in which the machinations of the garden itself don't operate and from which one has a special privileged overview of the entire ensemble. Expulsion from Eden in this case has a classical twist, in that the gates of this garden seem to lead into Arcadia rather than out of it. The Arcadian landscape is free of the transformations caused by the movement of the observer through the garden. In the garden itself, time as measured by movement, transforms and reassembles the garden's appearance. From the sloping lawn, time loses its ability to promote this metamorphosis and is, in a sense, therefore removed, hidden, or absent. Thus the separatrix of the canal, and perhaps even the shrubbery's edge, differentiates the domain of time from that of the timeless, and begins to propose a cosmology for the garden, a creation mythology, a finite figural world of time constructed in the encompassing field of timelessness.

### The technique of displacement

The structure of the garden bears closer inspection. In some critiques, it is only the garden to the rear of the chateau that is regarded with any interest. There are several reasons to dispute this strategy. First of all, the sectional and perspectival devices which orchestrate the effects of the rear garden also pertain in the fore-court on the entry side. If these are the devices which are integral to the definition, structure and operation of the landscape strategy, they might best be evaluated over their entire

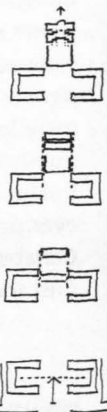


F View front to back

domain. Secondly, in the composition of the garden, the configuration of the canal bears many similarities to that of the rond-point, on the opposite side of the chateau, to which it thus offers comparison. Thirdly, if the chateau, or at least its garden elevation is acknowledged to be involved in the rear garden, the strong relationship of the two facades 'telegraphed' through volume of the building, suggests a continuity from front to back. Furthermore, the dimensions of the moat in which the chateau is situated aggressively continue the geometry of the rear parterres into the front, as do the walls of the adjacent service buildings, all the way to the entry gate (Plate F).

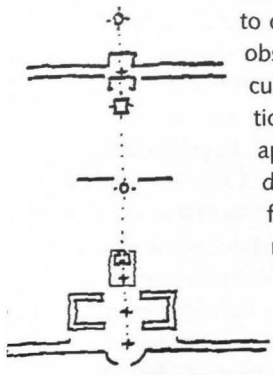
The gate is situated along one side of a clearing, a rond-point which intersects the road from Melun in the forest in front of the chateau. The shape of the rond-point is unusual in being an oval and the edge with the gate is flattened even further, allowing the facades of the gate to impinge on the adjacent clearing. The service buildings, including the courtyards between them, reproduce the area of the rond-point in a rectilinearized version, as though there had been a lateral displacement from the void of the clearing to the solid of the building. The moat and the chateau mark a further displacement from the service buildings, and on its island platform, the building itself is displaced to the southern end. Furthermore, the plan of the building continues this theme of centralized displacement in the projection of the grand salon beyond the rear facade and the corresponding indentation of the front facade. Further connections between the chateau and the service buildings are indicated by the composition of the house plan into two 'pavilioned' bars, a compressed version of the organization of the adjoining service complexes. Thus, the whole area of the composition is organized by the theme of successive displacements of centers (Figure 6).

The visual experience of the visitor is analogous but more position specific. The precise position of the chateau is not readily apparent as one approaches the gates of the garden. The basic shape of a cour d'honneur is suggested, although the house is clearly a separate entity. Because the terrace on the island is raised, its full extension, or even existence, is initially concealed. It is only as the observer draws closer that alternative possibilities begin to appear. Furthermore, given the section, the existence of the moat is a complete surprise (similar to the discovery of the grand canal). The general situation is that as one moves back along the central axis, the perceived position of elements moves back as well, but





from a fixed position, the composition seems rather well-balanced and complete. In fact, the garden can be seen as a series of centralized moments at each of which the garden rearranges itself to conform to the position of the observer (Figure 7). It is only at particular moments, at which a new situation is ascertained, a new element appears, or a familiar one disappears, that disjunctions in the fabric are evident. These quickly resolve themselves into new stabilities with new centers.



The facade of the chateau tends to operate in the fore-court similarly to the way in which the

grotto acts in the parterres of the rear garden: as an obvious destination which recedes in a series of stages. Each recessive disjunction revises the definition of the way in which the basic space is best apprehended. Since each initial perception of the spatial container is 'simple' and static until some sort of new evidence is presented, the experience of the gardens becomes one in which a series of static spaces are overlaid on ever-changing spatial entities. The stable nature of these interim spatial structures tends to reinforce the status of local centers, which in turn honor the location of the viewer with hierarchical significance. The static nature of these centralized moments and the impression they leave that the space is easily known and defined and that a significant position has been reached within the composition, as defined at that moment, tends to retard the visitor's inclination to continue as it increases the surprise when the assumptions on which these impressions are based are forced into revision by the garden's transformation. The viewer is lulled into complacency time and again by this strategy. The future, especially the immediate future, seems knowable and yet one is required to repeatedly revise one's estimates.

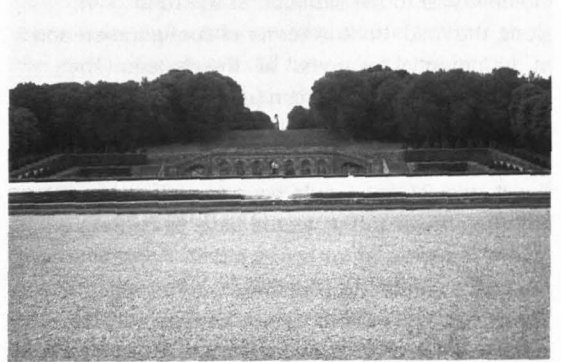
The facade of the service buildings provide ample evidence of these removals and revisions. In what initially appears to be a rather symmetrical organization, one notices that pavilions and facades have been displaced across each other in the direction of the major axis. Some of the results are quite startling. Of particular interest are the wing walls or gates which mark the corners of these buildings as they face the chateau (Plate G). One must pass through these or through the house itself to reach the rear gardens. One cannot but notice that the relationship between these walls and the adjoining pavilion is most peculiar and awkward, being carelessly attached only at one corner in a manner which recalls the courtyard walls of the Villa Giulia in Rome with similar effect. The wall seems to have slid past the pavilion only to have been caught momentarily in this awkward position. The fact that



G View of wing-wall

the structure of the wall matches the facade of a nearby pavilion adds to the impression that it has sheared off an adjacent volume as it has been displaced backwards, tracing the trajectory of the edge of the chateau.

The rear gardens produce similar effects as the visitor moves back towards the grotto. The fountain along the axis appears to mark the center of the garden from the elevation of the chateau. From the ground plane it appears more closely associated with the grotto. Both are 'true' as measured momentarily; both establish a norm and set expectations; both must be revised. A large, raised, square water-table is found along the main axis just before the discovery of the grand canal (Plate H). It



H View of water-table and grotto

is surprising how long this remains unnoticed by the viewer, partly disguised by its raised elevation, partly by its easy association with the grotto beyond. One is encouraged to move around this element as it blocks the main path, and at this point a disturbing mobility of the grotto against the water-table's far edge becomes noticeable. After navigating around the pool, the grand cascade appears and the valley of the canal presents itself (Plate I).

Again, throughout the rear garden, at each moment there appears a very clear organizational pattern which tends to eventually prove fictive, but nonetheless also tends to centralize the visitor in a position of homage and support. There is hardly the motivation to continue moving except for purposes



I Grand canal

of perambulation and confirmation. And then a new very clear pattern is made evident, expectations must be reorganized, and all the while, the chateau follows behind at a respectful distance. From the water-table looking back at the chateau, the whole first half of the garden has closed up and the building seems sited adjacent to what had been the 'central' fountain. And from the canal, the building seems to be sited on top of the water-table itself, poised above the basin adjacent to the 'retaining wall' and bracketed by the grotto.

### Temporality

Previously it was mentioned how similar this moment was to the situation at the rond-point along the road, both in terms of configuration and of the potential 'nearness' of the chateau. The building was originally seen just off the rond-point and ultimately it is noticed to be just off the great basin. Thus, to answer to the question „Where is the chateau?“ one would have to reply „When?“ and the answer to this would have to be determined by the position of the observer. Consequently, the idea suggests itself that the entire garden might operate along the lines of a giant timepiece, like a clock or a calendar, where the chateau moves across the landscape like hands across a clock face, except that here the motive power is provided by the mobility of the visitor. The time that is being marked is that time at which the building is „very near the road“ to that time at which it is „very near the canal.“ There are reasons to think that this might also be 'early' and 'late'.

This structure is one in which a series of frames is established, each one complete and stable (at least at a particular moment), and thus predictive of how it would likely be experienced. Yet when seen together as a sequence, the impression is completely transformed and a sense of movement is created, both physically and motivationally. This applies to Vaux as much as it applies to another medium, the movies. With only a little license, it might be possible to begin to think of Vaux as an extremely early motion picture, a 'drive-thru' movie. In a movie, the

sense of chronology is established by connections which are outside the technology itself. For example, people generally walk forward, and this convention is extended to orientate the direction of the film. Similar devices can be seen to structure the sequence at Vaux according to a chronology, the route along which the visitor walks and the place at which the visitor first arrives.

Phenomenally, Vaux is experienced starting from the rond-point, marked by the absence of the forest, the figural space, and the intersection across the road of the garden axis. As described, the adjacent cluster of service buildings responds to this space by simultaneously recreating it and displacing it, the first of several waves of similar events experienced along the route through the garden. The last apparent displacement of the chateau is to the water-table at the point just above the retaining wall. Yet in the final view along the visitor's route from the great lawn, looking back the chateau is 'restored' to an earlier position which seems to coincide more or less with where it actually is in plan, at least in relationship to the rear garden. With respect to its flanking service buildings, it appears to have been re-inserted between the two complexes, closing down the cour d'honneur.

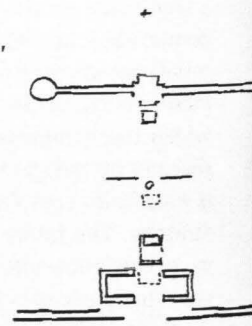
Thus, the pavilion is back to where it 'was' sometime before the viewer arrived on the site. The view from the lawn essentially resets the clock and pushes the chateau back to the start position. Therefore the 'last' position in which one sees the building is actually closer to being the 'first', when interpreted in terms of one's 'historical' experience of the garden sequence (Figure 8).

The fact that the view from the great lawn always resets the clock coincides with this view's other quality which isolates the gardens as an artifact separate from the Arcadian landscape of the park as an artifice, a fiction.

This relationship argues that within the 'timeless' environment of Arcadia, technology has been used to construct the 'other', that the garden is a clock-work world of progress and temporality only within its boundaries, and that to experience the garden from within it is to see time run through its paces, again and again, like an arcade game. Viewed from the lawn, however, it is only a static venue for such possibilities.

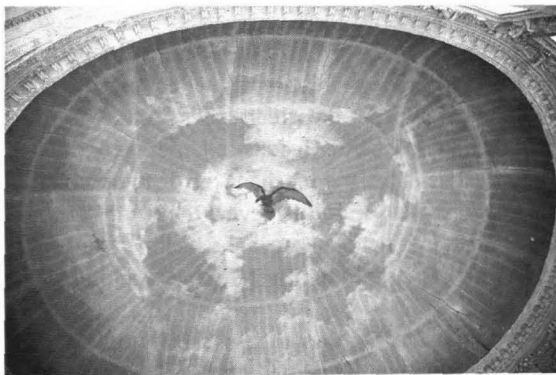
### Gods and mortals

Le Brun's ceilings for the public rooms in the chateau are lush examples of French baroque, elaborately framed by immense gilded cornices. The startling exception is the ceiling of the double height





oval-shaped Grand Salon. This room was unfinished at the time of Fouquet's arrest. It was to have contained a fresco by Le Brun, „The Palace of the Sun“. Here the walls which are detailed as exterior facades stop abruptly. The ground level is ringed by doorways which access the exterior as well as interior spaces with no distinction, as is also true of the windows above. Given the fact that the room is partially embedded in the mass of the chateau, the plane of the facade is clearly readable in the room due to contrast between bright and dark perimeters. The plane thus described slices through the room one bay off-center, imparting an unstable reading, especially as the room itself seems alien to the difference. It is as though one has interrupted a birth at that moment just before the laws of physics will expell this entity into the garden. The room itself has the appearance of an open courtyard, a center in the process of being distorted and displaced. The ceiling is simply painted to look like the sky. The sun seems to be directly overhead, but the viewer is in effect 'shaded' from its direct rays by large bird which appears to be gliding overhead at that particular moment. It is an eagle which is headed out toward the garden, surveying the ground below, its wings just pushing at the edge of the implied facade plane (Plate J).



J Ceiling, grand salon

The eagle, of course, is emblematic of Jupiter, a form he might assume when visiting among the mortals. Its presence here recalls the argument concerning the landscape of the divine woodland across the canal and surrounding garden. Thus, the appearance of the eagle reinforces the idea of a divine presence in the garden itself at the same time as it reiterates the structure of the separatrix between the divine and the mortal. If Jupiter is here, he is here within the conventions of earth, not heaven. But he is present as a motivator. The eagle's relationship to the room isn't casual, it is direct and focussed, and the mobility of the bird is directly transferred to provide mobility for the cortile. Here is an advancing center which operates independently of the technology of optics and perspective,

literally a deus ex machina. The device thus conforms to the general theme of the garden, at the same time as it subverts it with direct evidence of outside interference.

The only element in the grassy plane above the cascade when the gardens were first constructed was the Grebe, an impressive fountain which remains today. In the 19th century a statue was placed in the lawn behind this fountain, as the gardens were being restored from the ruined state into which they fell after the imprisonment of Fouquet in the first season that the gardens were completed. The statue was placed at the point at which the illusion of the tilted plane is most effective. Even though it is a late introduction there are engravings of the gardens which show a very similar object at this same location. Perhaps it is artistic license, perhaps it documents a planned installation that was never completed, perhaps there was something there temporarily and then removed. Some commentators lament the inclusion of this statue as a desecration of the garden, others extoll its value as though it were original. The statue is a reproduction of the Farnese Hercules, which depicts him at rest, leaning on his club, looking back over the garden, presumably enjoying the same illusion that greets the visitor who sits on the bench provided adjacent to his pedestal – the tilted tray. The implication seems clear. Hercules, at Zeus's bidding has labored to help erect the garden and has provided the motive power to move the pieces. Internal to the garden the pieces still move, but here on the hill it is all just seen as an elaborate artifice, a technofiction.

### Eternity and time

To the degree that the garden represents the world, or at least a world, as artificial, a creation of the gods, it also becomes the domain of change and of time. Reversing the human perspective on the classical relationship, the temporal world is the exception, the Olympian is the rule. The garden progresses, the Arcadian landscape just is. This raises the question as to whether time is only represented by the movement of the pieces and motivated by the transit of the visitor. A closer look at the plan might indicate that the answer is no. There is another system as well. The 'route' the chateau traces through the garden is never seen in its full range from the garden itself and the chateau is never replaced all the way back to the road, even from the grassy lawn at the feet of Hercules, perhaps because in doing so, in replacing the first displacement, the basic differentiation of void/solid, clearing/building would be eliminated, reduced to an undifferentiated unity and thus end the basic distinction which begins to structure this version of a world. The insertion of the chateau back between

the service buildings is as far as one dare go before the entire illusion would collapse into a formless whole. Creation mythology demands a separation to get things going. From then on it seems more or less a matter of momentum. Therefore, the position of the chateau in the rond-point argues for the original moment, the one moment to which there can be no return.

At the opposite end of the garden, there is an equivalent site, the grand basin. Just as the rond-point grows out of the forest and initiates the first separations in the development of the garden, this is the point at which the garden begins to re-enter the forest. Similar to the situation at the rond-point, the boundary here is reinforced by the canal/separatrix which differentiates the worldly on one side from the divine on the other. Furthermore, this is also a site for which the chateau can be seen to move to an adjacent position, a point just beyond the grand cascade. Below this, notice has already been taken of the buttresses for the basement wall. Here, certainly, are the foundations for that last moment in the life of this world, the moment when the chateau succeeds in completing its route and moves out over the grand basin and reseals the connection between these two worlds and perhaps annihilates the lesser one.

### Fiction and reality

Thus, the garden can be read not just as an artificial world, but a world whose basic structure contains a calendar of its own history and destiny, a memory of its beginning and a prophecy of its end. Although the chateau indicates by its repositioning its own history as the visitor moves through the garden, with the exception of its eschatological and archeological moments, there is, of course, much evidence that the chateau is also 'really' firmly positioned at a particular spot along this route. This spot is cause for optimism for those who would see a long life for this world, since it is located nearer to the beginning than the end. If the lateral pools in the 'center' of the garden are seen as marking the midpoint in the progression, there is a parallel point towards the end of the sequence, a point at which I suppose the chateau would be as close to the end as it is now to the beginning. This point is marked by the position of water-table. Thus as Kant had hoped, this is a world with a symmetrical arrangement of time.

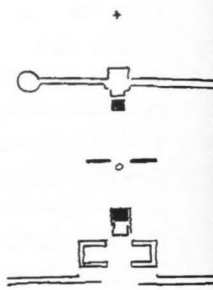
This relationship between the building and the pool at the far end of the garden suggests that another look might be taken of the site of the chateau itself. On closer inspection, one realizes that the moat around the platform on which the pavilion is sited can also be seen as a rectangular pool very similar to the water table, except in this case the chateau is sitting in it, causing it to be read as

merely a perimeter, as one might sit in a bath. Thus the suggested symmetry seems even clearer and the possibility that the water-table is potentially occupiable is more closely confirmed. (Fig.9)

Thus, Vaux-le-Vicomte is readable on various levels as not just a calendar but an apparatus which actually creates 'history'. It operates within a particularized domain of historicity, the garden, which is situated in a larger domain without this history, the park. In the first of these two worlds, history is described as a function of structure, which is structured by the application of technology, specifically the technologies of perspective and the psychology of perception. The exhibition of this structure to the viewer not only powers the entire apparatus, but also demonstrates the fictiveness of the proposal since the structure of this history is merely a function of the viewer's position. In the park, these same technologies are used to further fictionalize the entire structure of the garden, exiling it now from the domain of the viewer altogether. Therefore, the demonstrations of 'history' presented by Vaux are doubly fictive, but in both cases the fictive is necessary to define the 'real'. Consequently, the artifice within the garden is used to create an understanding regarding the 'real' position of the chateau and its relative 'earliness' in an eventual composition, while the view from the green lawn situates the 'real' condition of the Arcadian alternative and its 'otherness' against the mechanisms of temporality. Technology is thus used to reveal the 'truth' at the same time as it fictionalizes it. As 'techne' constructs and makes visible, the 'tector' covers and dissimulates.

This suggests a potential reversability between these domains, park and garden, timeless and timely, heaven and earth, a situation underscored by the evolution of Atlas. For the ancient Greeks, his role was to hold the heaven apart from the earth, but in the sixteenth century, Mercator inverted this and represented him as supporting the earth instead. From its various perspectives, Vaux provides the same differentiation. For Vaux, the subject of „et in Arcadia ego“ could be the technology which allows the park to be contrasted from the garden but only by operating within it.

For a moment Hercules changed positions with Atlas in his exchange for completing a labor. Subsequently, the site was immemorialized by the Pillars of Hercules, at the straits of Gibraltar, which marked the boundary of the classical world. In much the same manner, the figure of Hercules at Vaux marks the boundaries of one world as he assumes a reflective posture from the Olympian domain where he was admitted after his „partial“ death on earth.



Similarly, in an early act of technofiction, the Mercator Atlas proposes to position the world, but only by finding a place 'outside' of it. Yet this 'other' place is necessarily defined by terms which bind it back to earth. Archimedes and his lever make the same offer; but in moving heaven and earth, in a choreography of figure/field reversals, Vaux reveals

the fiction of the system outside and the virtue in the virtual.

Verfasser:

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Notes:

- 1 C.D. Broad, „Kant's Mathematical Antinomies,“ in PAS, , Vol. 55 (1954–1955), pp. 1–22.
- 2 Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi. *Theory and History of Literature*, vol. 10. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984, p. 77–81.
- 3 Irvin Rock and Stephen Palmer, „The Legacy of Gestalt Psychology,“ in *Scientific American*, (Dec. 1990), pp. 84–90.
- 4 Elizabeth D. Ermarth, *Sequel to History: Postmodernism and the Crisis of Representational Time*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992, p. 5.
- 5 Allen S. Weiss, *Mirrors of Infinity: The French Formal Garden and 17th-Century Metaphysics*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1995, p. 41.
- 6 F. Hamilton Hazelhurst, *Gardens of Illusion: The Genius of André Le Nostre*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1980.
- 7 Weiss, (op. cit.) p. 43.