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Constructing Hortiporn: on the Aesthetics of Stylized Exteriors

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'Constructing Hortiporn: On the Aesthetics of Stylised Exteriors' Paul Hewer, Department of Marketing, University of Stirling, Scotland Douglas Brownlie, Department of Marketing, University of Stirling, Scotland The paper examines the use of glamorously stylised photographic images embedded in highly refined aesthetic text (the Plant Room), not only as an information technology, but more formally as a situated representational practice producing meaning through signification (Williamson, 1978). We argue that there is a discursive economy of signs and spaces operating within the images and that when embedded within texts, they become active sites of representational practice. Images are referred to as 'hortiporn', where photography inscribes a 'look' into a subject position that demands submission. In this way, the premeditated images of the subject-text not only anticipate forms of arousal, they provide simulations of pleasure.

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Constructing ‘Hortiporn’: On the Aesthetics of Stylized Exteriors

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INTRODUCTION

The commodification of contemporary gardening cultures is big entertainment business in the UK. It employs a panoply of celebrity gardening gods (e.g. Diarmuid Gavin, Alan Titchmarsh, Joe Swift) and goddesses (e.g. Rachel de Thame, Charlie Dimmock). Television and radio programs are regularly devoted to those ‘green fingered’ stars (*Gardener’s World*, *The City Gardener*). They also author, or ghost-author, a wide variety of supporting texts which provide apparently avid consumers with instruction on *How to be a Gardener* (Titchmarsh, 2002), or how to bedeck one’s *plant room* (Swift, 2001). Walk through many large bookstores to the section now known as ‘lifestyles’ and you will find crowded shelves of glossy gardening books competing to attract and hold your attention and spending power. Open some of those books and you will immediately be struck by their meritorious production values: glamorous photographic images of enchantingly aestheticized spaces not only decorate the text, they punctuate it, revealing the carefully deployed hands of designer calculation and the expensive grammar of fine art photography. In this sense such texts are purposefully landscaped, i.e. designed, moulded and assembled so as to provide a very particular vista, deeply enmeshed within dominant regimes of meaning. We understand this as one moment in the historical process of the ‘aesthetic fetishising’, the *hortipornography* of gardens and gardening.

While offering sophisticated compositions that play on discursive spaces around gardens and gardening, the paper argues that such texts employ dominant logics of representation that are socially and historically situated and which construct and reconstruct divisions within social formations. It considers the framing of meaning through competing strategic ‘positionalities’ generated by discourses that circulate around the garden and gardening, aligning viewers with social positions and employing various technologies of enchantment to imbue artifacts with aesthetic meaning. It provides a reading and interpretive analysis of one contemporary gardening text, understanding it as one heavily inscribed artifact, indicative of underlying cultural forces. We discuss the ‘landscaping’ of this artifact’s materiality and how those landscapes are inscribed with aesthetic meaning. After Schroeder and McDonagh (2005, p.3), this text was selected because it “reveal[s] interesting aspects of [positioning].” Prior to this an assessment of the importance of the image to understanding contemporary culture is provided, alongside a discussion of methodological approaches available for understanding visual culture.

THE IMAGE AND CONTEMPORARY CONSUMER CULTURE

A host of contemporary theorists have sought to untangle the role of images in contemporary culture (Bauman, 2000; Maffesoli, 1996; Robins, 1996; Schroeder, 2002). The work of Maffesoli (1996) alerts us to the potential and power of images for an understanding of consumer culture. Maffesoli argues that the image must be understood as constitutive of urban memory: “the image is culture, the image *makes* culture” (1996, p.100, italics in original). The image from this account is thus expressive of our being-in-the-world, providing consumers with a ‘linking’ or ‘communion’ with others. The work of Bauman is also useful in advancing our understanding of the representational burden on images, as being

reflective and constitutive of positioning repertoires. In *Liquid Modernity* (2000), Bauman extends the meaning of shopping from its delimited retail context to that of:

“scanning the assortment of possibilities, examining, touching, feeling, handling the goods on display, comparing their costs with the contents of the wallet or the remaining credit limit of credit cards, putting some of them in the trolley and other back on the shelf—then we shop outside shops as much as inside; we shop in the street and at home, at work and at leisure, awake and in dreams...Shopping is not just about food, shoes, cars or furniture items. *The avid, never-ending search for new and improved examples and recipes for life is also a variety of shopping*” (2000, pp.73-74, italics added).

The notion of ‘recipes for life’ is a useful one and Bauman positions consumers as constantly seeking the skills and competences of consuming. Consumers are said to make use of discourses. In this regard, Bauman draws upon the work of Thrift, who considers discourses as “meta-languages that instruct people how to live as people” (Bauman, 2000, p.54). Our own argument builds upon this view by considering images as resources or scripts utilized by the consumer. Images in other words are considered as *recipes for life* that instruct people on the whys and wherefores of consuming, providing quick, easy and tailored solutions to time-strapped, harried consumers to resolve in an imaginary fashion the problems of contemporary life.

Parallels can be drawn with the work of Robins (1996) who, in drawing upon the work of Vattimo, conceives of images as devices for managing anxiety. Given the multiplication and proliferation of images in contemporary culture, he argues that this results in consumers becoming embroiled in images as a means to “*take refuge from the shocking and exhausting reality of the modern world.*” (1996, p.121). The sphere of consumption is in this fashion said to provide consumers with “*strategies of insulation and protection against the shocks of the real world*” (p.126). Images by this token become akin to a resource for the consumer, functioning as technologies and sanctuaries of enchantment.

ANALYZING THE IMAGE

There are a variety of different ways in which visual culture can be understood, through the lenses of cultural theory, psychoanalysis, feminism, semiotics and post-structuralism (Fuery et al., 2003). Drawing upon the analytical distinction between structure and intention, Barnard (2001) describes two traditions by means of which to understand visual culture: the hermeneutic or phenomenological and the structural. And using the work of Ricoeur (1974), he goes on to state that those approaches depend on various ways upon each other, that each of them should be thought of as supplementing or complementing the other. This call to interdisciplinarity inspires the study reported here, which is informed by the seminal work of Barthes (1973; 1984), Williamson (1978), Scott (1994), Schroeder and Zwick (2004) and Zafar’s (1999) later feminist work. All sought to generate understanding through cultural interpretation and detailed critique of a limited number of key texts. Rather than attempting the thinner but broader sweep of a larger sample, our approach seeks to employ the strengths of thick description and

interpretive analysis. Schroeder (2002) details how such an analysis moves through a series of stages, commencing with description and interpretation, prior to a shift to evaluation and theorization. More so, we draw specifically upon cultural analysis to investigate “*how meaning, pleasure and power are articulated through specific images*” (Lister and Wells, 2001, p.63). In this vein, we sought to develop readings of a carefully selected gardening text, to develop a line of argument which positions such texts as “*complexly coded cultural artefacts*” (Lister and Wells, 2001, p.89) embodying a host of representations, announcements and recipes for the consumer to enliven their lives. We argue for this cultural approach simply on the basis that it appears to replicate the way such cherished texts are consumed at an everyday level. Unlike the economy of exchange which marks out consumers’ interaction with formal advertising; readers (see Amazon, 2005) speak of the selected book as “*an engrossing read*” and a spur for the “*imagination*”: “*There’s so much going on in this book you’ll keep coming back for another little look. Whether it’s for a tip on keeping the maintenance down...or simply to gaze once again at some great pictures.*” Our method is therefore one of taking such ‘pictures’ or images seriously as data. And through interpretation, our own readings lead to the emergence of a number of key themes, namely: the reconfiguration of urban exterior spaces; seductive images of gardens as hortiporn; and finally the notion of consumer choice implicated in the instruction of a will to garden design.

IN SEARCH OF GARDEN REPRESENTATIONS

As a practice of consumption this paper is inspired by the lack of attention granted to such mundane, but spectacular and seductive activities as gardening. This perplexing lack of interest by consumer researchers is further questioned by the attention devoted to the practice from other disciplines. From the bible, to works of arts and literature the image of the garden can be read as what Morris terms a “*powerful collector of symbols*” (1996, p.62). Morris (1996) argues that the meanings of gardens are historically and culturally specific, always shifting, never fixed. In addition, she suggests “*The garden space, like identity, is fragmented, multiple, contradictory and provisional.*” (1996, p.76). She traces how the central motif of the novel, in this case *The Secret Garden*, is the representation of the garden as a retreat, but more specifically a feminine space for ‘self-determination and negotiated freedom’. Themes which echo throughout garden design history as we shall see when we turn to research which has examined gardening texts by garden designers of the Italian Renaissance to French formal gardens of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Mukerji (1990) in charting the history of French formal gardens analyses such spaces as ‘manifestations of materialism’ in early modern Europe suggesting:

“Gardens are forms of material culture inscribing affluence and power, legitimating social stations made problematic by economic change. They are places in which statues glorifying Europe’s classical heritage and rare imported plants, testifying to the economic reach of the international capitalist trading system, were used to buttress the social claims of their owners and designers. In addition, these gardens were designed. They were active means for communicating social location because they were carefully planned and executed, using the rich book culture that was being expanded through capitalist development in the book trade. With these tools, gardens were constituted as models of the exercise of power over nature, narratives for describing the virtues of discipline and of integrating divergent elements within an organized whole.” (1990, p.653).

From this we take a number of elements, the importance of garden spaces in previous societies, the use of gardens to express and communicate power, the importance of design and lastly, those sources through which such advice was exchanged. Mukerji thus demonstrates the importance of analysing representations of the garden, in her case through books on horticulture. In this way, she turns to the some of the first books on practical gardening, such as those of Alberti in Renaissance Italy for whom the garden “*was a place of retreat and fantasy, wish-fulfillment rather than practical activity. It was to be situated by the house so the garden could function as an outdoor living space.*” (1990, p.661). Gardens were therefore playful spaces for conspicuous display. Mukerji explains how the stylistic shift to French formal gardens involved a changing view of nature whereby the focus was placed upon the ‘geometry of its design’. This was most clearly articulated through the design of parterres and the work of Boyceau for whom the garden was conceived as a representation of the natural, a representation which contained two major characteristics, orderliness and diversity. As Mukerji explains, “*These were the aspects of nature that were revealed by scientific study. The diversity was made clear by empirical observation of particulars. The orderliness was revealed by the fact that natural laws could be written in the language of mathematics. The garden was a representation of the natural, so it too had to display the diversity and unity of nature.*” (1990, p.662).

Mukerji argues that the stylistic differences between Italian, French and English gardens during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries can be read as “*systems for mapping social ambitions on nature.*” (1990, p.668). She suggests that the central motif of the English landscape garden was meant to mirror God’s creation, the earth. Gardens were therefore designed to be observed and admired: “*The English garden was a place of study and contemplation of a nature that was other, and perfect in its otherness. It was something beyond human control, and yet under control because people had come to understand and work within its autonomous movements.*” (1990, p.670). Through such representations the underlying message was of the control exerted over land, as expressed through the portraits of landowners in their gardens where the message was one of the land that was tamed and open to their gaze.

Watters (1988) explores the relationship between Victorian literature and garden design theory suggesting that no singular garden ideal existed rather an eclectic range of garden styles from the picturesque, to old-fashioned gardens. In detailing the aesthetics of Victorian garden theory Watters starts with the idea of the garden as “*a work of art rather than an attempt to copy the ‘natural’ landscape.*” (1988, p.9). In this way, much of Victorian literature articulated a disapproval of the eighteenth-century landscape garden ideal, as did the writings of perhaps the most famous garden designer of the time John Claudius Loudon. For Loudon, the appeal of nature was mistaken, rather “*the hand of man should be visible in gardens*” (Watters, 1988, p.9). And this hand is clearly evident through the appeal of the ‘trim’ garden as illustrated through the writings of Trollope and Disraeli. Trollope’s *Can You Forgive Her?* published in 1864-5 contains the following description of John Grey’s house and garden:

“...perhaps the gardens of Nethercoats constituted its greatest glory. They were spacious and excellently kept up, and had been originally laid out with that knowledge of gardening without which no garden, merely as a garden, can be effective. And such, of necessity, was the garden of Nethercoats. Fine single trees there were none there, nor was it possible that there should have been any such. Nor could there be a clear rippling stream with steep green banks, and broken rocks

lying about its bed. Such beauties are beauties of landscape, and do not of their nature belong to a garden. But the shrubs of Nethercoats were of the rarest kind, and had been long enough in their present places to have reached the period of their beauty." (Watters, 1988, pp.10-11).

This style needs to be contrasted to that of the cottage garden or old-fashioned garden, which flourished within Victorian literature, as expressed through the writings of Thomas Hardy to George Eliot. In *Scenes of Clerical Life*, published in 1858, Eliot describes Mr Jerome's garden along the following lines:

"The garden was one of those old-fashioned paradises which hardly exist any longer except as memories of our childhood: no finical separation between flower and kitchen-garden there; no monotony of enjoyment for one sense to the exclusion of another; but a charming paradisiacal mingling of all that was pleasant to the eye and good for food. The rich flower-border running along every walk, with its endless succession of spring flowers, anemones, auriculas, wall-flowers, sweet-williams, campanulas, snap-dragons, and tiger-lilies, had its taller beauties such as moss and Provence roses, varied with espalier apple-trees; the crimson of the neighbouring strawberry beds; you gathered a moss-rose one moment and a bunch of currants the next; you were in a delicious fluctuation between the scent of jasmine and the juice of gooseberries." (in Watters, 1988, p.50).

Watters (1988) argues that the qualities of such gardens included variety, simplicity, harmony, unforced abundance, but also that they mirrored those qualities which Victorians associated with pre-industrial England:

"Of all the old rural scenes the arts had to offer, that of the old-fashioned cottage garden afforded the most coherent, complete, and readily apprehensible symbolic version of the world it at once recalled, ratified, and rendered in miniature. It was also the most bounded and idyllic of these scenes, an image that bracketed off the complicating and discordant realities of agrarian capitalism and rural labour, with a potential for disguising material poverty as natural wealth." (1988, p.51).

From these accounts of contrasting styles we gather a sense of the garden as an empty vessel with which meaning is contained, a meaning which is inextricably linked to notions of society and our vision of ourselves, and our role in that society. This meaning thereby resists definition, is open to change, and borrows from previous eras continually.

The shift to American gardens of the twentieth century is considerable, but in making it we find similar preoccupations, although a democratization of the games being played appears to have taken place, for no longer are we solely concerned with the lives of elite groups. Virginia Scott Jenkins in her study entitled *The Lawn: A History of an American Obsession* (1994) asks the telling question: what do front lawns reveal about American culture? In answering this question she turns to representational forms such as lawn-care advertisements which promoted the ideal of upward mobility through their persuasive and carefully placed images. She suggests that two types of advertisements in early years of 20th century can be spotlighted. The first were straightforward and unsophisticated and simply stated what was available to the gardener; but the second were designed to create markets: *"by convincing readers that they should do something new or in a different way."* (1994, p.67). Scott Jenkins (1994) explains how lawns at this

time were still perceived as the province of the well-to-do and that therefore advertising appeals used English lawns as a standard of perfection. In this way, she charts the increasing emphasis placed upon public display in such a mobile society where *"residents were judged on first impressions from the street."* (1994, p.79). Gardens, but more specifically lawns, were marketed as important means by which the character and economic standing of their owners might be displayed. Garden design and advice was thereby democratized, and through magazines Scott Jenkins suggests that *"Homeowners were taught that the house should be viewed from the road as a work of art."* (1994, p.79). Crucial to this vision was the emphasis placed upon the image of the lawn as a veritable carpet. In this way, *"Postwar lawns were marketed to the most white middle class as luxury items that reflected status."* (1994, p.81). Embedded in this view of the front garden was the notion of nature as something to be controlled, not simply tamed, but something to be managed and transformed. Echoes of Mukerji's approach thus abound, but Scott Jenkins is able to show how this produced a whole horticultural industry of lawn-care products. As she explains *"The standard held up for lawns that requires the grass to be of a single color, texture, and size was unrealistic even for the most devoted gardener; however, it enabled manufacturers to sell more weapons to homeowners in their battle against nature."* (1994, p.158).

Scott Jenkins (1994) ends her account with the demise of the lawn aesthetic and the emergence of new trends, aspirations in the face of cultural change. One such being the search for cultural security, as she continues: *"Privacy is becoming the new status symbol in a society that is increasingly crowded. As homeowners perceive a breakdown in the social order and must live closer to their neighbors, they are turning inward."* (1994, p.187). This comment mirrors the view of Popcorn in her suggestion that gardens have become the buffer zone between 'our cocoons and the real world' (in Rice, 1995). She continues by distancing this search from the everyday practice of gardening itself: *"This new wave of flower power seems rooted in a need to escape from a frenzied world rather than a desire to get dirt under the fingernails."* (Rice, 1995, p19). Our own approach focuses upon another means of representing the garden, that of the design-inspired, photo-feature, coffee-table lifestyle gardening book.

RECONFIGURING URBAN EXTERIOR SPACES

In the commodified world of consumer culture, marketing books about gardening have become big business. It is no longer sufficient for such books to merely inform about horticultural issues, instead each must have its own USP, its unique take on lifestyle. For *the plant room* (2001), subtitled *a contemporary guide to urban gardening*, the proposition engages readers through a discussion of the changing meaning of gardens and gardening in the context of contemporary lifestyles. The book describes itself as 'mould-breaking' and heralding a 'new age of gardening'. Gardening by this account becomes 'garden-making'; the themed decoration of 'outer space'; the domestication of light, air, flora and space; the commodification of space as an essential component of a new form of identity kit: in other words, an escape from existential angst and alienation, an ontological practice for modern life. From this perspective the book can be read as a manual for time-strapped, design conscious consumers who are presented with quick (al-ready) fixed solutions to some of the problems of contemporary living.

In *the plant room* (2001) representations of gardens are situated against the backdrop of contemporary urban living. The reader is presented with a playful stylistic mixing of codes such as dramatically juxtaposed notions of spatiality and de-centred subjects experimenting with fashion and the stylization of their lives,

in this case through shaping garden space. Images speak simultaneously of intimate and immense geometries making sense of each other; of centre and hierarchy giving way to periphery and horizontality; of the co-existence of agoraphobia and claustrophobia, of shelter and security and vulnerability and uncertainty; of cosy intimate metropolitan corners, secluded peaceful havens overlooking the River Thames (London), Sydney harbor, or Central Park (New York), located amidst the immense voids that punctuate skylines of imposing towers. In this way the garden is positioned as malleable imaginative space (Bachelard, 1994), as territory that is symbolic of the power and promise of modernity and its urge to shape, lift and separate. Rather than viewing the garden as a space that is 'other' to contemporary living, i.e. through a nostalgic return to some long-forgotten past (Hewer, 2003), in *the plant room* the reference point is to conceive of the garden as a mirror held to the rhythms of urban living: "In the cosmopolitan setting of a modern international city such as New York, London or Sydney there is an exciting shift taking place within the gardening world." (2001, p.7). The book employs a touristic quality of representing to the reader 'ideal' garden geometries exploring "contemporary city gardens from around the world, showing the wide range of garden designs that are at the forefront of this new look, and the issues that confront the modern gardener." (2001: 15). In this framing the targeted reader/viewer/consumer is that of the sophisticated aspirational metro-dweller. The book reads like a manifesto, or as the author prefers, 'guide' for the reconfiguring of garden space as outdoor interior. The spatial designs it offers not only anticipate forms of sociality, they transpose the idea of garden space into what Auge understands as a 'proper place', as a "principle of meaning for the people who live in it, and also a principle of intelligibility for the person who observes it" (1995, p.52). Auge asserts that as 'systems of possibilities' places have at least three characteristics in common: as sites of identity construction, of relations and of history. *The Plant Room* also anticipates the work of de Certeau (1984) when it portrays garden space as the place 'in whose terms elements are distributed in relations of coexistence', so that the patterns and rhythms of modern urban living are given expression in what is termed a 'versatile' space to be shaped and designed to 'suit your needs'. The garden is understood as an extension to our living space, an alfresco area for dining and recreation, an outdoor 'room' that flows seamlessly from your house's architecture and style. Not only is it "somewhere to relax, entertain, cook, eat, play and work." (2001, p.7), but somewhere to complement the classic interior of your home with an Italianate garden room featuring chalk white urns, striped fabrics and roman busts: a place for playing with geometries of space, for giving physical shape to the values that organize your life and for making one's lifestyle meaningful.

By this account, the text seeks to cast aside traditional conceptions of the garden as a "place to primarily grow plants" (2001, p.8) or to "imitate or recreate nature" (2001, p.9), to sex-up gardening for a younger generation through his tale of gardening as 'outdoor living'. In this way, we are told that the garden is "a place in which to spend leisure time" (2001, p.9), a space to reflect your personality and taste, an outdoor room in which to enact one's creativity and imagination, to show, find or reveal your selves to yourself. The central metaphor of garden space as a room is interesting in this respect as it heralds, not only the collapse of boundaries between the concepts of outdoor and indoor, but a reconfiguring of garden space whereby the ethos of design becomes paramount: "Some gardens are so closely designed and linked to the interior that the transition between the two has become seamless and the garden has become a real 'indoor-outdoor' room." (2001, p.11).

In a chapter entitled 'the versatile garden' the account of this space as produced through a deliberate and planned set of geom-

etries of design and decoration is outlined. Central to these is the idea of optimizing available space and its use by incorporating a 'large space for general outdoor living'. Within this space, Swift seeks to argue that it is the uses of such a space, the forms of sociality that it engenders that are paramount, rather than the traditional focus upon planting: "If you entertain outside on a regular basis, design a garden where people come first as the plants and features are easier to adapt to a layout than the other way round" (2001, pp.19-20). In this way, we can suggest that what the book outlines are the components of garden-making which are akin to a recipe for modern living, a recipe which has at its centre gardens as dwelling places: "It follows that with small garden you should try to keep a consistent paving level throughout. This will help keep the majority of the space usable...Dividing the garden into two main areas to create spaces for the children to play and the older folk to relax in can work really well." (2001, p.20). Such recipes include such items as the design of the layout, choices over the use of materials and surfaces, but also safety, especially in terms of child-friendliness:

"Safety is an important issue, especially where children are concerned. If the garden is a place to relax and unwind in, it has to also be a safe place where you don't have to be watching the children every minute of the day, and where you can be confident that the kids can't seriously injure themselves. Children are naturally inquisitive and will inevitably test a garden's safety to the max." (2001, p.24).

The importance of foregrounding children is interesting as it demonstrates a number of tensions within this aesthetic of modernism. First, the tension between the notions of the city as vibrant and energetic, with that of the city as a place of danger: "Unfortunately, the city has become a more dangerous place for children and the garden has become the principal place for them to play." (2001, p.12).

The second tension is that between having children in the garden and the effect of this inclusion on the design aesthetic, as we are told that "A child-friendly garden doesn't have to ruin the aesthetics of the design". To illustrate the point we are shown a garden with blue decking surrounding a square sandpit which is full of children's toys.

HORTIPORN: GARDENS AS HETEROTOPIC SPACES

As yet, we have attended to the design aesthetics which are central to *the plant room*. However the book also has fine art and design aesthetic which is equally conveyed through glamorous images of 'rooms' with decking, sparkling lights, glistening water pools, funky tables and chairs for conversation and relaxation and sociality, with verdant hyperreal plants acting as the backdrop to these scenes of contemporary living. All the images have one striking compositional feature in common-the absence of people, of actors. The reader is presented with scenes of outdoor living, whereby the gardens become stages for the drama of social communion, but without any actors being evident, emphasizing to us the agency of the images. One such image (2001, p.25) conveys a typical scene of outdoor living with the trademark large open space devoted to the rituals of everyday life, the text for the image reads as such:

"The cool colours and simple unfussy planting create a relaxing space for outdoor living. All the planting areas are mulched with cockleshells over a landscape fabric to minimize maintenance for the busy owners." (2001, p.24).

The images thus read as lifestyle enactments to provide solutions for the 'busy owners'. The absence of people as actors is interesting, as one might suggest that this facilitates the process of objectification by which viewers insert themselves within the network of traces, objects and imprints that define the images. The viewer is thus given furniture such as recliners and chairs to occupy, so that the garden space becomes a site of choice and critical moments of becoming, a room not for gardening as soil and toil, but a space for the shaping of power, desire and time as leisure-filled. The photographic image becomes a site of representational practice, a site of signifying activity; where photographs can themselves be seen as social agents doing the work of larger cultural forces, where images are required to be that which they are used to signify. In this sense signification can be seen as a constitutive feature of the context of the communication that is taking place around the discursive subject of gardens and gardening.

We refer to the images as 'hortiporn', after Smart's (1994) notion of 'gastroporn, where photography inscribes a 'look' into a subject position that demands submission, activated by mechanisms of fantasy and desire, fetishising goods such as food (Brownlie, Hewer and Horne, 2005; Hewer and Brownlie, 2005a), or in this case gardens, through, as Schroeder and McDonagh (2005, p.5) note, "eroticizing and reifying consumer products". That is to say, as hortiporn, the premeditated images in *the plant room* not only anticipate forms of arousal, they provide simulations of pleasure by means of employing pornography's photographic codes of representation. The pleasure is then derived from the act of gazing, whereby the images themselves act as substitutes for 'real' gardening. Paraphrasing Bywater (2001) we might suggest that hortiporn is to gardening, as gastroporn is to food, and what sexoporn is to sex: "Both are double-edged; they first create a simulacrum of a desire, then a simulacrum of satisfaction." (2001, p.1). For *the plant room* we might suggest that the images function in a number of similar ways. First, they convey images of gardens as desired lifestyles. Second, as forms of hortiporn the images function as *spectacles*, or as Debord suggests: "In societies where modern conditions of production prevail, all of life presents itself as an immense accumulation of *spectacles*. Everything that was directly lived has moved away into a representation." (1977, p.95)

For Debord the power of the image is conceived as a monopoly of appearance implying 'passive acceptance'. In *the plant room* the power and potency of the images appear to negate the view of gardening as a form of everyday practice. Instead garden making has become like tourism, a scopic regime, a spectator activity with its own prefigured rules or positions for the viewer (Crouch and Lubben, 2003). The space for any notion of gardening as a performance or practice (De Certeau, 1984) is thus delimited. Instead, the garden is read as a space for desire and consumption:

"As the sun sets, what you have created as your outdoor spaces takes on a completely different look. The ability to extend the hours of the day into the garden can constitute the perfect antidote to stressful city living while reflecting urban culture and all that comes with it." (2001, p.135)

As with a theatrical stage, Swift outlines how different lighting techniques, from spotlighting, to uplighting, to grazing, silhouetting, shadowing and downlighting can be employed to create a 'magical place'. The images of gardens as outdoor rooms can be read as simulated heterotopias. Foucault in the article 'Of Other Spaces' likens the garden space to a heterotopia, "...a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled." (1986a, p.27). As other spaces we argue that the images function as representations of

spectacular artifice, as immaculate conceptions freed of labour and effort, conjured up by the magical hand of consumer culture. They thus function as heterotopic spaces, designed to shelter consumers from the anxiety and vicissitudes of everyday reality (Robins, 1996), but also to reenchant this sphere of everyday life (see Hewer and Brownlie, 2005b).

THE CHOOSING (CONSTRAINED) SELF AND THE WILL TO DESIGN

Within the book the gardener is positioned as above all a consumer, little space is provided for gardening as production, instead consumer choice is foregrounded, whether this be in the form of choices over plants, colours, water features etc. But the logic which unites this aesthetic is one of the will to design. Design has thus become the holy grail of gardening, offering a vocabulary for garden making for the anxious city dweller, as the book promises:

"It takes careful planning to foster plants which will look good in the urban setting. Joe Swift show you how to do this and to choose from the wide range of garden furniture and accessories available to complete the look...in each chapter, Joe looks at layout, planning, colour, landscaping, materials, lighting, irrigation, maintenance, furniture and accessories." (2001, Inside Cover).

From a Foucauldian perspective we might argue that consumer choice or freedom appears to deliver forms of power, the "inculcation of a self managing and choosing self" (Slater, 1997, p.61). Consumer culture is thus said to represent a form of governmentality, a preoccupation with the 'conduct of conduct', whereby the modern consumer conforms to the "norm of the autonomous, responsible subject, obliged to make its life meaningful through acts of choice" (Rose cited by Slater, 1997, p.61). A sphere in which liberation and freedom reveal themselves as ultimately constraining.

However, before the reader becomes too burdened in the face of such freedom, the text is quick to reassure, to offer a solution: "If you are confident about designing your space yourself then that's fine, but if you have a tricky site or find the building aspect complicated then you could consider employing a garden designer. Why not?" (2001, p.15). Such design consultants are thus suggested as providing solutions, able to wave their magical wands for inspiration, aesthetic stimulation and above all to deliver a space that 'functions well'.

However, the image of the panopticon is readily apparent within *the plant room*. The concept of the Loft or roof garden, is thus able to be represented as a form of freedom, an 'oasis in the city', a space where the vista of the city is opened up to the gaze of the loft dweller (see images on pages 54-55 and 59, 2001). As Swift advises:

"The roof garden can be a truly unique and exhilarating space from which the vibrancy of urban life can be viewed, taken part in—or escaped from...However small, the outdoor space can give a property an all-important feeling of freedom—creating an oasis in the city." (2001, p.43).

What appears paramount is the sense of freedom obtained from such an elevated position.

However, other images (see p.50 and 58, 2001) paint a very contrasting picture, here the garden is open to the gaze of the city, a site "to watch over others" (Foucault, 1986b, p.246), but also a space in which to be prone to the gaze of others. For Foucault,

“space is fundamental for the exercise of power” (1986b, p.252). From this perspective, devices such as plants, parasols and trellising are employed to screen the consumer from this objectifying gaze: “...if privacy from overlooking apartments is an issue, consider erecting strong visual boundaries.” (2001, p.45).

In these images the strategic uses of parasols and plants are important in that they function to shelter the consumer from the power of this gaze appears telling. However, dilemmas and guidance over their selection bring us back to the exercise of power as a form of surveillance.

CONCLUSION

In this exploratory paper we read-off aspects of contemporary gardening culture from the subject text, thinking of its images as windows through which to glimpse processes of culture-making at work. Moreover, we argue that those images do not simply reflect culture and that we need to understand those images as instances of culture in the making. Offering more than simply lifestyle recipes, in our view the subject text serves to represent, or position the shaping of space in terms of several discourses located in the magical realm of gardens and gardening, where acts of mundane consumption take on an extraordinary form and are represented as such by various technologies of enchantment. In doing so, we have sought to provide an analysis of representations of the contested space which is the garden, and the ways through which this space is represented to consumers as a locale in which issues of choice, design and surveillance are brought to bear.

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