

Citrus and Peach Urban Landscapes in Limone and Montreuil

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Abstract

What does the tourist town of Limone on Lake Garda in Italy have in common with suburban Montreuil in France? Reinterpreting the infrastructural constructions to house fruits in these places, this paper will trace their lesser-known architectural marks through the urban landscape based upon established memories. In 19th century-Europe the citrus and peach industries reached their peak, but by the turn of the 20th century these sought-after agricultural/luxury commodities went into decline: peaches were no longer tattooed with artisanal stamps and lemons were tainted with a disease. First, this paper analyses the citrus architecture, specifically the lemon greenhouses along Lake Garda's towns. Then, it compares them with the criss-cross spaces for peaches within walls (*aka* peach walls), created in suburban Montreuil, near Paris. Observing the links between these two cases, it is concerned with memory traces, argued herein as promoting functional vestiges in European urban landscapes.

Referring to German landscape architect Leberecht Migge's writings, the paper questions why such functional vestiges operated as alternative allotments in the urban landscape elsewhere in Europe. How have they provided luxurious spaces or the cleansing of entrenched spaces for those who live or work outside the city or suburb? Although the spaces within such infrastructural constructions have since declined, peach walls have subsequently been converted into public spaces as with Jean Nouvel and Michel Desvigne's 800 kilometres 'seam' design (2009) near Paris. And traces of the lemon greenhouses have inspired David Chipperfield's new private luxury houses (2015) at Lake Garda. This comparison of the remnant fruit-growing traces of Limone and Montreuil through the landscape enabled remnant spaces to become sustainable places today. Urban citrus-spaces cleanse microclimates and the conversion of peach walls provides us with beneficial changes as communal spaces.

Introduction

Contemporary scholars have discussed the concern about urban agriculture in the context of sustainability¹ and yet what is at stake is how the existing fragmentary traces impacted European landscape modernism through their material memory traces upon twentieth century architecture. Walled enclosures have created functioning patterns in the urban landscape, individually and collectively through agricultural architecture. In reinterpreting cities in 19th and 20th century-Italy and France, the material memory traces of fruit cultivation within walled enclosures led to the development of housing allotments as modern incubators for people in the urban landscape. Lake Garda and Paris were the leaders in cultivating fruit. Two peculiar architectural-types originated in the seventeenth century: as elongated rectilinear lots in the form of an enclosed solar wall-honeycomb to grow peaches (in the form of espaliers), and ones built on many terraces for the cultivation of citrus fruits. This connection is especially marked from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. What these two places had in common in the past is their stone enclosures to protect the plants from extreme temperatures or winds. This paper argues how agricultural architecture and its contents (citrus and peach fruit trees) were adaptively reused to form modern urban spaces for living-in.

What I find fascinating about the citrus architecture of Lake Garda and the peach walls of Paris is their link to Le Corbusier's city planning for quiet places to walk in springtime. Lake Garda played a crucial part in forming Le Corbusier's landscape propositions. The Swiss architect was "attentive to both the grand landscapes of mountains and coastlines as well as those of the city."² In Paris, Le Corbusier was concentrating his efforts on salvaging the past in a curious way:

By destroying that part of Paris which did not conform to his Taylorist vision of the modern city, Le Corbusier argued paradoxically, he was in fact rescuing the past. In effect, he was editing and reconstructing the past for his own purposes, transforming the old city into an artificial environment that would function like a museum of monuments, a landscape of memory: "My dream", he writes, "is to the Place de la Concorde empty once more, silent and lonely and the Champs Elysees a quiet place to

¹ Dorethee Imbert, "Let Them Eat Kale," in *Architecture Boston Magazine* (Fall 2010): 24-26; Fabrizi, Mariabruna Fabrizi, "Artificial Microclimates: nature within walls in Montreuil and Pantelleria," February 24, 2014.

² Jean Louis-Cohen, 'In the Cause of Landscape' in *Le Corbusier: An Atlas of Modern Landscapes*, Jean Louis-Cohen, (ed.) New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2013, p.29.

walk in. The ‘Voisin’ scheme would isolate the whole of the ancient city and bring back peace and calm from Saint-Gervais to the Etoile.”³

As landscapes of memory, the artificial environments transformed into new places were Le Corbusier’s new urban and suburban housing lots, which I argue were derived from the functional infrastructures to cultivate fruits.

“...we’ll take a turn round the garden”

Walter Benjamin maintained, that “memory is not an instrument for surveying the past but its theatre...what is unearthed in the operations of remembrance, as it delves to ‘ever-deeper layers’ of the past, is a treasure-trove of images.”⁴ How is one able to unravel those memory traces concerning cultivated-fruit walls in Italy and France, many of which were demolished in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries? The memory of training fruit to fan into espaliers to grow across walls have remained in cities indenting their roots into the wall’s surface. The memory of the fruit’s flavour, however, has disappeared and there are no true traces of plant life.

In observing a cartoon of an enclosed garden planted with a tree published in modern architect Le Corbusier’s *Un Maison - Un Palais* (1928) with the following figure caption - on the “Springtime walk: if you’re good...we’ll take a turn round the garden”⁵ - directs one to notice the theatrical-memory pattern in his work. This is particularly the case with his involvement in designing suburban villa projects around Paris in the 1920s and 1930s. The cartoon represented a type of memory machine-for-plants that materialises into Le Corbusier’s adage of the “house is a machine for living-in.” Discussed herein as a material memory trace, Le Corbusier’s publication of the architecture-landscape cartoon within the urban landscape altered twentieth-century cities, inadvertently, into something new. This is especially the case with his spatial ideology of the roof garden as a symbol of 20th century

³ Nancy J Troy, *Modern art and oblivion: an introduction, Memory and oblivion*, Proceeding of the XXIX International Congress of the History of Art held in Amsterdam, 1-7 September 1996, Eds. Wessel Reinink and Jeroen Stumpel, Springer, p. 893.

⁴ *Berlin Childhood Around 1900* by Walter Benjamin, trans. Howard Eiland, Harvard University Press, Cambridge Massachusetts, London, England, 2006, p.xii; “History is a form of official memory, in what Benjamin perceives to be its distorted forms, a form of officially sanctioned forgetting.” Quoted in *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates*, Susannah Radstone, Bill Schwarz, eds. Fordham Press, New York, 2010, p.133.

⁵ reprinted in Benton 2013,123

Benton, Tim. “The ‘Petit Maison de Week-end’ and the Parisian Suburbs,” in *Le Corbusier and The Revolution of Reinvention*. London: Architectural Association, 2003.

modernism. “The roof garden was not a singular concept, but rather a vessel for competing visions of nature – organically luxuriant or geometrically controlled,”⁶ in the vein of a disciplined espalier ordered not to grow unruly. At times, however, the roof garden “occasionally expressed a nostalgic yearning for the ground.”⁷ Yet there is more to this image of the enclosed garden. In terms of the nostalgia for the ground in the two case studies discussed herein, the material memory traces of Limone’s citrus architecture along Lake Garda near the city of Brescia, Italy, and suburban Montreuil’s peach walls, east of Paris, both resemble this cartoon, or are distorted-elongated lots, as shall be revealed in this paper.

Prior to Le Corbusier’s career in France, in 1907, on one of Le Corbusier’s voyages to Italy, he followed Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s routes and sailed on Lake Garda. He was in awe of its terraced lemon-houses and visited these walled enclosures,⁸ which arguably affected his future outlook in designing social housing schemes (such as those designed for Algiers).

About six decades later, after Le Corbusier’s voyage, modern Austrian architect and critic Bernard Rudofsky, whose book and exhibition, *Architecture Without Architects* (1964) reaped global attention, documented Lake Garda’s lemon-houses. The book’s cover featured Limone’s long lemon-house, but in ruins. At first count these lemon-house remnants appear primitive because of their vernacular appearance – their material memory traces are built upon the terraced topography, which is more akin to what is now considered modern. The skeletal structures had aided Le Corbusier to create modern and buildings – in the city and in the suburbs too.

Citrus and peach architecture and their connective marks

At Lake Garda, there were many “comb-type structures” dotted along the shoreline. Built on a series of terraces and linked by stairs, these citrus houses were comprised of a massive walls, which was enclosed on three sides so as to maximum sun exposure. The

⁶ Dorothee Imbert, ‘Parterres en l’air: Roberto Burle Marx and the Modernist Roof Garden,’ in *Roberto Burle Marx: The Modernity of Landscape*, eds. L. Cavalcanti et al. Cite de l’Architecture and Barcelona, New York: Actar, 2011, p.224.

⁷ Dorothee Imbert, ‘Parterres en l’air: Roberto Burle Marx and the Modernist Roof Garden,’ in *Roberto Burle Marx: The Modernity of Landscape*, eds. L. Cavalcanti et al. (Cite de l’Architecture and Barcelona, New York: Actar, 2011), p.223.

⁸ Refer to *L’Italia di Le Corbusier*, Verona: Mondadori, Electa, 2012.

facades were glazed, which could be dismantled during the summer months, and each citrus house had its own plot to grow the fruit. The lemon greenhouses, including glass panes between timber panels, were located on the south-facing terraced slopes. Stone pillars pierce the landscape towards the lakeshore. During winter, the lemon-house facades are boarded up with glazing and timber elements to permit sunlight in the interior to heat the space for the citrus fruits to grow. Timber rafters are also put in place to keep the snow out. Whereas during summer the lemon-house's pergola-frame is stripped (and stored in another smaller covered enclosure) and functions with respect to ideal conditions. As flexible conservatories, these rectilinear lots are therefore utilitarian. Presumably, they informed different types that emerged in Germany because they offer clues as to how they formed 20th century garden lots.

As far as the citrus architecture is concerned, how common were the memory traces of these structures predating the 19th century? One must briefly turn to the French monarchy at Versailles and their interest in the Orangery when they visited Italy and "coveted the cache of citrus and returned determined to grow it as an emblem of power. The French climate was not-at-all suited to orange cultivation, so by the fourteenth century had developed glass-walled, heated buildings, called *les orangeries*, just for growing citrus."⁹ This was especially the case with King Louis XIV's elaborate fruits garden enclosures at Versailles. "For the next two hundred years, oranges would be the exclusive property of the aristocracy and the wealthy."¹⁰

Orangeries were similar structures to the lemon greenhouse but more of the ornamental-type of conservatories that followed the lemon-house-aesthetic in Spain, France and Germany. Lake Garda lemon-houses "were constructed to make possible the cultivation of citrus fruits at high altitudes. Citrus cultivation reached its peak in 1850-1855 when Gargnano was home to around half the lemon greenhouses along the entire length of the lake."¹¹ Eventually, "one after the other, lemon houses were abandoned. During the First World War soldiers carried away the wooden beams and planks to build shelters or use for firewood."¹² The main point

⁹ Boule 2013, 17 Boule, David. *The Orange and the Dream of California*, Santa Monica: Angel City Press, 2013.

¹⁰ Boule 2013, 17 Boule, David. *The Orange and the Dream of California*, Santa Monica: Angel City Press, 2013.

¹¹ See 'The Limonaie,' <http://www.gargnanosulgarda.com/events-lake-garda/the-limonaie-gargnano.html>, accessed 30.07.2015

¹² Toby Sonneman, *Lemon: A Global History*, 2012, p.56.

here is that the archaic citrus structures impacted modernism – and that the fruit lots were converted into spaces to live in, on the periphery of the city. In 1929, the construction of the *Gardesana Occidentale* road commenced and two years later it connected Limone with the other lemon houses of Riva (towards Austria) and Gargnano (towards Brescia). Because of this new access road, tourism increased in the area.¹³

Fortuitously, citrus architecture and criss-cross peach walls provided the remnant spaces for which European countries were able to prepare for the advent of modern urban landscapes. Yet at that time these spaces were inaccessible to the general public because they were privately owned enclaves. By the 20th century, the living traces of actual citrus and peaches began to decline after the First World War and gradually disappear after the Second World War. Between the wars at suburban Montreuil, German/ British army fighters circumvented the labyrinthine peach walls and up until now some of these spaces lay vacant and existed until demolished to make way for new buildings or communal spaces. Meanwhile in the lakeside tourist town Limone's lemon houses, were exposed to a different fate: during the First World War, the German army needed to keep warm and so the timber pergola structure atop of the terraced-and-walled citrus lots were dismantled and burned. And while the timber vanished from the lemon conservatory, the fruit began to spoil because of the cold temperatures and so as the fruit died what remained were its rotted tree roots and existing lime-stone walls.

As evident in the postcards of Montreuil, the vast expansion of the long-configured peach walls were plastered with lime to preserve the heat. They were hidden spaces and almost Kasbah-like and allowed for fruit to be grown in special circumstances – regardless of taking up land, in the form of terraces or vast swathes of flat land, these picturesque orchards with their sought-after luxuries were exported to neighbouring countries. The organization of the city of Georges-Eugene Haussmann's renovation of Paris permitted the maze of peach walls to be razed to the ground to make way for new buildings and public spaces. In any case, the lime-white-plastered walls preserved the heat in the same manner as the Limone

¹³ Fava, Domenico. *Tra le limonaie di Limone sul Garda: Un persorso tra storia e cultura*, Lombardia: Comune di Limone sul Garda, 2006, p.20.

conservatories. When covered with temporary frames to resist frost, the peach walls became hidden spaces, but today many of them have become ruins.

Intriguingly, there is thus a connection between the peach walls and the circular dry-stone walls to house citrus trees of Pantelleria, an island off the coast of Sicily, which were created as artificial microclimates for fruit trees as common infrastructural constructions to protect the plants from strong winds and cold temperatures.¹⁴ As paradisiacal gardens, they resemble what could be described as small lot-like theatres as in Le Corbusier's memory of the cartoon published in his book.

Reserved for those who could afford such food luxuries, instead the citrus and peach urban landscapes are material memory traces, which became alive again when the fruit no longer existed. Lake Garda's citrus architecture in particular raises the question about the origins of modern architecture because of its terraced wall enclosures fitted with glazed facades. The issue I am going to discuss now is how the two case studies promoted functional vestiges in urban landscapes for living-in.

Material memory marks as lot-like theatres

Dorothee Imbert's thoughts on the cultivation of fruit (and vegetables) in lots outside the city of Paris merit close attention. Some of her claims about the German landscape pioneer Leberecht Migge's polemics, which she says "were a call to arms for food self-sufficiency,"¹⁵ relate to the enclosed citrus-architecture lots that existed for the wealthy landowners for its fruit cultivation for the northern European market. Imbert has acutely observed how urban agriculture has enabled one to critique the city in a new way. She notes that Louis XIV expressed his vision of "garden design, urbanism and food production, which included "walled orchards" at Versailles,¹⁶ which points towards the origins of agricultural architecture and their relevance to landscape modernism. She also asserts Montreuil's "spatially compelling" peach walls "at the opposite end of Paris, whose now barely productive traces bear witness to their mark on the collective memory."¹⁷ Here "collective memory" plays an

¹⁴ Fabrizi, Mariabruna. "Artificial Microclimates: nature within walls in Montreuil and Pantelleria," February 24, 2014

¹⁵ 2010, 24 Imbert, Dorethee. "Let Them Eat Kale," in *Architecture Boston Magazine* (Fall 2010): 24-26.

¹⁶ 2010, 24 Imbert, Dorethee. "Let Them Eat Kale," in *Architecture Boston Magazine* (Fall 2010): 24-26.

¹⁷ 2010, 24 Imbert, Dorethee. "Let Them Eat Kale," in *Architecture Boston Magazine* (Fall 2010): 24-26.

important part. The reason for this is because in 19th century Germany, the memory of the allotment gardens were linked to European urbanization at a time when there was mass migration from rural into cities to lead a better lifestyle. They were more communal.¹⁸

Lots could be rented out so that people could grow their own food and feel a sense of purpose for doing so, for food security. Migge who during the war years advocated a set of design strategies, foresaw this process as “green” planning,¹⁹ leading to self-sufficiency in the allotment garden. Imbert suggests that Migge “promoted an integrated housing-garden unit where greenhouses, vegetable beds, and pergolas spatially extended the minimum dwelling and supplemented the family diet with a carefully calibrated output for foodstuff.”²⁰ She continues: “urban agriculture offers the potential to recalibrate the social, economic, and spatial balance, it is the designer’s role to underscore the importance of urban agriculture as a designed open space with wide-ranging implications.”²¹ The memory traces of the existing citrus houses and peach walls in particular offer clues as to how such functional vestiges not only promoted green planning ideas but also point towards modern architecture’s origins of the elongated-urban green roof terrace and glass enclosure as an idea derived from the remnant fragmentation of the citrus and peach urban landscapes, discussed at the beginning of this paper.

Lake edge-lots and suburban lots

Now I will demonstrate what seems to have been the two principal memory traces in an urban landscape devices developed by European architects and landscape architects: the allotment for urban situations, and party walls – to neutralize and establish new spaces. Such traces transformed into auxiliary spaces – and one might return to Le Corbusier’s designs, especially his surrealist Beistegui apartment (1929-31) in Paris (as an indoor-outdoor lavish space) and the Algiers projects of the 1930s, as devices that offered alternative allotments. That is, as functional vestiges in the urban landscape.

¹⁸ Dumpelmann, Sonja. “‘Per la difesa del giardino’: Gardens, Parks, and Landscapes between Tradition and Modernism in Early Twentieth-Century Italy,” in *Modernism and Landscape Architecture, 1890-1940*, T. O’Malley and J. Wolschke-Bulmahn (eds.), New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2015.

¹⁹ Haney 2010, 145 Haney, David H. *When Modern Was Green: Life and Work of Landscape Architect Leberecht Migge*, London and New York: Routledge, 2010.

²⁰ Dorethee Imbert, “Let Them Eat Kale,” in *Architecture Boston Magazine* (Fall 2010): 24-25.

²¹ Dorethee Imbert, “Let Them Eat Kale,” in *Architecture Boston Magazine* (Fall 2010): 25.

Seen in this light, Le Corbusier's Algiers projects is not only a statement about the social relations of fruit production in Lake Garda, but as replanting new memory traces in the form of new buildings in the landscape. What is interesting about the case studies I have described here are the attempts to make citrus houses and peach walls into material memorial traces suggested that as well as to allow the production of a sustainable urban landscape with memory so it does not simply become a seasonal (or fashionable) phase of construction.

Alternative allotments as functional vestiges in the urban landscape

As material memory traces, both of them – citrus and peach architecture – still exist within modern and contemporary architecture but as new forms emanating from Migge's ideas and from the earlier functional vestiges dating back prior to the 19th century lemon houses. Citrus and peach urban landscapes left their memory traces on modernism through Le Corbusier urban landscape works in Europe (including northern Africa). And this was the case especially in the early twentieth century.

Apart from museums preserving their memories on the location where they once grew, as in Limone, today these infrastructural constructions no longer serve for this function as they did in the past. The material memory traces of agricultural architecture affected the urban landscapes of Lake Garda's shoreline and Montreuil. Memories of framing fruit plants gave rise to "green modernism"²² to improve people's livelihoods. This paper argued how agricultural architecture, such as the greenhouse and allotment gardens, and its memory contents (citrus and peach fruit trees) were adaptively reused to incorporate inhabitants.

Le Corbusier's projects in and around Paris must have inspired him not only to design the Beistegui Apartment but also to design the Petit Maison project (1934-35). Most emphatically, the lemon houses would have inspired him to design the Algiers Project – to follow the contours of the landscape as *exaggerated* memories. There appears to be a northern African dimension to it all. Presumably, he must have seen the peach walls of Montreuil. In some ways, his new residual spaces filled with lot-theatres, lake edge-lots and suburban lots are uncannily akin to inhabited kasbahs, which will continue to provide solar access to those who are currently occupying/squatting within its spaces.

²² On "green modernism" see David H Haney, *When Modern Was Green: Life and Work of Landscape Architect Leberecht Migge*, London and New York: Routledge, 2010.

Although the spaces within such infrastructural constructions have since slowly disappeared, the Parisian peach walls have subsequently been converted into public spaces as with Jean Nouvel and Michel Desvigne's 'seam' design scheme (2009). Whereas traces of the lemon greenhouses have definitely inspired David Chipperfield's two new private luxury houses at Villa Eden in Gardone, Lake Garda, which I visited in 2015. This comparison of the remnant fruit-growing traces of Limone and Montreuil through the landscape enabled remnant memory spaces to become resilient places today. Urban citrus-spaces cleanse microclimates and the conversion of peach walls provides us with beneficial changes as communal-theatrical spaces as well as self-sufficient spaces.

Postscript: the export of a 20th century urban-architectural orangery

A further commentary upon citrus architecture can be had for the internal "peeling of the Caribbean Orange," an installation by Gordon Matta-Clark, into a building that was set to be renovated into the Museum of Chicago's existing structure. Slated for renovation, artist-architect Gordon Matta-Clark's *Circus: The Caribbean Orange* (1978) came up with an alternative use of buildings and literally sawed through three floors of a derelict building in the centre of Chicago, which was conceived as a calculated removal of a derelict structure in the urban environment. Matta-Clark cut through the floors and walls based on the arc, hence the formation of the multi-layered orange slices, where new composite spaces emerged comprising of the voids. It was an act of rebuilding the memory of citrus architecture – an internal urban landscape as a series of *stray* residual spaces. As Marc Treib writes:

We have all seen urban wall remnants upon which the records of the once-abutting spaces have been deposited on the party walls of their neighbours. The incongruence of residual ceramic tile, the curiously tinted plaster surfaces floating on brick, or the fragments of residual concrete overlay scale and history to the normally blank walls that turn away from the street. Matta-Clark's work provides us a similar chronicle of building history, augmenting residue with a vision of the positive void that charges through floor planes, claiming space and identity. Incisions reactivate memory, providing that the power of the void can supersede architecture's repository of pragmatics.²³

²³ Marc Treib, *Setting and Stray Paths: Writings on Landscape and Gardens*, London and New York: Routledge, 2005, p.84.

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