

THE CHANGING ROLE OF BOTANIC GARDENS IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE NATURAL ORDER

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1. ABSTRACT

Botanic gardens constitute an excellent medium to render legible different conceptions of environment. Since the earliest examples of gardens aimed to increase the scientific understanding of plants, botanic gardens have always exceeded their research purpose of plant collection and classification. Aside from codifying plant life, they have expressed the different aesthetic and cultural aspirations of each time and place. In recent times, an emphasis has been put on the capacity of botanic gardens to educate the general public about current environmental issues and the different values around which the relationship between humans and plants has been constructed over history. In the current context of environmental disruption, less attention is given, however, to the extraordinary potential of contemporary botanic gardens to contribute to the construction of new forms of natural order.

Through a quick overview of some of the different systems of classification in the natural sciences and its concomitant principles of organization in landscape gardening, this essay will highlight a few historic examples to show how botanic gardens have worked towards a synthesis of prevalent scientific codes of botany and aesthetic canons of landscape architecture. It will then focus on the discussion of a contemporary case, the Bordeaux botanic garden, designed by the French landscape architect Catherine Mosbach, as a way to recapitulate and expand some of the key issues in the history of botanic gardens. This essay ultimately seeks to highlight the potential of botanic gardens, specifically, and landscape architecture, in general, to internalize, render legible, and thus advance different constructions of the natural order and of the position of the human within.

1.1 Keywords

botanic gardens, botany, natural order, construction, representation