

# Discontinuous sciences

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Objektyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **Pamphlet**

Band (Jahr): - **(2017)**

Heft 21: **Sampling Kyoto gardens**

PDF erstellt am: **11.08.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-984682>

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## DISCONTINUOUS SCENES

Kiyoshi Sey Takeyama

Leibniz loved to draw. The mathematician who discovered differential and integral calculus expressed his ideas through visual representations. And Deleuze explained the notion of Leibniz's monads<sup>1</sup> by drawing a two-story house.<sup>2</sup>

Conic sections, connecting algebra and geometry, provide us with beautiful formulas and elegantly curved forms which easily convince us of the order of the universe. But while Leibniz and Deleuze relied on conics to make sense of the world according to quantitative laws, they also saw value in the more ambiguous forms expressed in drawings and diagrams. Both of them were insistent on connecting the discrete thinking of the intellect with the continuous sensation of the body—that is, the intelligible with the “sense-able.”

Our experience of landscape also appears continuous because it is physical. When we walk through a garden, we perceive the world through all five senses, enjoying the garden as a singular yet apparently integrated experience. In addition to physical sensations, our experience may be accompanied by multiple emotional states: We may feel calm, relaxed, or consoled. Many of us are comforted by landscape.

However, in the attempt to describe any such experience in words, all is transfigured by the analytic and discrete approach, thus rapidly diminishing the emotional dimension. Words are logical; they follow a system akin to digital notation. As the experience of landscape itself may be described as analog—that is, both grounded and founded on physical quantities (time, temperature, light) in constant flux rather than on the basis of logical reasoning—there remain illogical elements worth considering. In fact, it is within these illogical elements that human emotion is preserved. That is to say, the ambiguous forms expressed in drawings and diagrams mark the boundary between the digital and the analog, retaining their figurative connection to the physical world while also revealing a degree of emotional resonance.

1 Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz established a metaphysics of simple substances which he referred to as monads in *Monadology* (*La Monadologie*, 1714). Humans, animals, and plants are all considered monads, thus signifying individuals or units which cannot be broken down further into parts. Horst Bredekamp, *Die Fenster der Monade*:

Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz' *Theater der Natur und Kunst* (Berlin: Akademie, 2008).

2 Drawing of the “maison baroque” (The Baroque House [an allegory]) in Gilles Deleuze, *Le pli: Leibniz et le Baroque* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1988).

Take, for instance, the cave paintings at Lascaux or Altamira. We can still smell a “flavor”<sup>3</sup> of emotion within the very concreteness of these animal representations despite the fact that they may also be read as discrete signs symbolizing such notions as masculinity, femininity, fertility, etc. as the archeologist-anthropologist André Leroi-Gourhan recognized.<sup>4</sup> We feel the “flavor” and respond to it with our own corporeality.

Both European and Islamic gardens offer us continuous experiences at multiple scales. At the territorial scale of Versailles Grand Parc, grand views evoke a sense of infinity through optical effects while within the gardens at Petit Trianon, we return to the continuously physical and “sense-able” experience of an intimate garden scene. Beyond the baroque garden style in France, English landscape gardens, while no longer strictly adhering to pleasing geometries, also give us a continuous experience, namely through the popular circuit walks. In contrast to these serpentine pathways, and much more reminiscent of the earlier mathematical foundations of baroque gardens, Naqsh-e Jahan Square in Isfahan, Iran achieves a different kind of “continuous scenery,” nobility even, as if the order of the cosmos itself were being projected directly onto the earth. The harmonious layout of reflective water, blue sky, and dry air, all of which are transparent and visually clear, makes us feel as though the world were brimming with wisdom.

If the geometric compositions of these baroque and Islamic gardens evoke a world of intelligence, then to what kind of thoughts do Japanese gardens invite us—or is it more a set of emotions we are invited to *feel*?

3 Leibniz uses the term *goût*, translated as “flavor” or “taste,” in his discussion on monads within his *Monadology*, particularly in regards to the experience of awakening to an experience of conscious perception upon being stirred by a stronger or higher “flavor”—a distinct experience—rather than remaining in a stupor: “L’on voit par là, que si nous n’avions rien de distingué et pour ainsi dire de relevé, et d’un plus haut goût dans nos perceptions, nous serions toujours dans l’étourdissement. Et c’est l’état des Monades toutes nues.”

Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Philosophische Schriften*, ed. C. I. Gerhardt, vol. 1 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1875–1890), article VI, 611; *Les principes de la philosophie ou la monadologie [Monadology]* §24.

4 André Leroi-Gourhan, *The Art of Prehistoric Man in Western Europe* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1968), 113.

The most notable difference between these gardens is the Japanese garden's structure, comprised of an accumulation of discontinuous scenes. It does not make for an experience of continuous scenery but rather a disjointed and fragmented experience. It does not present a field elegantly ruled by perspective or a place saturated with the power of reason. In short, the Japanese garden is not at all visually transparent.

If European and Islamic gardens are reconstructions of continuous experiences, in terms of a series of discrete and analytic signs, or else representations of a story based on the continuity of experience, Japanese gardens are discontinuous from beginning to end. They are assemblages of scenes which are not at all related to one another. In fact, in place of objects or follies in the landscape which act as reminders of a rational understanding of the world, one finds a series of symbolic expressions and reflections, each capturing a singular moment.

Historically, the Japanese art of garden making did not rely on standard drawing conventions such as the plan or section. Instead, gardens grew out of rough drawings representing multiple, discrete scenes. It wasn't logic which was praised but rather the physical expression of one's creative intuition.

Japanese gardens are not microcosms of the great world of reason; they offer a sort of continual discontinuity of scenes filled with emotion. Scenes are not endowed with powerful forms or narratives and borders remain ambiguous. Each scene, "connected" only disjointedly, is easily dismantled into incomplete objects and events.

But then there are sounds.

While scenes in a Japanese garden may be logically disjunctive and visually discontinuous, sounds draw together the remaining impressions. They arrange these discrete scenes so that when we walk, a fragmented scenery is lent cohesion by the sound of gravel, of water, of birds singing. We participate in stitching together the previously unrelated impressions through our own movements. And then, on occasion, the garden's integrity is cut by the sound of *shishi-odoshi* (a bamboo sound device).

After a moment of silence, sounds come back to life; as if awoken from a seamless dream, the visual discontinuity continues.



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