“Burial in a sacred grove is an ancient privilege.”
—Paul Shepard

Oh, don’t talk to me about gardens and spacial poetry. It is recherche du temps perdu and paradise.
The only paradise, as Richard Elman says, is the one that has been lost. Who do you know who has made it all the way to Within a Building Grove?

Where I grew up we had the “Old Back Road.” You got to The Road (a foreign-country-in-the-suburbs complete with abandoned farmhouse, snakes and an occasional drifter sleeping off a drunk) by traversing a hundred yards of terrifying and exhilarating forest. Who can say if any Road adventure has been manifest in my work; but I sometimes wonder if my can of buried peanuts ever became some other kid’s miraculous discovery.

A friend who lives in a Korean Buddhist monastery writes, “There aren’t any gardens in America anymore.” And I think I agree with him, at least in the sense of garden-as-paradise. It wouldn’t be so verbalized, but every one seems to believe that they can’t/must make use of somebody else’s paradise as their own.

Yeah, it’s a sign of the times that most designers don’t perceive the signs of the times (or are unable to make one of this perception if they do). But since who is that new? Lack ing vision or insight or courage, steal somebody else’s. However, one person’s vision is another’s vertigo; insight insan i ty; and courage well, call me collect if you find one. One thing I do know, it doesn’t spring pantherogene tically from freestanding walls painted primary colors.

Yet, today’s predicament is a bit more perplexing than Venturi’s in ‘66. We can’t shock anyone anymore. Even Hilton Kramer knows: “That the culture (Picasso) set out to attack and transform proved to be more resilient in its response to this assault than anyone at the time had reason to expect, that it showed itself capable of absorbing such assaults and profiting from them — this, I should have thought, would now, in the next to last decade of the twentieth century, have become an acknowledged datum of critical intelligence.”

No, we may not be able to shock them anymore, but the audience double-dares us to try, and then books the place for the Debutsante Ball. What is a designer to do?

But maybe I’m wrong. Maybe stuff did his job too well. Maybe designers aren’t perceptio nal. If Beuys is right that what distinguishes so-called advanced societies from those of the past is that they consume images rather than beliefs, then all those preserved pillars are just what the public ordered.

In any light, this project—a private cemetery—is firmly the face of the contemporary. For what aspect of human experience is more saturated with notorious and blindly-held beliefs than death? You might say that this garden offers the opportunity to employ one’s beliefs or to have their absence exposed.

You’ll want to know that Valanakis’s Oedipus was researched and that the labyrinth is of Poma origin. Sure, at one time or another we’ve all used the artist’s secret code. But don’t expect intent to compromise your response? Perhaps we need to decide if Duchamps was right when he said that the most important thing about a painting is its title.

The cubes are clipped hormoneconsultants; the pavilions trained and clipped Myers.