



## Peer Reviewed

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

Oh, don't talk to me about gardens and spatial poetics, *A la recherche du temps perdu* and paradise. The only paradise, as Richard Ellman says, is the one that has been lost. Who do you know who has made it all the way to *Within a Budding 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 pennies 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 everyone seems to believe that they can/should/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 use of this perception if they do). But since when is that new? Lacking vision or insight or courage, steal somebody else's. However, one person's vision is another's vertigo; insight — insanity; and courage, well, call me collect if you find any. One thing I do know, it doesn't spring parthenogenetically from freestanding walls painted primary colors.

Yes, 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 Debutante Ball. What is a designer to do?

But maybe I'm wrong. Maybe Bob did his job *too* well. Maybe designers are *too* perceptive. If Barthes 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 purloined pillars are just what the public ordered.

In such light, this project — a private cemetery — flies in 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 Pima origin. Sure, at one time or another we've all coveted the artist's secret code. But don't express intentions compromise your response? Perhaps we need to decide if Duchamp was right when he said that the most important thing about a painting is its title.

The cubes are clipped horsechestnuts; the pavilions trained and clipped yews.





