

The Union Street

**URBAN
ORCHARD**

Editoriale Lotus



Summer Park Governors Island

MDP Michel Desvigne Paysagiste
Summer Park, Governors Island
 New York, 2007

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 Con/With: REX architects (Architect)

that it does not give into the illusion of false theories or utopian revolutions that clash with the reality of our human nature and of the evils of the various established societies. If this is how things stand, do we have to frame the phenomenon of the new urban agriculture in the narrative of the end of the great illusions? Is it the response to these years of crisis in Western countries?

Deeply affected by sad events in his own life as well as by terrible disasters like the Lisbon earthquake of 1755 that had destroyed the city, causing thousands of deaths and undermining his faith in Providence, Voltaire wrote *Candide* under the influence of the pessimism of the moment. Only at the end of the story does the philosopher yield to the hope expressed by the celebrated words “il faut cultiver notre jardin” (“we must cultivate our garden”).

Once again, in the current phenomenon of cultivation of one’s own garden, there is an accentuation of the collective, community dimension, as well as a request not to remain confined to the outskirts of the city as in the tradition of the urban allotments of the last century, but to see with pride these activities as a contribution to the safeguarding of the planet. Cultivating one’s garden would represent a political phenomenon of dissidence for those who seek to save the world by defending the supply of food, in a moment of dramatic oscillation between bulimia and anorexia, but once again the figure of the oxymoron raises its head in this discussion, as in the title of Serge Latouche’s latest book, *Vers une société d’abondance frugale* (“Toward a Frugal Abundance”), “a fiery tirade against the catastrophe produced by bulimia of consumption.”

So some have come to think that in our time cooking with the simple products of nature, and growing some of them yourself, can be regarded as a subversive act. When “*Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front*” by the poet, writer and farmer Wendell Berry was published in the *Whole Earth Catalog*, the mother of all alternative magazines, in 1969 it was immediately evident that it contained all the best that had come out of the American student revolt and the hypothesis of a return to nature and abandon of consumer society.

Forty years have passed since then and his environmental message has become legendary, but in reality we do not know whether we have to respond to the excesses of consumerism or to the new shortages produced by the grave economic crisis underway by turning to alternative sources of energy.

The new urban agriculture certainly has a symbolic and therapeutic value. It can help us to modify many points of view on the world, but we have to realize that we will not be able to rely much on its production capacity.

And yet the new urban agriculture undoubtedly wants to maintain the character of a place of compensation typical of the garden, although with the addition of a particular pathos due to the discovery that in addition to having a form the garden yields fruits. Who in Italy does not admire the agricultural landscapes present in the great tradition of painting, painting that has laid the foundations of the idea of the Italian landscape?

The cultivation of open urban space seems an exciting proposition and probably also an aesthetic culture medium in which to try out new forms of living together and developing fertile community relations, and this might have consequences. It will be interesting to see how many vegetable gardens will spring up in the neglected zones of our city and whether someone is going to start making its existing gardens cultivable. The aesthetic appreciation of the vegetable garden presupposes a shift in sensibility from the visual and mental sphere of recent landscape architecture to the physiological and empirical one more characteristic of the rural habitat, where getting your hands dirty, but also tasting, eating, toiling, etc. implies an opening to the contamination between different realms of the sensible world.

Finally, why not? “Cultivating our garden” might be a *pharmakon*, a “remedy,” an interesting therapeutic medicine from which we cannot exclude the emergence of something whose consequences cannot be wholly predicted.





paesaggio di giardini sperimentali - micro agricoltura
landscape of experimental gardens - micro-agriculture

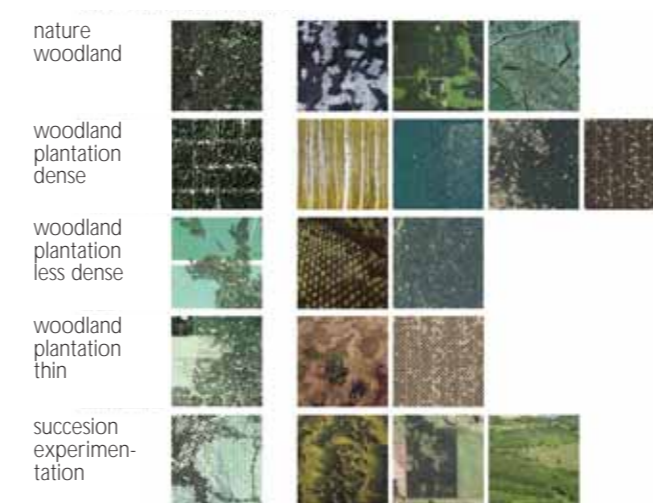


Planimeria generale, matrici degli elementi di progetto
Area plan, matrices of the elements of design

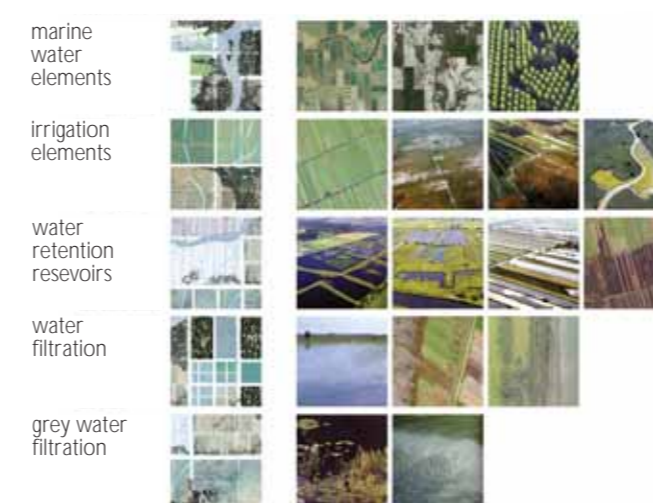
Il progetto proposto da MDP con Rex per la riqualificazione di Governors Island, antica residenza dei governatori britannici, e la sua conversione a parco pubblico urbano si fonda su una serie di principi in grado di supportare diversi scenari di sviluppo possibili anziché sul disegno di un paesaggio da contemplare. La dimensione e le caratteristiche topografiche del suolo, oltre a ragioni di natura economica ed ecologica, hanno indotto i progettisti a concentrare la maggior parte dei servizi in un anello attrezzato lungo tutto il perimetro e a organizzare lo spazio interno in campi di attività definiti da una griglia di matrice jeffersoniana.

The project proposed by MDP and Rex for the upgrading of Governors Island, former residence of the British governors of New York, and its conversion into a public urban park is founded on a series of principles capable of supporting different possible scenarios of development rather than on the design of a landscape for contemplation. The size of the area and the topographic characteristics of the ground, along with motives of an economic and ecological nature, have induced the planners to concentrate the majority of the services in a ring with facilities around the perimeter and to organize the space inside into fields of activities defined by a grid of Jeffersonian origin.

infrastruttura boschiva permanente / permanent
woodland infrastructure



infrastruttura idrica permanente / permanent water infrastructure



impianto boschivo permanente / permanent woodland infrastructure
impianto idrico permanente / permanent water infrastructure
percorsi e sentieri / paths and trails
giardini sperimentali e micro-agricoltura / experimental gardens and micro-agriculture

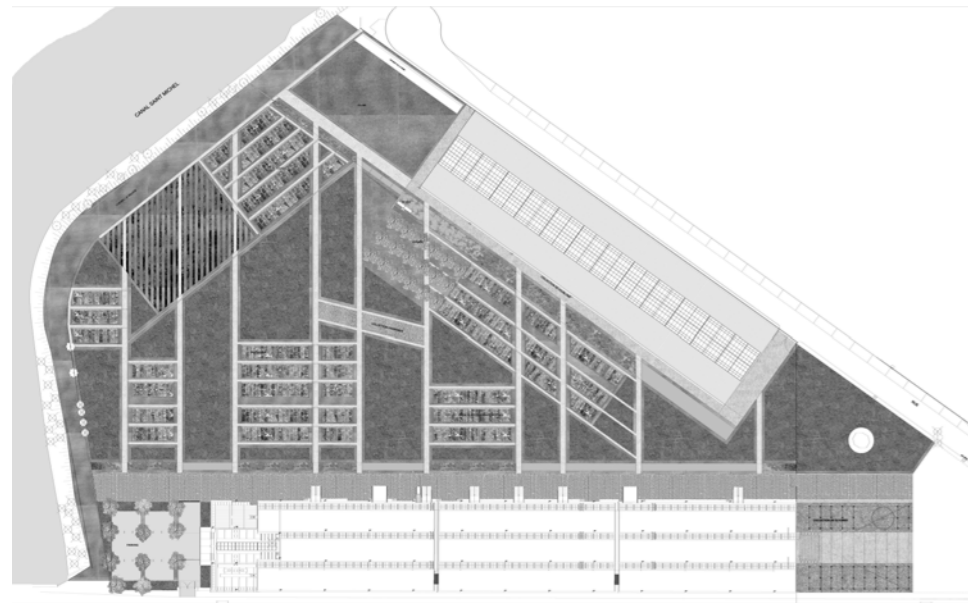
Matrici e diagrammi degli elementi di progetto, vedute virtuali dell'area centrale
Matrices and diagrams of the elements of design, virtual views of the central area

Facendo riferimento a tecniche tradizionali per la bonifica dei suoli, come il compostaggio e la rotazione delle colture di cereali, il progetto si articola in una serie di attività produttive, didattiche e ricreative organizzate in una matrice flessibile. La natura delle acque presenti sul sito, in parte dolci e in parte marine, ha permesso la creazione di un'ampia varietà di vegetali organizzati sul territorio in base al grado di salinità del terreno. L'interno dell'isola si configura dunque, secondo un modulo fisso ma con una sequenza variabile, in un mosaico di orti urbani, campi, giardini, aree boschive e spazi aperti che fungono come laboratori per lo scambio, l'apprendimento e la produzione alimentare o energetica in supporto alla vita urbana.

Drawing on traditional techniques for the improvement of soils, such as composting and the rotation of cereal crops, the project is divided into a series of productive, educational and recreational activities organized in a flexible matrix. The nature of the bodies of water present on the site, some fresh and some salt, has permitted the creation of a vast cross-section of vegetation, arranged in the territory on the basis of the degree of salinity of the soil. Thus the interior of the island is configured, according to a fixed module but with a variable sequence, into a mosaic of urban vegetable gardens, fields, gardens, wooded areas and open spaces that act as laboratories for exchange, learning and the production of food or energy in support of urban life.



Cité Nature



MDP Michel Desvigne Paysagiste
Cité Nature
Arras, France, 2001-05

Michel Desvigne
Con/With: Jean Nouvel

Scorci del giardino con i padiglioni restaurati sullo sfondo, planimetria generale, veduta verso il fiume Scarpe
Views of the garden with the restored pavilions in the background, area plan, view in the direction of the Scarpe River

Un'area industriale di circa 25.000 mq nelle vicinanze di Arras è stata convertita in un parco tematico grazie alla riqualificazione di due capannoni trasformati in padiglioni espositivi su progetto di Jean Nouvel e alla realizzazione di un piccolo giardino botanico posto tra essi, che, ricalcando i tracciati degli edifici demoliti, richiama il linguaggio delle coltivazioni del paesaggio dell'Artois.

Un sistema di canali di irrigazione a vista irroria i piccoli appezzamenti di piante selvatiche e cereali, mentre un campo di meli segna l'ingresso al museo.

An industrial area of around 25,000 sqm in the vicinity of Arras has been turned into a theme park through the upgrading of two sheds, converted into exhibition pavilions to a design by Jean Nouvel, and the creation of a small botanical garden between them that, following the layout of the demolished buildings, recalls the patterns of the agricultural landscape of Artois. A system of open irrigation ditches supplies the small plots of wild plants and cereals with water, while an orchard of apple trees marks the entrance to the museum.

