



*Michel Baridon* (1926-2009).

This issue of *INTERFACES* is dedicated to the memory of the journal's founding figure, Michel Baridon (1926-2009). Michel was a passionate and demanding scholar, a fervent reader of the Enlightenment period of which he was one of the best specialists, an indefatigable ferryman of the *philosophes'* ideas. From his numerous journeys into the long eighteenth century, Michel, over the years, developed a keen taste for human exchange and *conversation*, and the generous practice of an intellectual curiosity that all those who had the privilege of knowing him remember with emotion.

After thirty years as a Professor of English at the Université de Bourgogne, and a long list of remarkable volumes and articles on the British and French Enlightenments (including his famous 1977 monograph on Edward Gibbon, *Gibbon et le mythe de Rome*), Michel devoted another twenty-some years to a prolific and path breaking exploration of the various issues relating to gardens and landscape. He was appointed for three years by the Ecole du Louvre as their first ever Professor of garden history, and in the same years founded the present journal *INTERFACES*, which he conceived as an open forum for innovative, interdisciplinary research on word & image issues, with a particular focus on literature, linguistics and the history of art and images.

As he progressed through research projects that were always grounded in a scrupulous and enlightening history of ideas, Michel developed a growing interest for the inscription in Nature of the European imagination, from Louis XIV's *Grand Siècle* to the Romantic period. Embracing a wide variety of issues—philosophical, scientific, aesthetic—related to landscape design (be it real, in gardens, or fictional, in art and literature), he published several books and essays in which the creations of Le Nôtre, Capability Brown, the Marquis de Girardin or Humphrey Repton are always analyzed within the broader context of Descartes, Newton, Locke or Rousseau, but also Fénelon, Defoe or Laclos. His most important studies are *Le Gothique des Lumières* (1991), his famous, prize-winning critical anthology *Les Jardins. Paysagistes, jardiniers, poètes* (1998 ; translated into Spanish), and the brilliant *Jardins de Versailles* (2001; new edition 2003, translated into English and Italian). *Naissance et Renaissance du paysage* (2006) is perhaps his most ambitious essay, whose deceptively simple title hides a strong thesis which radically questions the idea that sensibility to landscape only appeared in the Renaissance period. His last book, *L'Eau dans les jardins d'Europe* (2008), is a remarkable sum of suggestions and new facts, for which he was awarded the prestigious René Pechère prize in Brussels in November 2008.

Michel was a guest lecturer in numerous universities and foundations throughout the world, but was also, back at home, the most benevolent supporter of researchers and younger colleagues, from

the most prestigious to the most modest, who came to visit him in Dijon. With them he shared ideas and wines, and this legendary hospitality, in which his wife Gisèle, the inseparable companion of all his pursuits, played no small part, was the natural and logical expression of a life project founded upon an infinite generosity.

Internet travellers will find numerous traces—written, aural, and visual—of Michel’s presence among us. Michel was fascinated with this living, tangible, empirical, worldwide *web*, the vector of incredible ramifications. As the heir and promoter of the Enlightenment ideals, he saw in it a real source of progress for mankind, the intimation of an intelligent perfectibility—the fight of his life.

We are Michel Baridon’s legacy. The immediate reference is of course to the inheritance of the journal at hand, on *IMAGE TEXTE LANGUAGE* and its plural focus on literature, linguistics, the visual arts, and epistemology. The journal reflects Michel’s multidisciplinary approach to understanding all aspects of culture past and present, as well as his readiness to give voice to a wide variety of theoretical and methodological approaches. The somewhat ‘post-modern’ typography (and spelling) of the subtitle of the journal also insists on its bi-lingual characteristic. It reflects an insistence on an equivalency and bi-cultural give and take. It is an important point. Michel greatly enjoyed contact with others; he and Gisèle both loved to travel, and made good friends all over the world. Certainly one of the benefits of Michel’s gregariousness resulted in institutional projects between L’Université de Bourgogne and The College of the Holy Cross, including student exchanges, faculty visits, as well as *INTERFACES*. Similarly, the connection with the Université Paris Diderot would not have happened had not Michel promoted and nurtured it. We are his legacy.

If Michel was best known as a 18<sup>th</sup> century scholar, his curiosity and knowledge did not stop at the edges of this “increasingly long” century. We know of course of his encyclopedic works on gardens and landscapes neither bound by times or borders. This catholic (le “c”) curiosity and knowledge, his understanding and value of art came early. Hanging rather inconspicuously on one of his dining room walls is a ceramic plate by the great modernist of the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Asked how he had acquired such a treasure he recounts how as young man on his first coming to Paris from Algeria, he had stopped at Vallauris at the artist’s studio. His mother had given him a little money to purchase some clothes when he arrived in Paris. Instead, he gave all the money he had, for it took more than the price of jacket, shirt and tie for that dish of art. Michel was not covetous, not especially eager to possess things, even significant artifacts. That gesture does however presage his characteristic devotion and commitment to his lifelong values: his passion, his presence in the moment, his insatiable intellectual curiosity and rigor, his daring, his enterprise and adventure, his readiness always to generously give his all—to his projects, to his friends, and of course to his family.

Michel enjoyed great narratives—Gibbon, Fielding, Defoe, Laclos, and non-verbal texts like Versailles—and also anecdotes and jokes. He was generous with the foibles of friends and colleagues and very demanding of himself and what he offered to others in print or in a glass. Prolific as he was, he assessed every word for its color, its weight, its nuance, resonance, music, and as it were, its “mouth feel.” In French and English Michel was poetic and savored and demanded from his languages what he demanded from his wines. One recalls an occasion in his wonderful stone vaulted wine cellar when he opened a Corton–Charlemagne. Gisèle had prepared quiches and shopped for sausages, Michel poured. The four guests were delighted with the wine’s rich gold color, its hints of honey, grilled almond, and maybe cinnamon? And we were rather surprised when both Michel and Gisèle, grimace in disappointment, spilled their glass, and insisted we do likewise. This was not, in Michel’s view, a worthy sample of a Corton–Charlemagne and he opened another. Michel’s standards were high. The second bottle of course proved him right.

Michel did not live in an “ivory tower.” He was engaged in the world. He cared deeply about the disenfranchised, the oppressed wherever and whoever they were, and voiced his views and acted without reserve when he could. For instance, he was the founder and President of the “Section Française du Centre de Pen Kurde” and pressed President Jacques Chirac for the liberation of the Kurdish writer and journalist Dursun Al Küçük political prisoner in Georgia. As his magisterial work on Versailles amply demonstrated, for Michel no frontiers separated the worlds of art and political power; its corollary was that as a scholar he was a social and political activist. At the same time, Michel’s polemic was intelligent, civil, and subtle. We think, for instance he would have enjoyed Simon Morley’s “Atomic Bomb”, the art offering for this issue. Morley has gathered delicate pieces of wilds flowers from the South Korean landscapes where he lives to spell out the dreadful name of what continues to threaten the whole world’s existence since the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century; Morley juxtaposes fragile plant bits and the nominative for the instrument of nuclear holocaust. To what effect? To what ironies? This image is not a collage of flower stems, but is a watercolor painting! *A trompe l’œil*. It asks like one of the poems Michel sometimes read: “What the hand, dare sieze the fire?/And what shoulder, &what art/Could twist the sinews of thy heart?” Michel, however, would direct the creative questions to us, and hold us responsible. We are his legacy.

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