Dance and the Garden: Moving and Static Choreography in Renaissance Europe*

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In the Renaissance there were close similarities between the static choreography of the formal gardens of the nobility and the moving choreographies performed by the members of the court. The principles of order and proportion, the expression of splendour, the geometrical forms, were all fundamental principles of both Renaissance court dance and the formal garden. The patterns in both these art-forms were meant to be viewed from above. This close similarity in design principles between the horticultural and kinetic arts existed right through the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and continued into the seventeenth century.

In his book, The Renaissance Garden in England, Roy Strong describes those gardens as a “profound expression of the Renaissance mind.” He argues that “not only are these gardens important in the history of art and architecture but they also provide abundant material in relation to the history of literature, theatre, science and ideas.” Roy Strong, along with scholars such as David Coffin, John Dixon Hunt, and Claudia Lazzaro (to name just a few), have added immeasurably to our knowledge of the grand gardens of Renaissance Europe, through their detailed studies of the design, plantings, architectural features, iconographical schemes and the philosophical and political significance of these gardens.

This article draws on the work of scholars of garden history and it would not have been possible without the detailed studies of individual gardens which these scholars have produced. However, this article draws parallels between the design of gardens in Renaissance Europe and the contemporary choreographic designs of Italian, English, and French dancing masters: a linking of the choreographic and horticultural expressions of the “Renaissance mind” which has not hitherto been explored. Through an analysis of the choreographic patterns of Renaissance dance

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1Strong, 223.
2Ibid.
3The number of scholarly works on fifteenth to seventeenth-century gardens is too great to fully list here. For the main works see Coffin, 1972, Coffin, 1991, MacDougall and Hazlehurst, Lazzaro, Hunt, 1992, and Hunt and Willis.
practices, I argue that the principles which underlaid the design of grand gardens in Europe also underlaid the construction of choreographies. Furthermore, that changes in the design principles of these gardens occurred at a similar time to corresponding changes in the choreographic practice.

My contention that the principles which governed the conduct of the art of dance in the Renaissance were the same as those which determined other creative endeavours, including that of the planting and design of gardens, was also recognized at the time is supported by Sir Hugh Plat, who published several gardening books in the early seventeenth century. In his book, The Garden of Eden, Plat says: "I shall not trouble the Reader with any curious rules for shaping and fashioning of a Garden or Orchard . . . Every Drawer or Embroider, nay, (almost) each Dancing-Master, (my emphasis) may pretend to such niceties." As far as Plat was concerned both choreographers and garden designers created artefacts which were constructed according to the same design principles.

Both garden design and choreography are concerned with manipulating, controlling, and ordering space. Dance can be seen as the creation of patterns in space: patterns which form and reform, and trace out shapes in the air and on the ground. Formal gardens can also be viewed as the creation of patterns on the ground: their shapes are static, but they still present changing images as viewers stroll from section to section, and new shapes open up before them.

An important element in the creation of patterns in both the choreographic practice and in garden design of Renaissance Europe is that in order to be fully appreciated patterns were meant to be viewed from above. Order and measure, symmetry, geometrical forms, straight lines, the construction of the whole out of small compartments, the expression of splendour and power, and the creation of enclosed spaces with clear boundaries, these were all fundamental principles of both court dance and the grand gardens.

These fundamental principles are clearly seen in the Italian gardens and in the contemporary collections of choreographies. The earliest extant garden design of the sixteenth century is a sketch for a small garden by Baldessare Peruzzi from the 1520s. The designs in the compartments are geometric, segments of squares and circles. The now famous Italian

4The common intellectual framework shared by poets, musicians, choreographers, and artists during the Renaissance is discussed with respect to sixteenth-century France by McGowan, 1985.

5Plat, 31-32.

6Lazzaro, 38.
gardens of the Medici family and other nobility of sixteenth-century Italy were built from the 1530s onwards. The Medici villa at Castello was started in 1537, the villa at Poggio was begun in the fifteenth century by Lorenzo de’ Medici, but Duke Cosimo I made additions from 1545. The Villa Lante at Bagnaia was laid out from 1568, the Villa d’Este at Tivoli begun in 1560, and the Villa Farnese at Caprarola was begun in the 1570s. L’Ambrogiana was begun after 1587, while Petraia was renovated by Ferdinando de’ Medici from 1591 to 1597.

The two main Italian dance treatises of the sixteenth century were printed in 1581, and 1602. From information in the treatises, however, it is clear that both these works were published nearer to the end of the authors’ careers than the beginning, and that they represent the dance practice of the second half of the sixteenth century, exactly the period when the grand gardens were being constructed.

Information on the princely gardens of the fifteenth century is less abundant. But from the work of scholars such as David Coffin on the gardens in Rome and from the architectural treatises of the fifteenth century, such as that of Leon Battista Alberti, it seems clear that the essential characteristics of strongly geometric shapes, compartments enclosed within a finite space and arranged in four quarters were present.

The fundamental design principles found in both the Italian horticultural and choreographic arts were applied more widely than just in Italy. Throughout the sixteenth century in France there was great enthusiasm for Imperial Rome and its ceremonies as a symbol of princely power in all fields of artistic endeavour: from architecture to the triumphal entry, from hat jewels and coat buttons to statues and trophies, from painting to poetry. This enthusiasm extended to include the same geometrical

7Ibid., 326.
8Ibid., 43.
9Ibid., 34.
10Ibid., 70.
11Ibid., 84.
12Caroso, 1581 and a second, revised, version in 1600.
13Negri, 1602.
15For a discussion on the problems of dating the fifteenth-century Italian dance treatises, see below in note 39.
16See McGowan, 1985, 121-207, for an extensive discussion of the French response to the ideas developed in Italy during the fifteenth century by Leon Battista Alberti and others and the Italians’ resurrection of their imperial heritage.
dance patterns for the French court ballets as was found in Italian court
dance, and in the descriptions of the English court masques.17

Thus geometric patterns lay at the heart of sixteenth-century Italian
court dancing, and the French in turn were strongly influenced by the
Italian practice. Two of the dancers named by Cesare Negri in his list of
the most famous ballarini of his age, Ludovico Palvello and Pompeo Dio-
bono, worked at the French court from 1554 onwards.18 The creator of
Le Ballet comique de la royne, Balthazar de Beaujoyeulx, was an Italian,
Baltazarini di Belgioioso, who arrived in Paris in the late 1550s. Geomet-
ric patterns were also part of the French court's spectacles, such as Valois
fêtes, Le ballet des Polonais (1573)19 and Le balet comique de la royne
(1581).20 The climax of the latter occasion was a dance with forty geo-
metrical figures. Geometric dance figures continued on into the
seventeenth century as seen in such works as the Ballet de M. de Vendôme
(1610),21 and the notebook of a French dancing master compiled be-
tween 1614 and 1619, which included diagrams for five to sixteen
dancers arranged in geometrical figures.22 Italian choreographic practice
also reached England as well as France. Elsewhere I have argued that Eng-
lish dance practice exhibited strong links with Italian practice as early as
1500,23 while evidence for the knowledge of French dance practice in En-
gland is found throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.24

In this article my argument as to the similarity in design principles be-
tween dance and the grand gardens in Italy, France, and England from the
fifteenth to the seventeenth century, is presented through a discussion of

17For a detailed discussion of how Ronsard (in particular) described sixteenth-cen-
tury French court dancing, the impact the noble dancer made on those present, and the
figures of the dance itself: “circular, now long and then narrow, now pointed, as a trian-
gle” (ibid., 224). See ibid., 209-41.
18Negri, 2-3.
19For a brief resume of the 1573 festivities, see McGowan, 1994, 196-97.
20McGowan has also edited a facsimile edition of the 1581 production, 'Le Balet
Comique' by Balthazar de Beaujoyeulx. (McGowan, 1982) For more information on the
French court ballets from 1581 to 1643, see McGowan, 1963.
22Walls, 123. For more information on the dance master's notebook, see Ward,
115-16.
23Nevile, 1998a. See also Fallows, 1-7.
24For additional information on the extent of French and Italian influence on Eng-
lish dance practice in the early seventeenth century, see Walls, 110-12 and 221-24. For
information on the presence of the dance treatises of Caroso and Negri in England during
the seventeenth century see, Smith and Gatiss.
the fundamental design principles as they applied to both arts: first, the
ordered and measured nature of gardens and dance; second, the geometric
shapes or figures created by both arts; third that these shapes were con-
structed to be viewed from above, and fourth how both court dance and
princely gardens functioned as an expression of the power and authority of
a ruler or noble. The second half of the article concentrates on the changes
which took place in the seventeenth century in both garden design and
dance practice. In particular, it focuses on the question of when did the
“new” French style of garden design arrive in England in the early seven-
teenth century, and what the answer to this question tells us about the
type of dances performed by courtiers in the Jacobean and Stuart masques.

ORDER, MEASURE, AND GEOMETRICAL FIGURES

Above all, the Renaissance garden was ordered and measured. Through it
was expressed the interaction of the artificial culture created by human
beings with the natural “culture” created by God. Nature as a reflection
of the cosmic order was seen as inherently ordered, and so in the garden
the art of mankind had to “imitate not only nature’s outward appearance,
but also its underlying order.”25 This underlying order was understood to
be rendered more perfect by the cultivation of the trees and plants in the
garden, and in the addition of sculpture, ornaments, water features,
mounds, and grottoes. In the topiary work, labyrinths, as seen in the
Villa d’Este (fig. 1) and in trellis constructions, natural materials —
plants, vines, and trees — were cultivated into geometric figures like
spheres or pyramids, or into shapes reminiscent of sculpture like ships or
human figures, or into natural shapes like animals. One fifteenth-century
garden is described as having topiary in the form of “ships, temples, vases,
giants, men, women, dragons, centaurs, putti, various animals and birds,
jousters, philosophers, a pope [and] cardinals.”26 In Giusto Utens’s depic-
tion of the Medici villa at Castello,27 the steps leading up to the garden
are ornamented with topiary in the shape of vases. Behind these steps is a
hedge topped with a topiary parapet, while at the top of the second, nar-
rower flight of stairs are topiary obelisks. Although the materials used to
construct the topiary work, or edifices like pavilions were natural, their
appearance was not.

The overwhelming importance of order in fifteenth- and six-
teenth-century gardens was the characteristic which distinguished them

25Lazzaro, 8.
26Ibid., 49.
27The garden was begun in 1537, though Utens’s painting is from 1599.
from the gardens of earlier centuries. It is also the characteristic which binds them to other artistic endeavours of the Renaissance, such as painting, architecture, and poetry, as well as cartography and theatre design. For example, the influence of symmetry on Renaissance thought can be seen in the cartographers' strong conviction that the unknown landmass of the southern hemisphere would have to equal that of the northern hemisphere. Similarly, in the maps of Gerard Mercator (1595) and Abraham Ortelius (1570) there is a vertical symmetry between the landmass of the Old World and that of the New.  

One of the most influential humanists on the development of the Renaissance garden was Leon Battista Alberti. Around 1450 he presented his treatise on architecture, *De Re Aedificatoria*, which included comments on gardens, to Pope Nicholas V. After it was finished it circulated in manuscript copies, and Rykwert feels that it could have even been translated into Italian before it was printed in 1486.  

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28 See Gillies, 34-35 and 166-67. For more details on the interrelationships between gardens and the theatre, see Adams, 63-73.

29 Alberti, 1988, 300.

30 Rykwert, xvi.

31 Ibid., xviii-xix.
Medici (also a choreographer) had a copy of which he was very fond, and was not eager to lend it to Borso d'Este when the latter requested it in 1484. When the book was printed two years later, sheets of the printed edition were delivered to Lorenzo as soon as they came off the press. Another manuscript copy was finished in 1483 for the Duke of Urbino, Federico da Montefeltro. Translations into French and Italian were published in 1553 and 1546 respectively, and Alberti’s remarks on garden design were still being repeated at the end of the sixteenth century.

One of Alberti’s central points was that the garden was the concern of the architect just as much as the house was, because the same geometric figures should be employed in gardens as in buildings. The same terms were used in gardening and architecture, and it was not an accident that the great garden designers of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were also the famous architects of the day; for example, Francesco di Giorgio Martini, Giuliano da Sangallo, and Bramante. In the designs of Francesco di Giorgio, for example, the compartments of the gardens are very similar to the rooms of the houses. The ordered and compartmentalized gardens in sixteenth-century Italy often resembled the plans for ideal cities which appeared at the same time.

While there were strong links between architecture and garden design, Alberti’s other writings suggest connections with the art of dance. His treatise on painting, Della Pittura, appeared in an Italian version in 1436, and is very similar in philosophical outlook to the fifteenth-century dance treatises, the earliest of which is believed to have been written circa 1430 to 1450.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the principles which Alberti delineated in regard to the creation of a garden also applied to the creation of

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32Ibid., xviii.
33Ibid., xix.
34For example, in the gardening treatises by Giovanvettorio Soderini, written in the 1580s and 1590s, the author repeats Alberti’s words “almost verbatim.” Lazzaro, 45.
35Alberti, 1988, 300.
36Lazzaro, 44.
37As Lazzaro has observed the Boboli garden in Florence (begun 1550) resembles the city plan in Pietro Cattaneo’s treatise published in 1554. Ibid., 44.
38Alberti, 1956.
39It is difficult to date precisely the fifteenth-century dance treatises, as they all exist only in manuscript form and only one is dated and signed by the scribe. For a summary of the various theories as to the dates of the dance treatises see Nevile, 1992, 61-67, and Clough, 241-269. For more detail on the similarities between Alberti’s treatise on painting and the fifteenth-century dance treatises, see Nevile, 1991, 3-12.
choreographies. In the prologue to his treatise, one of the fifteenth-century dance masters, Guglielmo da Ebreo, spent a great deal of time explaining how the art of dancing proceeds from the art of music, and how the essential nature of music was the study of proportion and relation. For the educated of the fifteenth century (as for those of the Middle Ages) the perfect art was one in which rational form and proportion were expressed simultaneously in sound and movement; that is, poetry which was sung and danced. Thus the art of dance in the Renaissance was also created on principles of order and proportion: a proportioning of the dance space; a proportioning of the movements of the body, and a proportioning of the music. The resultant choreographies reflected this order in their use of geometric shapes (squares, straight lines), and in their use of space.

In gardens the order was not only expressed through geometric forms of the ornaments, but also through the use of bi-lateral symmetry, the central paths which bisected each other at right angles, the trees planted in straight lines, and the geometry of the compartments, all of which created a strong rectilinear character. Utens's view of the Medici villa L'Ambrogiana (begun after 1587) clearly shows the wide central avenue with symmetrical units on either side of it. (See fig. 2.) Not only does each compartment have its own geometrical space, but each section is divided into four quarters. Even the large trees in the beds at the back of the garden are planted in straight lines. The four quarters and bi-lateral symmetry is also clearly shown in the 1573 engraving of the Villa d'Este (fig. 1).

There are many other gardens from Renaissance Europe which could have been chosen to illustrate the ordered and geometrical nature of garden design. One of the most famous is the botanical garden at Padua, which was designed as a square within two concentric circles, the former being divided into four smaller squares by two perpendicular central paths. The four smaller squares were themselves divided into triangular, circular and square beds, while the triangular shape was also formed by the eight segments between the arc of the inner circle and each side of the four smaller squares. An early description of this garden written by the Venetian Marco Guazzo in 1546 emphasizes the use of these three principal geometric figures.

40Ebreo, 1463. For a translation of this treatise, the only one to be dated, see Sparti, 1993.
41For more details on the Italians' preference for square, quartered compartments, see Coffin, 1991, 174-75.
42For more information on the garden at Padua see Azzi Visentini, Terwen-Dionisius, and Minelli.
43For a modern edition of Guazzo's description of the garden at Padua, see Azzi Visentini, 250-53.
In the grand gardens the concern for straight lines and regular geometric shapes extended from the largest design units down to the smallest components, as can be seen in the detail of the garden at L'Ambrogiana. (See fig. 3.) The beds, which were filled with flowering plants of different colors and shapes, were divided again into squares, circles, triangles, all delineated by paths. These paths not only helped to reveal the design...
through the contrast between their level ground and the slightly raised bed of plants, but they also allowed the compartment to be entered.44

The similarity between the patterns of the compartments and those of the choreographies can be illustrated by comparing the garden at L'Ambrogiana with the sixteenth-century balletto, Dolce Amoroso Foco. In this dance for three couples the men stand in a line down one side of the room, the ladies facing them down the other side. The first part of the dance emphasizes the straight lines with all the movement being along the original axes or an axis perpendicular to it, created when the couples change places. (This is illustrated by fig. 5.) The second half of the dance is a hay which creates patterns that are those of the compartments. The middle couple start the hay and change places on the perpendicular axis. They then move diagonally to change places with the last woman and first man. They then move along the original axis to change places with the remaining two dancers. (The path created is shown in fig. 6.) This path is very similar to those in the top left compartment of figure 3. After six steps all the dancers are in a straight line across the width of the hall. The hay continues in a straight line, with each change of place creating a circular figure found in the top right compartment. Holding right then left hands alternately, each couple traces a 90 degree arc to create a straight line along the length of the hall. During the next step they trace another 90 degree arc to complete their half of the circle and to form a straight line across the width of the hall. (See fig. 7.)

One of the major contributing factors to the ordered, rectilinear nature of the formal gardens was the use of the square. The compartments, while often having circular forms within them were invariably square. This shape was further emphasized by the planting of large trees in each corner of the compartment, as in the Villa Petraia and L'Ambrogiana. (See fig. 4 and fig. 2.) This characteristic of the Renaissance garden also found expression in the patterns created by the dancers as they progressed through the figures of a dance. For example, the figure of a square delineated by a dancer at each corner was a common formation in Renaissance dance, either as an initial pattern, or as a formation kept throughout the dance. For example, Negri's balletto, La Battaglia, is a dance for two couples which begins and ends in a square. This dance also contains several hays in which the square dissolves into a straight line, then back into a square, then into a line again but on an axis perpendicular to the previous one. (See fig. 8.) Often the choreography emphasized the pattern of the “squared circle”; for example, the fifteenth-century ballo, Anello, begins

44Lazzaro, 37.
with the two couples facing one another in a square. The whole dance consists of the four performers changing places and moving around the outside of the other couple to create circles.

Furthermore, in the choreographies the harmony and proportion of the straight walks of espaliered fruit trees or yew were transmuted into the long, forward-moving floor tracks of the fifteenth-century balli and bassedanze, and the common circular figure which was often interspersed with the rectilinear patterns. (I am referring here to the figure which is created when a couple takes left or right hands and they move around each other tracing out a circle as they go.) One example of this type of floor pattern is the bassadanza Lauro (which was choreographed by Lorenzo de’ Medici). (See fig. 9.) Many of the bassedanze and balli share this type of floor pattern. Figure 9 shows the starting position of the two performers and the path they traverse during the course of the dance. In this particular dance the couple only move forward, with a pause in the middle of the choreography to describe a circle. The floor track is very similar to the gardens with their long, straight, central avenue, often interspersed with a circle around which the four compartments are arranged; for example, the Medici villa Petraia (fig. 4) or the Medici villa Poggio a Caiano.
FIGURE 5. *Dolce Amoroso Foco*

FIGURE 6. *Dolce Amoroso Foco*: First three changes in the hay.

FIGURE 7. Pattern created by the hay in a straight line along the width of the hall in *Dolce Amoroso Foco*. 
FIGURE 8. La Battaglia: Pattern created by a hay for 4 in a square.

FIGURE 9. Floor Track of the bassadanza Lauro.
In other dances the performers move forwards and backwards from the starting position, but usually still in straight lines. As Claudia Lazzaro remarks:

"Throughout the Renaissance, a central avenue traversed the garden, often covered with a pergola. . . . Movement from one end of the garden to the other, but not excursions to either side, was encouraged by such an axis."45

In the bassadanza Lauro, the two performers move from one end of the dance space to the other, with only a few small “excursions to either side” with the riprese. One should note that two of the four groups of sideways steps occur in the central circular space, created by the couple taking hands and walking around each other. Thus half of the sideways movements are used to reinforce the circle in the middle of the long, straight path.

**LOOKING DOWN AND LOOKING OUT**

Another important design principle of both Renaissance gardens and court dance is that both were meant to be viewed from above.

Texts from the fifteenth century and particularly in the sixteenth repeatedly stress that the order in a garden must be visible, primarily from a high spot, as the patterns in the gardens of simples were best viewed from the palace windows. . . . But even from its highest point, the ordering of a garden through the repetition of compartments, geometric figures, ovals, and hippodromes could not be wholly perceived from within [my emphasis]. Painted and engraved views of gardens . . . present what is not visible from within — nature ordered through regular units.46

The patterns of the dances were also designed to be seen from above. At a ball the dancing took place on the floor of the hall, and often the ladies of the court were seated on raised platforms along one wall. In the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries when dancing became a common feature of theatrical performances, the dancing often took place on the floor of the hall with the king or prince seated on a raised platform to view the spectacle. When the dances took place out of doors many spectators watched from the upper-level windows of the buildings around the city squares. Thus, as in the gardens, the patterns would not be entirely visible to those on the dance space, especially not to the performers themselves. The order of the whole would only be visible from above. This was certainly the case for the Jacobean masque dances as they were performed not on the raised stage but on the floor of the hall, surrounded on three sides.

46Ibid., 70.
sides by the audience. Not only would there not have been enough room on the front of a prospective stage to adequately perform a dance with eight, nine, twelve, or sixteen participants, but with most of the audience seated along the sides of the hall at right angles to the stage and facing in towards the central space, the danced portrayal of initials and geometric figures would have been difficult for them to perceive.

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries the choreographies were designed to be viewed from all sides. The audience, who were often performers, watched the dance from close by (like the windows of a palace), or from within the dance space itself (like a mount in the garden). Thus their attention was focused on a finite space, with clear boundaries. The performers’ attention was also focused within the dance space. While they would not have ignored their fellow courtiers standing or sitting around them, their attention was still within a confined space, not focused on a distant vista.

The gardens of the Renaissance most often operated with the same focal point. The boundaries of the garden were also clearly marked by hedges or walls. The space they occupied was not large, unlike the later seventeenth- and eighteenth-century gardens: “the whole was measurable and finite.”

Gardens increased in size in the seventeenth century, and the basis of their design changed. No longer were the gardens organized around a collection of small compartments enclosed within a wall or a hedge. The two to three foot hedges of the sixteenth century increased in height in the seventeenth century so that their wall-like dimensions controlled the view within the garden far more and worked to prevent a perception of the order and organization of the garden as a whole.

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47 Based on fifteen years’ experience of performing the sixteenth-century balletti, I would estimate that the average space needed to perform a choreography for more than six performers would be twenty-one feet by fifty feet.

48 Ibid., 70.

49 While the majority of Renaissance gardens were constructed with this internal focal point, there were exceptions. Gardens such as the Villa Madama at Rome were constructed so that their focus was towards a distant object such as a mountain. I would like to thank Professor Coffin for drawing my attention to the existence of these more unusual Renaissance gardens in which the focus was outside the garden itself.

50 Lazzaro, 276.
foreground and more on a distant vista, which, while still part of the garden, was situated at the end of the wide central avenue that dominated the entire garden.

In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries dance increasingly moved onto a stage, which meant that one side only was the front, and that the focus of the performers’ attention had to be directed out from the dance space into the body of the hall. The performers were “looking out” from the stage into the distance, as they were no longer surrounded, or in close proximity to their fellow courtiers. The audience were also further removed from the dancing. They too were looking at a far distant vista to see the dance, as perspective channelled their gaze towards a certain point.

The effect that changing the nature of the dance space had on the choreographic patterns can be seen by comparing Emilio Cavalieri’s ballo, *O che nuovo miracolo*, for the final intermedio in the 1589 wedding celebrations of the Grand Duke Ferdinando de’ Medici and Christine of Lorraine, with the social dances of late sixteenth-century Italy. The floor patterns in Cavalieri’s ballo are very similar to those found in the contemporary courtly social dances. Cavalieri used common patterns such as *una treccia* or *una intrecciata* (a hay), two *seguiti in volta* (in which each dancer creates a small individual circle by turning around one shoulder or the other), two dancers coming together to meet and then to change places, and a “figure of 8” pattern in which dancers first circle around the dancer next to them, and then around the dancer on the other side of them.51

The main difference between the floor patterns in *O che nuovo miracolo* and the majority of the social dances is that in the former the action has to take place on a flat plane in front of the arc of seven dancers, with the focus being outwards in one direction; that is, towards the audience. The square, or rectangular, patterns in which the focus and interaction between the performers are inward looking52 are not present in this ballo.

Many of the social dances for one couple are built around a pattern of the two dancers facing one another, one at the foot and one at the head of the hall. The dancers then parade in front of each other, come together

51 For an extended discussion of Cavalieri’s ballo, see Nevile, 1998b and 1999.

52 One example of a social dance which is entirely built around these patterns is the balletto, *La Battaglia*. (Negri, 257-63) As the name suggests, this dance is a mock battle for two couples with the women pitted against the men. The floor patterns concentrate the attention within the square formed by the four dancers, with the movements being mainly around the perimeter of the square or moving across the interior of the square, either diagonally or on one or other of the two axes.
and change places, often several times, during the dance. In dances for more than two (like *Dolce Amoroso Foco*) the couples form two lines and face each other on either side of the hall. The creation of a square, or two lines, of dancers is not possible, or at least not desirable, when a dance is transposed to a proscenium stage. Rather than partners changing place along a perpendicular axis the dancers in Cavalieri's *ballo* are all starting facing the same direction. They then have to move forward, away from the arc formation, meet, change places, and then return to the arc so they all face the front of the stage again at the end of the step sequence.

**Splendour, Power, and “Divine Effects”**

The court dances and the grand gardens of the Renaissance were both used by princes, popes, and cardinals as expressions of their splendour and power. The expense and the labor of designing, building, planting, and maintaining these gardens was enormous, and thus they were only available to a few. While small private gardens abounded in Rome as extensions of the indoor living space, it was only “the lavish gardens created for the popes, the cardinals, and the noble families . . . that expressed the intellectual concepts necessary for the consideration of the garden as a work of art.”

Contemporary descriptions of the princely gardens recognized their function as a display of the power of its owner. For these visitors the order and control exerted over the plant life and over the forces of water in the fountains and grottoes, and exhibited in the garden were exemplars of the prince’s dominion in other aspects of life. It was as if the “streams respond

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53In today's common usage the words “magnificence” and “splendour” are often used interchangeably. In the sixteenth century, however, there was a distinction made between them. In the 1490s the Neapolitan humanist Giovanni Pontano wrote two treatises, one on “Magnificence” and one on “Splendour.” In these two treatises Pontano says that “magnificence” applies to large, substantial and permanent projects such as houses and buildings. “Splendour” refers to more transient objects, private collections, furnishings, clothes, and gardens. For more information on this distinction see Coffin, 1982, especially 213-14. I would like to thank Professor Coffin for pointing out this distinction to me.

54For a description of how the Elector Palatine, Frederick V, expressed his power and dominion in his garden at Heidelberg Castle (created between July 1614 and October 1619) see Zimmerman, 97-118.

55See Coffin, 1991, 3: “The medieval documents of the sale or lease of houses in Rome, after briefly defining the building, follow the statement almost inevitably with the notarial formula ‘with the garden behind it.’”

56Ibid., 6.
to the call of their lord, plants spring up at his bidding.”57 Another example is given by Lionello Puppi, who comments:

[s]urviving descriptions of the gardens begun in 1487 for Alfonso of Aragon at Poggio Reale, near Naples, make it very clear . . . that they were laid out specifically to celebrate the wealth and privileges of their owner in the most spectacular way possible, and that that entailed the use of artificial elements and ingenious technical devices of every conceivable kind.58

Dance also functioned as an expression of the authority and power of a prince.59 The rules and postural codes of courtly dance were part of the mechanisms by which the court made itself appear above and inaccessible to the rest of society. The courtiers believed that their superiority was to be demonstrated to the rest of society by the different way in which they moved, walked, danced, and even stood in repose. Their carriage and demeanour when on the dance floor did not change once they had finished dancing: it remained with them as it was their normal posture.

Because of its “magnetism and powerful effect,” dance was an integral part of the spectacles organized for the important state occasions: visits by foreign princes or ambassadors, wedding celebrations, calendrical feasts, and entries by the ruler.60 At many of these occasions the performers were the courtiers themselves. For example, at the celebrations held in Naples in May 1473 to honour Eleonora d’Aragona before she left on her wedding journey to Ferrara, stands with a capacity to hold around twenty thousand people were erected along the sides of the Piazza dell’Incoronata. In the center of the square a stage had been built for the King of Naples, the court, and his guests. It was Eleonora herself, not professional dancers, who began the dances on the stage in front of the assembled populace.61 As Graham Pont has remarked:

[d]ance was not only an essential part of aristocratic education and courtly behaviour; it also provided a code of social emblems and a language of cosmic metaphors which were part of the Renaissance world-view. To the Renaissance mind, nurtured on Plato, a well-conducted life was essentially a noble dance.62

57Comito, 42.
58Puppi, 50.
59For one example of how dance functioned in this way in one specific city, see the study by Teofilo F. Ruiz on the Castilian city of Jaén.
61Falletti, 272-73.
62Pont, 118. Pont adds in a footnote that one of Plato’s words for “uneducated” is “achoresentos,” that is, “danceless” (Ibid., 124).
A “noble dance” was more than entertainment or an agreeable way of passing the time at a social function. As McGowan explains it was the “movements and the geometric patterns” that made Renaissance court dance “both graceful and more significant than a simple social ritual. The patterns inscribed on the floor of the ballroom or stage were not haphazard; they had divine effects.”63 These were the same geometric patterns which were present in the formal gardens and which were also seen as having a moral effect on those who walked through them. As Lucia Tongiorgi Tomasi comments: “the geometric forms which recur so frequently in these designs for plant-beds — shapes such as the square (traditionally a symbol of earth and its elements), the circle (a symbol of heaven and divinity), the regular polygons, and the triangle (a symbol of fire) — had to sustain complex astrological and magical-esoteric connotations.”64 For example, in 1623 John Taylor visited the garden at Wilton, which he described as:

circular, triangular, quadrangular, orbicular, oval, and every way curiously and chargeably conceited: there he hath made walks, hedges and arbours . . . planting them and placing them in such admirable art-like fashions, resembling both divine and moral remembrances, [my emphasis] as three arbours standing in a triangle, having each a recourse to a greater arbour in the midst, resemble three in one and one in three.65

The Seventeenth Century
The changes which occurred in gardening design in the seventeenth century happened slowly, and at different times in different places. Just as in dance, the impetus and innovation shifted during this century from Italy to France, though in both arts the French practitioners learnt from the sixteenth-century Italian practices. As mentioned above one of the major changes in garden design during the seventeenth century was the increase in size.66 The house and garden were regarded as one unit, with the garden laid out so that it was seen at best advantage from a single viewpoint.67 The geometric compartments of flowers changed into parterres of box, and the patterns in these beds also underwent a radical alteration. Gone were the squares, circles, and hexagons, and the rectilinear character of the compartment designs. The

63McGowan, 1985, 224.
64Tomasi Tongiorgi, 212.
65Strong, 122.
66When Louis XIII started work on Versailles it was only a few acres in size, but by 1668 the gardens had grown to cover over one hundred acres.
67Thacker, 135.
French parterres were curvilinear, composed of 'S'-shaped curves, arabesques, arcs, and embroidery-like scroll patterns, as illustrated by the garden at Vaux-le-Vicomte, and one of the designs for a parterre de broderie from Jacques Boyceau's *Traité du Jardinage*, of 1638 (fig. 10).

In his 1652 posthumously published treatise, *Théâtre des plans et jardins*, Claude Mollet claimed that he was the first person to introduce the new parterres de broderie to French gardens. One of the earliest gardens in which we know this occurred is the palace at Fontainebleau, renovated by Claude Mollet in the 1590s under the instructions of Henry IV. A general plan of the palace and gardens from circa 1600 has survived, which show that the beds were still laid out in geometrical patterns. In 1614, however, another plan was made of Fontainebleau by Alexandre Francini. In this design all the parterres are of the new scroll-like designs. The geometric shapes of the previous century have gone. Further evidence to support this time-frame for the introduction of the new parterres is given by the garden designs published by Olivier de Serres in 1600, *Théâtre d'agriculture*, in which the designs are still predominantly geometric.

The introduction of these new designs for the parterres was not universal during the first ten to fifteen years of the seventeenth century. Even in France the older patterns still persisted. For example, in the book of garden designs published in 1629 by D. Loris, *Le Thresor des Parterres de l'Univers*, the parterre patterns are square in their proportions and

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68 The garden at Vaux-le-Vicomte was created by André Le Nôtre between 1656 and 1661. For Israel Silvestre's engraving of this garden (and the central parterres) see Hobhouse, 168.

69 Karling, 8.

70 Ibid., 10.

71 Ibid., 8-9.
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strongly resemble the sixteenth-century geometric designs rather than the seventeenth-century French embroidery patterns.\(^{72}\) In Italy the new French designs and concepts were particularly slow to be adopted. For example, in Francesco Pona’s treatise of 1622, *Il Paradiso de' Fiori*, he strongly recommends that if there is a choice, then the garden should be arranged in “four perfect squares,”\(^{73}\) the standard format of the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century gardens.

The radical change in the patterns employed in garden designs of the seventeenth century is echoed in the change which occurred in the patterns created by the French choreographers of the seventeenth century, particularly in the dances created for Louis XIV’s court at Versailles. The rectilinear floor plans vanished as the courtiers traced out the same sweeping curves and arabesques found in the parterres outside the palace. Figure 11 is the notation of the regular minuet, which was used to open the balls at Versailles during the reign of Louis XIV. Both the difference between it and the floor plans of the sixteenth-century balletti, and the similarity with the *parterres de broderie*, are quite striking.\(^{74}\)

It is interesting to note that just as the Italians were reluctant to embrace the new garden designs from France, so too were they happy to continue using the choreographic style and forms of Caroso and Negri. In 1630, long after his death, Caroso’s *Nobiltà di Dame* was re-issued in Rome with the title *Raccolta di varij balli*. In circa 1620 G. Mancini, born into an upper class Sienese family (1559), art collector and critic, and from 1623 onwards the papal physician, wrote a short treatise on dance, *Del Origine et Nobiltà del Ballo*. The step descriptions which Mancini includes in his work resemble those of Caroso and Negri; that is, he is still concerned with the dance practice of seventy years earlier.\(^{75}\) Similarly, at the same time as Mancini was writing his treatise, Ludovico Jacobilli wrote down on a few pages descriptions of dances including a *spagnoletta*, a *gagliarda* and a *canario*, dances which “he may well have

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\(^{72}\)Thacker, 145.


\(^{74}\)Figure 11 is taken from Kellom Tomlinson’s work, *The Art of Dancing*, which was published in 1735. The dance is written in a system of notation developed by Pierre Beauchamp in the latter part of the seventeenth century. The system was first used in publications by Raoul-Augur Feuillet in his work, *Chorégraphie, ou l’Art de Décrire la Danse*, published in Paris in 1700. Thus, as was the case with the dance treatises of Caroso and Negri, the written records of the choreographies notate a practice which had existed for decades previously.

\(^{75}\)Sparti, 1995.
learned while a student at the Roman Seminary” (1614-1615).\(^{76}\) One has to assume that the style was still alive in the 1620s and 1630s (at least in Rome) otherwise there would have been no market for, or interest in, these publications.\(^{77}\)

\(^{76}\) Sparti, 1996, 261.

\(^{77}\) Sparti concludes from the work of Jacobilli that “Thanks to his clear accounts and step descriptions we are able to confirm, here at least, a very definite continuing [Italian] tradition of step, choreography, and style from the last third of the sixteenth century through the first two decades of the seventeenth” (ibid., 262).
Masque Dances and Garden Design in Jacobean England

If the new style of garden design was first used in France some time between 1600 and 1614, when did these developments arrive in England, and what does the answer to this question tell us about the type of dances performed by the courtiers in the masques of James I’s reign?

During the first two decades of the seventeenth century there was renewed interest among the English nobility in remodelling and extending their gardens. Publications dealing with the design, layout, construction, and planting of smaller gardens and orchards were also popular. Most of the publications reflected gardening practice of Elizabeth’s reign, with their emphasis on enclosed gardens laid out as a single square, subdivided into four quarters, or as a series of squares all planted with different knots. Evidence from gardens reconstructed during the first decade of the seventeenth century and from newly constructed gardens confirms this view that the design principles of the previous century were still adhered to. For example, the series of designs and survey plans made by Robert Smythson in 1609 indicate that the predominant form of gardens at this time were rectilinear. Smythson’s survey of Wimbledon House shows the total area divided into separate gardens, each laid out in four square compartments, with the largest garden indicated as planted with knots. Smythson also recorded the additions made to Somerset House. “This garden [had] a quatrefoil laid onto a divided square for its geometrical basis, though this was merely the preliminary to what became a complex arrangement of knots, beds and emblematic devices.” From 1603 to 1610 Sir William Rigdon built a house and garden for himself at Dowsby in Lincolnshire. Once again the ground plan for Dowsby indicates that the patterns of the compartments were knots, and that the trees in the orchard were to be planted in a quincunx. The French hydraulic

78 Gervase Markham published books 1 and 2 of The English Husbandman in 1613 and 1614, and the work was published again in 1615, 1623, and 1635. William Lawson’s A New Orchard and Garden first appeared in 1618 and then again in 1623, 1626, 1631, 1638, and 1648. It also appeared another eight times between 1650 and 1695. Thomas Hill published The Profitable Art of Gardening in 1568, and it was regularly re-issued until 1608. Under the pseudonym Didymus Montaine he published the book The Gardeners Labyrinth (1577) which also appeared again in 1578, 1586, 1594, and 1608, as well as four times between 1650 and 1660.

79 For example, Lawson, 1983, 11-12.

80 Brown, 30-31.

81 Ibid., 35.

82 Strong, 117-19.
engineer Salomon de Caus worked in England between 1607 and 1613, first in the employ of Queen Anne, and then for her son, the Prince of Wales. During his time in England de Caus worked on the gardens at Somerset House for Queen Anne, as well as remodelling the gardens at Greenwich. In the Works Accounts for 1613-1614 there is mention of payments for laying out knots at Greenwich, a strong indication that the patterns were still geometric.

Wilton House, the seat of the Earl of Pembroke, provides a clue as to when the new French style was adopted in England. From a description of the garden in 1623 as “circular, triangular, quadrangular, orbicular [and] oval,” it seems that the garden was geometric and rectilinear. In 1630 Philip Herbert inherited Wilton on the death of his brother. From 1632 to 1635 he had part of the house and the garden rebuilt, with Isaac de Caus in charge of the work. Ten years later Isaac de Caus published a series of plans of Wilton, and from these plans it is very clear that the four compartments which lay underneath the windows of the piano nobile were parterres de broderie (fig. 12). From the surviving evidence the garden at Wilton in 1635 appears to be the earliest example of an English garden laid out according to the new design principles developed in France.

The conclusion that the transition from the strongly geometric Renaissance style to the arabesques of the baroque first occurred in England in the 1630s is confirmed by another royal garden, St James’s Palace. It was the French garden architect André Mollet who re-designed the gardens at St James’s Palace from 1629 to 1633 on the invitation of Queen Henrietta Maria. A description of the garden, written in 1637, describes part of the garden as consisting of “parterres of different figures.”

But it is not only the activities of men such as de Caus and Mollet which reveal the horticultural passions of this time. Formal gardens also appear in masque stage sets, and, not surprisingly, the descriptions of these gardens parallel the developments in the living gardens of the nobility. For the masque presented by the members of Gray's Inn in honour of the marriage of the Earl of Somerset and Lady Francis Howard, The

83 When Prince Henry died de Caus moved back to the Continent, where until 1619 he designed and supervised the building of the Hortus Palatinus for his late employer's sister, Princess Elizabeth, and her husband the Elector of Palatine. Ibid., 74.
84 Ibid., 96, 227 n. 39.
85 Ibid., 122.
86 Ibid., 147-49.
87 Ibid., 188.
Masque of Flowers, on 6 January 1614, the Banqueting House at Whitehall was transformed into:

a garden of a glorious and strange beauty, cast into four quarters, with a cross-walk and alleys compassing each quarter . . . Every quarter of the garden was finely hedged about with a low hedge of cypress and juniper; the knots within set with artificial flowers . . . In every corner of each quarter were great pots of gilly-flowers.88

Twenty years later when the Banqueting House again became “a new and pleasant prospect . . . showing a delicious garden,” the knots which had filled each quarter had vanished, replaced with the new, fashionable parterres.89 On this occasion the masque was Thomas Carew’s Coleum Britannicum, performed before the court on 18 February 1634; that is, at precisely the same time the garden at Wilton was being rebuilt by Isaac de

88Spencer and Wells, 169.

89Orgel and Strong, 2.579.
Caus. Similarly, a year earlier in the court play, The Shepherd's Paradise, (1633) the design by Inigo Jones portrays a garden in which the new, French, scroll-like parterres are clearly visible.

If garden styles in England began to change to the new French style in the late 1620s and early 1630s, did the court dance practice follow a parallel path? From the descriptions of the main-masque dances which do exist in the masque-texts themselves it seems clear that the early masque dances continued the practices of the sixteenth century. As Peter Walls notes:

Those masque descriptions which do go beyond a rather general expression of enthusiasm for what was seen indicate that the formation of geometrical groupings played a prominent part in set-dance choreography.

Samuel Daniel describes the first dance of the twelve goddesses in his masque from 1604, a dance which took place in “the midst of the hall,” as “being performed with great majesty and art, consisting of divers strains framed into motions circular, square, triangular, with other proportions exceeding rare and full of variety.” In Hymenaei (1606) and Masque of Queens (1609) the dancers formed both geometric patterns and alphabetic figures. In the text of one of the songs in the masque, The Vision of Delight (1617) the dances are described as “curious knots and mazes” thus indicating that not only were these dances ones with geometrical patterning, but that the same words were used to describe both the dance patterns and the patterns used in the formal gardens.

Orazio Busino, the chaplain to the Venetian Embassy in London, left an entertaining account of the Twelfth Night masque for 1618, Jonson’s Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue. The dance for the twelve masked knights started in the form of a pyramid, with the Prince of Wales alone at the

As Peter Walls points out, Carew accompanied Sir Edward Herbert to France when the latter was ambassador there from 1619 to 1624, and therefore should have had ample opportunity to become acquainted with the latest in French taste, including dancing (220).

See Strong, 182-83.

Walls, 121.

Spencer and Wells, 29-30.

“Here, they daunced forth a most neate and curious measure, full of Subtilty and Deuice; which was so excellently performed, ... The straines were all notably different, some of them formed into Letters, very signifying to the name of the Bridegroome“ and “a more numerous composition could not be seene: graphically dispos'd into letters, and honoring the Name of the most sweete, and ingenious Prince, Charles, Duke of Yorke.” Jonson, 8.220-21 and 315-16.

Walls, 106. See also ibid., 121-23 for further discussion of the masque dances.
apex. The twelve then changed places with each other before joining with the ladies for the revels’ dances.

They did all sorts of [balletti] and dances of every country, such as [passe-mezzi, correnti, canarie, spagnolette] and a hundred other beautiful turns to delight the fancy. Finally they danced [la spagnoletta] once more with their ladies.96

From Busino’s account the main masque dance was based on geometric figures, and the dances he named for the revels, the passamezzo, corrente, canario, and spagnoletta are all found in the Italian manuals of Caroso and Negri.

If the revels’ dances for the 1618 masque appear to have been those current in Italy in the late sixteenth century, ten years later the fashion seemed to have swung in the direction of France. In 1628 Bulstrode Whitelocke was elected to the position of Master of the Revels for the Middle Temple. In his account of the festivities for the 1628/1629 Christmas season, Whitelocke lists the dances performed.

[I]n the evening the Mr entered the Hall, with about 16 revellers, proper handsome young gentlemen . . . the Mr led them in his bar gowne with a white staffe in his hand, the musique playing before them. They began with the old measures, after that they daunced the Branles, then the Mr took his seat, & the Revellers daunced Galliards, Corantoes, & french daunces, then countrye daunces till it grew very late.97

Instead of passamezzi or spagnolette, the members of the Middle Temple danced “the old measures . . . the Branles . . . Galliards, Corantoes, & french daunces, then countrye daunces.”

From Whitelocke’s description of the 1628/29 festivities, it appears that the list of dances does bear some resemblance to the order of the nobles’ dances performed at the French court balls in the early decades of the seventeenth century; that is, the suite of bransles, then the ceremonial danses à deux, the courante, and the gaillarde and finally dances in which partners could be chosen at will. However, one must note here that given this brief description it is not possible to state definitively whether Whitelocke’s “galliards” and “corantoes” were the same dances as the gaillarde and courante described by François de Lauze in his treatise of 1623.

96“[F]ecero tutti le sorti di balletti, et danze, che si costumano in qualsiuoglia paese, à modo de passamezzi, correnti, canarie, spagnolette, et cento altri gesti fatti a pizzego molto belli. Ballaroni finalmente un’alla volta la spagnoletta con la sua Dama” (Orgel and Strong, 1.281 and 283). Busino’s account and a translation is quoted in full in ibid., 279-84.

97Quoted in Walls, 262.
The late sixteenth-century Italian dance treatises of Caroso and Negri, for example, give many variations for the gagliarda, which do not resemble de Lauze’s gaillarde. Similarly, the dance, La corrente, from Negri, and the pantomimic coranto as described by Arbeau, are not performed in the same manner as the courante by de Lauze.

In the French court balls of the first decades of the seventeenth century, the latter part of the ball often “provided the occasion for the dancing of lively new dances.” While it is not possible to identify what was meant by the term “french daunces” in Whitelocke’s account, it seems reasonable to assume that he was referring to dances currently fashionable in France, and that these “french daunces” would be like the “lively new dances” performed at the end of the French court balls. Certainly by the 1640s the English court was being ridiculed for its obsession with French fashions, including dance.

Given the available evidence concerning the fashions in both court dance and the formal gardening practices, it seems that up to the early to mid 1620s the dances in the English court masque followed the strongly geometric style of the late sixteenth century. From the late 1620s onwards there was an increasing French influence at court, which in the gardens resulted in a change to the arabesques of the seventeenth-century French style and may well have had the same result as regards the dance practice.

In this article I have argued that there were close similarities between the static choreography of the formal gardens of the nobility and the moving choreographies performed by the members of the court. The

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98De Lauze, 44-46. De Lauze’s work is the only French dance source from Arbeau’s treatise of 1589 to Rameau’s Maître à danser of 1725, and in it he has recorded the main social dances of the French court in the early decades of the seventeenth century. For a discussion of de Lauze’s work see Garlick.

99Negri, 265-66.

100Arbeau, 123-25.

101De Lauze, 34.

102Garlick, 182.

103For example in a play called The Varietie by William Cavendish, Earl of Newcastle, the style of dancing at court was definitely French. In this play, performed prior to 1642, gentlemen are portrayed as walking with turnout: “and now dey valk vid deir toes out for brave genty, you call dat a de splay foot.” (Cavendish, 20) For a discussion of this play and the political climate in which it was performed, see Butler, 195-98. The turnout of the feet while dancing (and walking) assumed a far greater importance in the seventeenth century in France than it had in the previous century. For example de Lauze’s first principle of dance was the correct manner of walking, a necessary component of which was the turnout of the feet (De Lauze, 27). For a discussion on the importance of the correct manner of walking in the seventeenth century, see Garlick, 112-21.
principles of order and proportion (which must be visible from above), the expression of splendour, the geometrical forms, were fundamental principles of both Renaissance court dance and the formal garden. Furthermore, the patterns in both these art forms were meant to be viewed from above. This close similarity in design principles between the horticultural and kinetic arts existed right through the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and continued into the seventeenth century. Therefore, given this similarity in design principles, and the evidence from the small number of descriptions of masque dances we do have, one can hypothesize that the masque dances (as opposed to the revels) of the Jacobean court masques were of the same geometric style which was current in Italy and France from 1550 onwards. The floor plans would be rectilinear, not curvilinear, and the patterns produced would be geometric, with emphasis on squares, triangles, circles within squares, and the diagonals of rectangles or squares. From the late 1620s and early 1630s, however, English court dance imitated more closely the contemporary French practice, in which geometric shapes changed to scroll-like patterns and ‘S’-shaped curves and arabesques.

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