

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The present collection gathers the studies presented at the Sixth Annual Conference of our International Society for Phenomenology, Fine Arts and Aesthetics which took place at the Harvard Divinity School in Cambridge, Massachusetts on May 12–14, 2000.

I am bringing it to the world forum of our readers with a particular satisfaction because the treatment of the theme shows the wide breadth of our work: indeed, by going into the depth of the human significance of the garden, we see how in all major cultures it comes prominently from the innermost springs of the Human Condition within the onto-poiesis of life.

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A-T.T.

THEME

GARDENS AND THE PASSION FOR THE INFINITE

A beautiful field with straight furrows methodically seeded, well watered, all green with tender leaf – what a lovely sight that is, one with the promise of a good, needed harvest. A lovely picturesque meadow, a pasture graced with grazing sheep, but also the habitat of rabbits, woodchucks, moles, birds of the air, etc. A thick forest, whose stout and tall trees provide wood for building homes, fences, bridges, tools, whose thick foliage is the abode of innumerable larger and smaller living beings. The human owner of these parcels, proud of his/her dominion over this corner of earth, dreams of extending the bounds of that dominion to further ranges. This is a desire to expand frontiers.

One may venture to say that while out in the fields and meadows, one rides the surface of our human engagement with Mother Earth. In gardening, on the contrary, one enters, through personal care, into the growth of plants, into deepest communion with Mother Earth, into participation in the networks of nature-life.

When we cultivate a garden, our innermost personal engagement enters into play. The interest of the gardener goes beyond the produce that the plot yields, beyond increase in quantity and size, in soil improvement, and better technique, all that leads to a better harvest.

And what about gardens? Be they vegetable, herb, or green gardens, pleasure gardens, ornamental formal gardens, or romantic informal gardens, all play symbolic roles. Gardens figure centrally in some of the oldest myths of humanity. Paradise expresses the deepest yearning of the human heart for the harmony of everything alive, for a perfect human condition. An ideal state lost in immemorial time and never retrieved is symbolized by the garden. In contrast, as a symbol of human accomplishment, of the glory of the consummate monarch and of the highest cultural achievement there stand the gardens of Versailles, an enduring reflection of *le Roi-Soleil*. Chinese gardens are meant to be miniatures of the world. Getty's park is a mysterious labyrinth of meanings. And the garden that I cultivate around my house expresses the layout of my soul with its temperament, aesthetic taste, ingrownness with nature-life. Common and unassuming, it the "essential garden."

These larger or smaller or altogether small spaces, perhaps encircled by a fence meant to protect from herbivores, dogs, and trespassers, are devoted to

the cultivation of plants. A garden assumes the tiniest dimensions on a windowsill. A garden is a space for the cultivation of specially selected plants meant for personal use – vegetables, greens, herbs, flowers, ornamental shrubs, all cultivated for the pleasure of their color, shape, fragrance, grace, taste, for direct enjoyment.

As our human cultures manifest, there is a particular significance in the cultivation of a garden that exceeds by far any practical life-sustaining benefit. The sensibilities, emotions active in the gardener's involvement with his or her piece of land run through the entire range of the human soul. Emerging from its subliminal, specifically human sphere, these sensibilities soar on the wings of *Imaginatio Creatrix* above attachment to possessions, enterprises, ambitions, power ... and express the full gamut of aesthetic, moral, and intellectual enjoyment of our beingness, extending out toward the furthest frontiers of human longing.

To understand this privileged life significance of the garden, we have to grasp it as being inscribed within the web of human life, as having the phenomenology of life as its context.

In short, the gardener's and viewer's immersion in a garden extends through all the rays of logical expansion in the ontopoietic unfolding of the individual human person. A garden stirs one's entire beingness. Our whole vital and creative system, as it were, feeds on the garden and draws out from it the entire spectrum of rays of significance. A garden may be seen as a mirror of the affectivity of the cultivator and of that of the viewer as well. Gardens appear to be a quintessential locus for our full experience of nature-life. A garden serves as a mirror of our inner existence; a garden is seen as a miniature of the world; it functions as a symbolic expression of our highest longings for order in beauty. We see in a garden an "Eden," an ideal of harmony, beauty, sublimity, innocence, peace, and fulfillment, a prototype of "Paradise."

A garden partakes in all the "passions of the earth" (see "Passions of the Earth in Human Existence, Creativity, and Literature," *Analecta Husserliana* LXXI). As living beings, we cannot refrain from at least tacitly partaking in these passions. They measure our very beingness. Through the cultivation of a garden the human being digs deeper and deeper *ad infinitum* into the life sedimentations of this participation, descending toward the vital-organic womb of life itself. In doing so, our living beingness reenacts this participation through our entire imaginative system, assuming it intuitively. Yet simultaneously it draws on all the significant rays of the specifically human preoccupations of *Imaginatio Creatrix*, which suffuses the human sphere of life with the highest ideals of mankind. In short, the range of significant

human sensibilities provides the inspiration to descend from the highest elevation into the entire logoc spread.

On the one hand, the experience of the gardener cultivating the life of plants from germination through unfolding and growth is already preceded by an aesthetic project and a vision of the garden's flourishing, and the harvest encompasses all the human passional strivings: vital, subliminal, communicative. This follows in the imaginative reworking and appropriation through experience of all the onto-poietic phases of life's unfolding. Yet in following their temporal lines, this aesthetically transformed passion is not bound to their temporal succession; it moves freely, albeit in a synchronizing aesthetic that oscillates between the never graspable promise of the origins at one end and the fulgurating rays of fulfillments at the other.

By provoking these two passional strivings of the human being, the garden brings together the originary, the elementary, and that which recedes from sight into the infinite, elevating the human spirit.

Does not this passional oscillation between the termini of the Human Condition, which embrace the entire spread of the onto-poietic unfolding of human beingness – in particular, in the sphere of aesthetic experiences – fall in line with the innermost device of the Logos of Life, which moves so constantly between these poles?

On the other hand, and on reverse course, do we not in our immersion in a garden's life *volens volens* follow the flow and duration of its progress? Do we not merely postpone, and only for short intervals, the wild onward course of changing life? For a period we bring nature-life to a standstill. Indeed, the garden that is planned in our imagination, that is shaped at our own hands, and which reposes in a seemingly finished state is from instant to instant undergoing an imperceptible transformation, one that merges in its duration with our own inner flux. We immerse ourselves in this duration, expanding into an infinite duration.

Dwelling in that duration we achieve an infinite repose. Does not the midsummer blossoming seem to last forever?

This compressing of the successive stages of becoming into an imaginative illusion of endurance is particularly exemplified in symbolic commemorative forms of the garden. In some gardens we seek to retain past glories of humankind, great achievements and ideas, longings and dreams, our human passion for perdurance. We attempt through them to stop the flow of change, to retain elusive being, the shapes that this ceaseless flux once took, by immortalizing them in a faint image rescued from oblivion and brought into the palpitating present course of life in defiance of the inexorable passage of time.

The pulls and tensions of spontaneities, forces, dynamisms struggling onwards in the growth-and-decay progress of the living being that is human, on being worked upon in imaginative interpretation, are reappropriated in the human being's most intimate participation in nature-life and lose their present urgency, so that we may repose in nature, have confidence in its logic rules, and hope for continuing fulfillment in the harvest to come.

Could we not say then that the aesthetic passion carrying the project of the garden lies at the crossing of two innermost passionate drives of human life: the drive toward infinite renewal and a drive for infinite repose?

The Garden – a unique aesthetic synthesis of our passions.

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