

The Gesture of tending a garden

A garden is more than a garden. A garden is a species of technology, it is the cultivation of land and the growing of crops, but through the gardener it becomes much more. A garden can be tended beautifully, arranged beautifully, set to rest beautifully. A gardener may make an Art of the canning of tomatoes or the burning of their fields. A garden is by its nature a thing that reaches beyond its purpose. Though it may serve that purpose well, it is not subservient to it, it is more than a means to an end.

A garden nourishes. It requires that you invest yourself in it and rewards you in turn. Tending a garden seems an archaic gesture, rendered obsolete by the advancement of technology and the economies of scale which are integral to modern production. Yet the gesture remains, and those who practice it find meaning within its inefficiencies. There is pleasure in the tilling of the soil, anticipation in the sowing of the seeds, pride in the labor of cultivation. For the gardener this connection to soil and to seed, the time, care, and labor that went into a harvest, invests the fruits of that labor with special significance. It is a sort of value that is difficult to quantify, whose logic runs counter to modern production and the predominance of profit – a value concerned more with quality of experience than efficiency or productivity.

A garden demands sustained engagement. A garden demands attention, and its needs shift as the season progresses. A gardener must have a variety of skills to fulfill these needs, tilling the soil, sowing the seeds, placing peas and beans in the shade and tomatoes in the sun – each thing in its time and place so that it may thrive. For the gardener this is a collaborative gesture, working with the land, with the thing being grown, responding to the necessities imposed by circumstance while still directing towards a specified end. That end too, requires that the gardener take up a variety of skills. Just as there is meaning to be had in the tending of the

garden, so too is there pleasure in preparing, preserving, and presenting the fruits of that labor. Some gardeners take pleasure in canning their vegetables for the winter, others find joy in the precise arrangement of their flowers within the home, and some take satisfaction in the delicate relationship of their garden and the bees – the particular way that they sustain one another and, by extension, us. The Gardener sustains their garden, and in turn the garden sustains them.

A garden is directed towards fulfilling a need. A garden is essentially a suspension of nature, an area cordoned off from its surroundings and directed towards the ends of its steward. These ends may be practical, as in food, commerce, and research, or they may be directed towards another set of needs. A flower garden defies most of the already archaic practical potential of the garden, yet its products nourish all the same, fulfilling psychological, aesthetic, or emotional needs. I think that is the reason that the gesture remains, it points towards something lacking in the current order of things, where abundance is expressed in opulence rather than generosity, and we find ourselves in a deepening pit of want. For the Gardener tending their garden may be an end in itself, but that is a solipsistic meaning – the true beauty of the garden is realized when its products and the efforts of the gardener are directed towards the deeper needs of their community.

-Chance Taylor