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Mateusz Salwa
Wydział Filozofii, Uniwersytet Warszawski
ORCID: 0000-0003-4988-8912

The garden as a new ecological paradigm[1]

Abstract
This paper advances the suggestion that the garden (and gardening) may be a new ecological paradigm. Today's environmental aesthetics and ethics are mainly interested in wild nature. It is argued that nature enclosed in national parks, which provides the main topic for contemporary aesthetic and ethical considerations, should be replaced with nature cultivated in gardens. The author claism that – theoretically and practically – we should treat the garden as a model which makes it possible to reconsider the relationship between people and their natural environment.

Key words:
aesthetics, ethic, environment, garden, gardening

Streszczenie
W artykule zostaje postawiona teza, że ogród (oraz ogrodnictwo) można uznać za nowy paradygmat ekologii. Współczesna estetyka i etyka środowiskowa koncentrują się na dzikiej przyrodzie. Zdaniem autora przyrodę chronioną w parkach narodowych, do której się głównie odnoszą wspomniane dziedziny, należy zastąpić w rozważaniach przyrodą kultywowaną w ogrodach. Z teoretycznego i praktycznego punktu widzenia, to ogród należałoby traktować jako model pozwalający poddać namysłowi relacje między ludźmi a środowiskiem naturalnym

Słowa kluczowe:
estetyka, etyka, ogrodnictwo, ogród, środowisko

1 The article was first published in *Aesthetics of Human Environment. VIII Ovsiannikov International Aesthetic Conference*, ed. by. S. Dzikevich, Lomonosov Moscow State University, Moscow 2017, p. 32-45. I elaborated on this topic in Salwa 2020, 149-170; Salwa 2022; Frydryczak, Salwa 2022.

1. Introduction

Today's environmental aesthetics and ethics are mainly interested in wild nature and it is not without a reason that they do so, stemming to a great extent from the 18th and 19th-century interest in wild nature. Such approaches identify nature either with nature untouched by human hand or with nature which may be treated as if it were not subject to human influence (even when in fact it is). Although it is widely acknowledged that the dichotomy culture *vs* nature is questionable, it is iterated by the above theories as the focus on wild nature necessarily amounts to placing nature outside culture or society. In order to avoid theoretical pitfalls and offer a view that corresponds better to the present situation in which, practically speaking, virgin nature hardly exists – we have been living in the Anthropocene, after all – we should look for another paradigm of nature.

My contention is that nature enclosed in national parks, which provides the main topic for contemporary aesthetic and ethical considerations, should be replaced with nature cultivated in gardens. Thus, the new paradigm of nature would be that of a garden. I suggest that – theoretically and practically – we should treat the garden as a model which makes it possible to reconsider the relationship between people and their environment. The fact that gardens are human environments, i.e. they are created by people, does not mean that nature is reduced to an artifact. Quite the contrary: it is impossible to understand gardens without the dichotomy culture *vs* nature and yet they are places where this opposition turns into a culture-nature continuum in which the two are not mutually exclusive.

In what follows, I would like to show briefly why gardens are important for environmental thinking as far as aesthetics and ethics are concerned. In order to do so, however, I shall first of all offer a provisional definition of garden.[2]

2. What is a garden?

The multiplicity of forms and functions that gardens may have necessarily precludes any possibility of offering one definition of what a garden is (Miller 1993; Ross 1998, 6-9). It seems more likely that it is at best possible to think of a sort of family resemblance between various gardens (Hunt 2000, 14). However, we are usually able to distinguish a garden (i.e. a place we call by that name or that we assume to be a garden) from a non-garden. As the editors of the *Cultural History of Gardens* put it: "The range of places that can be envisaged within this category [garden – M.S.] is enormous and various, and it changes from place to place, and from time to time. Yet this diversity does not wholly inhibit us from knowing what it is we want to discuss whe we speak of the garden" (Leslie, Hunt 2013, XIII). The corollary of this

2 My following arguments are based on a book that I published in Polish (Salwa 2016).

belief is that gardens – no matter what they look like and what purposes they may serve – differ from other "green spaces". They are heretopies (Foucault 1986).

Given the abovementioned difficulties as well as intuitive knowledge of what a garden is, hardly ever do we find its explicit definitions in garden literature. One such definition has been offered by John D. Hunt. It is worthy of note because of its highly informative character:

> a garden will normally be out-of-doors, a relatively small space of ground (relative, usually, to accompanying buildings or topographical surroundings). The specific area of the garden will be deliberately related through various means to the locality in which it is set; by the invocation of indigenous plant materials, by various modes of representation or other forms of reference (including association) to that larger territory, and by drawing out the character of its site (*the genius loci*). The garden will thus be distinguished in various ways from the adjacent territories in which it is set. Either it will have some precise boundary, or it will be set apart by the greater extent, scope and variety of its design and internal organization; more usually, both will serve to designate its space and its actual or implied enclosure. A combination of inorganic and organic materials are strategically invoked for a variety of usually interrelated reasons – practical, social, spiritual, aesthetic – all of which will be explicit or implicit expressions or performances of their local culture. (Hunt 2000, 15-16)

Hunt adds furthermore that:

> the definition works in two distinctive ways (…) A site exists both as a physical objects and as a place experienced by a subject. So gardens will be conceived, first of all, in the abstract (their ontology, or essence); but the idea of a garden is at the same time paradoxically composed of the perception of gardens in many different ways by different people and different cultures and periods. (ibid.)

A much shorter and more general formula comprising all the elements enumerated by Hunt has been provided by Mara Miller, an analytic philosopher according to whom:

> a garden is any purposeful arrangement of natural objects (such as sand, water, plants, rocks, etc.) with exposure to the sky or open air, in which the form is not fully accounted for by purely practical considerations such as convenience. (Miller 1993, 15)

Miller refers to the fact that nature in a garden is not reduced solely to its instrumental value as it is characterized by an "excess of form", as she calls it. However, she does not refer to formal richness but to the fact that the way a garden is designed cannot be interpreted in purely utilitarian terms and thus excess of form "provides

some sort of satisfaction in itself, and some sort of 'meaning' or 'significance'" (ibid.). What is more, given that such an excess of form is typical for works of art, a garden is a sort of work of art and hence it is to be aesthetically appreciated.

It is however possible to find an even more succinct and general definition, which nevertheless seems to be quite satisfactory as it distinguishes gardens from other places while encompassing even the most disparate types of gardens. It states that a garden is "a limited fragment of a territory which is cultivated in a particular way and – generally speaking – covered with plants in order to achieve nutritional and/or aesthetic goals" (Le Dantec 2006, 58). The key element of the above statement is the expression "in a particular way" which may be thought to denote the excess of form suggested by Miller and – in spite of its somewhat enigmatic character – it surpasses her idea insofar as it does not involve considerations whether gardens are artworks or not.[3]

What is, then, so particular about the way nature is cultivated in gardens? It is unanimously agreed that gardens – regardless of their possible economic, social or political functions – have always been created in order to fulfill various aesthetic needs rooted in human desire to be amid nature. Gardens are justly believed to offer aesthetic pleasure which stems not only from the fact that they are skillfully designed, crafted and maintained but also from the presence of animate and inanimate nature within there. An awareness (or at least a belief) that gardens are not completely artificial as they consist of something which is not human-made – i.e. an awareness that they are full of nature which, albeit shaped by gardeners, is not created by the latter in a manner akin to producing a sculpture or a building – is crucial for a garden experience. If we acknowledge that, for example, the gardens of Versailles are a manifestation of royal absolutism, the fact that they consist of living nature is of primary importance. It suffices to imagine how different they would have been if they had been made of porcelain, marble, wood or plastic.

> If we imagine – Robert Harbison writes – the forms of a formal garden like the Boboli or Villa Medici in masonry instead of vegetation we get an unexpectedly bizarre construction which shows that people let themselves be confined by plants in ways that they would endure uneasily indoors. (Harbison 2000, 6)

My contention is that what Miller refers to as an "excess of form" which stems from a particular way gardens are cultivated is their aesthetic value. In other words, I claim that gardens are places which sharply differ in character from their surroundings because their internal organization is aimed at, among other things, offering an aesthetic experience of nature. A garden is a natural environment which – regardless of the functions it is designed to have – is shaped by humans

3 Such ruminations are very inspiring but do not really help in answering the question "what is a garden" (Salwa 2014).

with regard to the aesthetic experience of nature i.e. on the one hand the aesthetic experience of nature determines how it is organized and on the other – nature is organized and shaped in order to be aesthetically experienced. It means that in order to experience a garden as a garden (and not e. g. as a sheer "green space") one has to take nature's aesthetic dimension into account.

The argument that the constitutive element of all gardens is nothing else than their aesthetic dimension may seem flawed for at least two reasons. Firstly, it may sound essentialist and thus contrast with the Wittgensteinian approach mentioned at the outset. Nevertheless, it is not my intention to argue the fact that nature in a garden being an object of aesthetic experience suffices to define a garden. I merely believe that it is a necessary condition for a place to be a garden. Secondly, historically speaking, it can be rightly noted that gardens have been generally divided into utilitarian ones, i.e. kitchen or vegetable gardens, which have been said to have purely practical functions, and pleasure grounds of different kinds, where the fact that people are in a close contact with nature regardless of what they are doing has always been of primary importance. Thus, it has been contended that nature is shaped in such a way as to have aesthetic values only in the latter case. Such a belief stems from identifying aesthetic values with artistic ones. Hence, if utilitarian gardens are devoid of any artistic qualities (associated with stylistic properties or symbolic content), then they necessarily have no aesthetic significance. If, however, aesthetic qualities of gardens are thought of not so much in terms of the beautiful, the picturesque or the sublime, as in terms of sensory qualities (according to the etymology of the term aesthetics), then it is reasonable to claim that every garden – even the most humble one as long as it is a garden (i.e. as long as it has been designed and cultivated as a garden and is experienced as such) has an aesthetic value insofar as nature in it is aesthetically experienced as nature.

3. Aesthetic experience of nature in a garden

The above view is based on an approach offered by Rosario Assunto, Italian philosopher who, to the best of my knowledge, has been the only one to devote so much place to – as he used to call it – a "philosophy of the garden" (*filosofia del giardino*) and to treat the idea of a garden as a useful point of reference in environmental thinking (Assunto 1988).

Assunto, influenced to a great extent by Plato's philosophy as well as that of German idealism, believes in a fairly essentialist vein that it is possible to define the essence of garden. He treats all the gardens as works of art and claims that gardening is an art, by which he means that on the one hand gardens should be appreciated in the same manner as artworks and on the other that gardening requires not only technical skills but also a particular attitude. In both cases a contemplative approach is needed and it results in the beauty of the garden or its aesthetic

dimension (*esteticità*). Thus, a gardener cultivates nature in a garden in such a way as to make it beautiful while a visitor or user of such garden is expected to discover the garden's beauty and have an experience of it. Contemplation does not, however, amounts to being disengaged and it is not associated with an approach typical of a distanced observer. Assunto simply identifies contemplation with a disinterested attitude, i.e. an attitude which allows one to see things as they are and to respect them for what they are. In other words, nature in a garden (insofar as it is contemplated) is contemplated is treated as a goal in itself, which means that cultivating a garden differs from cultivating a field on a farm only in that it does not treat nature solely in instrumental terms. Nature in a garden may, obviously, have an instrumental value, yet it must never be reduced to being solely an asset of that kind. Therefore gardens are places where nature turns out to have an inherent value which, however, does not supplants nature's instrumental value but accompanies it. This is what makes gardens "absolutely other spaces", as Assunto writes. Thus, a disinterested approach and an aesthetic experience of nature result in particular gardening practices which respect nature's needs and cycles while allowing one to notice and appreciate them. What is more, they make people aware of the fact that they are one with nature and that it should not be abandoned or destroyed. For Assunto, gardens are earthly paradises and as such they offer an ecological ideal of what Earth should be like.

Assunto's garden theory may be fruitfully juxtaposed with environmental aesthetics, which is less interested in gardens than in wild nature but offers an interesting insight into the aesthetic experience of nature. According to Malcolm Budd, in order to define an aesthetic experience of nature one has to know what nature is and what it means to experience it aesthetically (Budd 2002). What is more, both of these issues have to be analyzed in reciprocal light as they mutually determine each other, since it is the understanding of the essence of aesthetic experience of nature as nature that is at stake. Budd suggests that we should conceive of nature as of everything which is not human creation, yet he admits that a natural object may stem from human activity and that it may be in an unnatural (artificial) state. An aesthetic experience of nature is thus an experience of something which is experienced as non-artificial, i.e. it is not appreciated as art. In other words, one has an aesthetic experience of nature whenever he or she experiences it as nature. An aesthetic appreciation of nature is therefore an appreciation that does not take into consideration any human design that may have been imposed on nature. In order to aesthetically experience nature as nature one has to know or believe that what they experience is natural. Budd claims that:

> a response is aesthetic in so far as the response is directed at the experienced properties of an item, the nature and arrangement of its elements or the interrelationships among its parts or aspects, and it involves a positive or negative reaction to the item not as satisfying

> a desire for the existence or non-existence of some state of affairs in which the item figures, but considered 'in itself' (…). By 'experienced properties' I mean properties the item is experienced as possessing, in perception, thought, or imagination, and the notion is to be understood in an all-embracing sense, covering not only immediately perceptible properties, but also relational, representational, symbolic, and emotional properties as they are realized in the item, and including the kind or type of thing the item is experienced as being. (Budd 2002, 14)

According to Budd, an aesthetic experience of nature consists in a disinterested sensory experience of what one takes to be natural, i.e. non-artificial, and consists of an aesthetic appreciation of it as independent from any human design. Such an experience may be directed at – as he calls it – "nature affected by humanity", which may be found in gardens, among other places (ibid. 7-9).

If Assunto's approach is now combined with Budd's proposition, then it may be claimed that gardens are places where the human cultivates, shapes and organizes nature in a particular way implied by an aesthetic experience of nature as nature, and that they are managed in this particular manner in order to make other people have an experience of this sort. As a result, in a human-made garden people may aesthetically appreciate (positively or negatively) the naturalness of nature (or what they take to be nature's naturalness) or – to put it differently – its non-human or other-than-human condition. It does not mean that garden nature is not subject to human intentions; it does mean, however, that human does not approach it in a purely instrumental way. In this sense, a garden is a place where the tension between disinterestedness and interestedness, disengagement and engagement necessarily arises. It is thanks to disinterestedness and disengagement that one may become aware that he or she is interested and engaged in the environment, especially when he or she is trying to alter it according to his or her own plans. It goes without saying that it is possible to aesthetically experience nature beyond gardens, in particular in national parks as environmental aestheticians suggest, but it is in gardens that nature is supposed to be experienced that way. Garden nature is intentionally designed to be an object of an aesthetic experience. Otherwise, why would anyone want to create a garden?

There is no doubt that one may experience gardens in various ways, different from the one discussed above. One must not forget that a garden is always an intentional human creation and thus may be experienced as a work of art. In this respect, the garden experience extends between two ends of a spectrum: human design and natural order.[4] It is, however, the latter (which invariably accompanies the former and depends on it insofar as it is designed) which holds primary importance if we want to understand why gardens are so particular. That a garden is "made of"

4 It is a distinction suggested by Allen Carlson (2002, 115-121).

nature is crucial to its being an artwork, just as an aesthetic experience of nature is fundamental for any other possible way of experiencing a garden (let us recall Harbison's remark here). What is more, an aesthetic experience of natural order which is treated as natural despite being "human-affected" allows one to experience the human design that lies behind a garden in a different way. An aesthetic experience of nature in a garden makes it possible for people to experience aesthetically their art as art, i.e. as an activity which is completely dependent on them and as such is non-natural. Thus, it favors a critical reflection on the relationship between human beings and their natural environment. Certainly, it will not result in human becoming one with nature or in a transspecies harmony as Assunto hopes, yet it may certainly attenuate the anthropocentric paradigm and promote treating nature as respectful partner.

4. Ethics in a garden

As mentioned above, nature in a garden is cultivated and shaped in such a way as to make people aesthetically experience it as natural and therefore gardens are places where nature is "presented" as non-artificial despite that it is affected by humans. In other words, gardens are – as I contend – places where human activity aims at showing other-than-human character of nature. This particular aspect of gardens facilitates interpretation of otherwise quite enigmatic though widespread formulas stating that gardens are places between art and nature or that gardens are art-and-nature or, alternatively, that they are neither artificial, nor natural (Cooper 2006, 21-61; Parsons 2008, 114-127; Ross 1998, 1-24). They are places in which an art (culture) – nature continuum is created. It has to be noted that other places may be said to have this hybrid character, too, yet what makes gardens so particular in that respect is that their hybridity is intentionally made an object of aesthetic experience.[5] It is a consequence of the fact that nature is aesthetically experienced as nature (i.e. as non-artificial) and that art is aesthetically experienced as art (i.e. as non-natural).

If so, then gardens may be claimed to be places where a human and other-than-human community is created. As Anthony Weston writes:

> More gardens everywhere. Here a mixed community is already close to the surface. The tomatoes and cucumbers and collards become part of "us," they form a community with its own needs, and the gardener stands inside or alongside, not outside, that community as well, along with the neighbors who plow and advise, the friends and soup kitchen that get the extra food, the racoons who rummage in the compost pile, the horses whose manure fertilizes, the insects who make their homes among the vegetables and consume

5 The idea of hybridity and collective employed here has been borrowed from Bruno Latour (2009).

> their more destructive cousins. Correspondingly "they" become the various threats: other plants ("weeds," though lovely enough in their own rights), the groundhogs and deer that take more than they need or trample more than they get, the hornworms and cutworms and mites, the kids down the hill who lob baseballs into the corn. Even in this simplest and most modest of ways we already see the transformation of something fundamental. Species lines no longer determine our allegiances here; rather, our alliance is to one multispecies community and against various others who emerge as invaders and disrupters. A mixed community, a working landscape, a multicentric world. (Weston 2009, 123)

The communal character of gardens, i.e. the fact they are collectives gathering human and other-than-human actors, is enforced by the fact that gardening as a "particular way" of cultivating nature is based on an approach Gísli Pálsson (1996) calls communalism. Contrary to other possible approaches, which either treat nature as a raw material that can be freely used by humans or conceive of it as a good that has to be protected and thus in one way or another tend to separate nature from culture and "speak for nature", communalism consists of treating nature as a significant other with which a dialogue has to be sustained, because all entities share a common fate and remain in a close mutual relationship. Seen in this way, a garden turns out to be a place where such a community is established by humans who adopt a multicentric perspective.

Even if the idea of a dialogue with nature may be associated with the stereotypical image of a gardener who talks to their beloved plants, it plays an important role in contemporary debates on how to cope with the ecological crisis. It is claimed that an ecological culture has to be promoted and that such a culture is to be a dialogical one (Tyburski 2013, 332-333). Obviously, the term "dialogue" does not denote an actual exchange of ideas, but it refers to an attitude which one has to assume whenever he or she wants to have a conversation with another person. As Hans-Georg Gadamer claims, a dialogue requires that one treats their interlocutor as a partner, i.e. as equal albeit different, and worthy of respect. Despite knowing that the way one understands the other person is determined by their language and therefore an adequate understanding of someone's words is never possible, one should not cease in the efforts to grasp what their partner in the dialogue wants to convey. What is more, one should not abandon one's point of view as it will make any understanding virtually impossible (Gadamer 1976). In other words, as far as human – nature relationship is concerned, the idea of dialogue refers to treating nature as a partner by humans, i.e. as their other which has its needs, interests and demands that can be defined (even if not once and for all) and have to be taken into consideration (Gadamer 1992, 221-236; Grün 2005). Additionally, it implies that humans do not have to surrender their needs, interests and demands. Quite the contrary: these factors allow people to define what nature "tells them".

The idea of community of human and other-than human beings as well as the idea of a dialogue between them imply that nature is conceived as a sphere which should be approached in an ethical way. Contemporary environmental ethics is to a great extent defined by a discussion between proponents of anthropocentric theories and those who opt for biocentric ones (Piątek 1998). Biocentric theorists claim that nature has inherent value and therefore it should be respected and protected for what it is, regardless of any possible advantages people may gain from it. Conversely, advocates of the anthropocentric approach denynature any inherent value and claim that the value of nature stems from the fact that it is good for people. Such an approach is based on the assumption that only human beings are qualified to assing values to nature, as exclusive possessors of applicable knowledge about them, which makes people the measure of all things. This theory does not preclude, however, a respect for nature but it justifies it in another way – nature is worthy of respect not for what it is *per se* but in view of its usefulness to people. There is an intermediate solution, too, namely so-called weak anthropocentrism, which states that humans necessarily value nature from their standpoint but at the same time they may assign it an inherent value. In other words, we do not always treat nature as instrumentally valuable for sometimes we do value it for what it is.

Weak anthropocentrism as a theory corresponds to what Michael Pollan termed a "garden ethic". He describes it as follows (it deserves being quoted at length as there is no better description of weak anthropocentrism and a presentation of the garden as a new ecological paradigm):

> 1. An ethic based on the garden would give local answers. Unlike the wilderness area, it would propose different solutions in different places and times. (…) It's a weakness because a garden ethic will never speak as clearly or univocally as the wilderness ethic does. (…) The health of a place generally suffers whenever we impose on it practices that are better suited to another place.
> 2. The gardener starts out from here. By that I mean, he accepts contingency, his own and nature's. He doesn't spend a lot of time worrying about whether he has a god-given right to change nature. It's enough for him to know that, for some historical or biological reasons, humankind finds itself living in places (…) where it must substantially alter the environment in order to survive.
> 3. A garden ethic would be frankly anthropocentric. (…) We know nature only through the screen of our metaphors; to see her plain is probably impossible. (…) "Garden" may sound like a hopelessly anthropocentric concept, but it's probably one we can't get past.
> 4. That said, though, the gardener's conception of his self-interest is broad and enlightened. Anthropocentric as he may be, he recognizes that he is dependent for his health and survival on many other forms of life, so he is careful to take their interests into account in whatever he does. He is in fact a wilderness advocate of a certain kind. It is when he respects and nurtures the wilderness of his soil and his plants that his garden seems to

flourish most. Wildness, he has found, resides not only out there, but right here: in his soil, in his plants, even in himself. Overcultivation tends to repress this quality, which experience tells him is necessary to health in all three realms. But wildness is more a quality than a plance, and though humans can't manufacture it, they can nourish and husband it. (…) The gardener cultivates wildness, but he does so carefully and respectfully, in full recognition of its mystery.

5. The gardener tends not to be romantic about nature. What could be more natural then the storms and droughts and plagues that ruin his garden?

6. The gardener feels he has a legitimate quarrel with nature – with her weeds and storms and plagues, her rot and death. (…) Better to keep the quarrel going, the good gardener reasons, than to reach for outright victory, which is dangerous in the attempt and probably impossible anyway.

7. The gardener doesn't take it for granted that man's impact on nature will always be negative. (…) The gardener doesn't feel that by virtue of the fat that he changes nature he is somehow outside of it. He looks around and sees that human hopes and desires are by now part and parcel of the landscape. (…)

8. The gardener firmly believes it is possible to make distinctions between kinds and degrees of human intervention in nature. (…) Because of his experience, the gardener is not likely to conclude from the fat that some intervention in nature is unavoidable, therefore 'anything goes'. This is precisely where his skill and interest lie; in determining what does and what does not go in a particular place. (…)

9. The good gardener commonly borrows his methods, if not his goals, from nature itself. (…) By studying nature's way and means, the gardener can find answers to the questions (…). It does seem that we do best in nature when we imitate her – when we learn to think like running water, or a carrot, an aphid, a pine forest, or a compost pile. (…)

10. If nature is one necessary source of instruction for a garden ethic, culture is the other. Civilization may be part of our problem with respect to nature, but there will be no solution without it." (Pollan 1992, 190-192)

Environmental ethic usually echoes such classics as Henry David Thoreau, John Muir or Aldo Leopold, and hence it focuses on wild nature. As a consequence, the ethical ideal finds its embodiment in national parks, which are treated as opposite to farms where nature is assigned only an instrumental value and which epitomize anthropocentric approaches. Wild nature protected in national parks from human intervention is a point of reference for biocentric theories. Garden ethic refers instead to nature which is subject to direct human actions motivated by people's interests, yet it suggests that nature's wildness should be appreciated and conserved. Given that natural environment that surrounds us is nowadays inevitably "affected by humanity", it seems that garden ethic is a much desired candidate to

replace the wild nature-oriented environmental ethics; or at least quite eligible as its adjunct.

Garden ethic offers guidelines (but not rules) which in fact allow one to establish a culture-nature continuum and thus create a place where other-than-human beings are introduced into the human world and vice versa: humans are immerged in a sphere which they usually place outside social reality. What is more, the fact that garden ethic acknowledges that people have a right to impose themselves on nature and suggests that they should impose limits on themselves may be much more appealing to the general public than radical biocentric theories and thus much more effective. At the same time it is not all too anthropocentric, either.

5. Conclusion

If we agree that gardens are places designed to offer an aesthetic experience of nature regardless of their other functions, and that hence they are places where human activity not only aims at fulfilling people's needs and demands but also at making people respectfully aware of nature's presence and agency for better or worse (this is what I would call the "excess of form"), then we see why garden (and gardening as a "particular way" of cultivating nature) is a sound candidate for a new paradigm of environmental thought and practice.

Gardening is not an activity that leads to protection of nature which should be left untouched and thus be placed outside social reality. On the contrary, it is a practice which subjects nature to human needs (consumption) while ensuring its protection. Thus, gardening implies negotiating people's demands and nature's interests. It goes without saying that it is possible to garden in a thoroughly unecological fashion, yet apart from some extreme examples (which, by the way, seem to be contrary to common sense) it may be claimed that every garden – a kitchen yard as well as a royal French or English garden – embodies an ideal of human-nature symbiosis. Such a symbiotic relationship is far from being harmonious. Gardens are places of incessant and in most cases unresolvable tensions. What is more, the ideal of unity – as suggested by Assunto, for example – requires that people as beings who create gardens and hence are responsible for the relationship between themselves and nature are able to recognize what nature needs. This, however, is impossible for obvious reasons – we will never find out what nature is really like. Even if we are to approach nature "on its own terms", it is we who lay down these terms.[6] All this does not mean, however, that we should not try to find a balance between our anthropocentric perspective and the non-anthropocentric one. This is what all gardens are about.

6 The phrase used here originates with Y. Saito (Saito 2004).

Such an approach may be accused of being conservative, especially by the exponents of radically non-anthropocentric views.In the light of the latter, gardening is in fact a thoroughly anthropocentric practice. Yet it is precisely its anthropocentric character that makes gardening a good candidate for a new environmental paradigm. Non-anthropocentric theories are usually criticized for suggesting that one may relinquish his or her human perspective. As a result, non-anthropocentric demands are said to be futile and unrealizable. Gardening is immune to such criticisms as it is admittedly anthropocentric. It is a practice which is genuinely founded on the idea of yielding the human point of view, but at the same time it is accompanied by the awareness that it cannot be done. What is more, it is relies on the premise that people do not have to waiver their needs, demands or goals, while they still may respect nature construed as a partner.

Gardening does not consists in either subjecting nature or being subjected to it, but in creating a community with beings-other-than-human, a community which will not be destroyed by the inevitable tensions that lie at its core.

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