

REFLECTIONS ON A GARDEN

INITIATION

September 1998

In a garden
in the heart of the city
I dig up
22 square meters
of shiny lawn.
At each shovel
I'm impressed with how massive
the lumps are.
I can hardly turn them over.
I touch them and smell them.
These lumps will be the seedbed of my
garden.
At this stage the garden is still calm,
protected
by blind walls and blocks of flats,
the inhabitants of which are my spectators.

On this surface,
I will bring together
flowers and vegetables
in order to observe
the specific characteristics and development
of each.
One species will be influenced by the other.
How will they interact?
Which will dominate
in this situation:
the 'aesthetic' qualities of the flowers, or the
'functional' character of the vegetables?

PREPARATIONS

November 1998

Searching for flowers and vegetables
that grow during the same season and
investigating how
I will arrange them according to colour and height.

January 1999

The bed lies fallow now.
Sent some soil
for analysis

(type of soil: clay, previous use: lawn).
Waiting.

February 1999

Results:
the pH turns out to be high,
the nitrogen is normal,
phosphates and potash are low.

March 1999

Fertilising the soil
(correcting the mineral balance) and
working on it with the rotary cultivator.
Letting everything rest until spring comes.

May 1999

Planting the seeds

POSITIONING OF THE PLANTS

In the first row, from left to right, reside:
pink flowers, courgettes, and yellow flowers.
Behind these are purple flowers running alongside fennel.
Between the fennel and the celeriac I plant red flowers.
Next is a row of broccoli and pale blue flowers.
The left corner at the back is filled with
sunflowers, backing up the cabbages.
The enclosed area is divided in such a way that
a happening of flowers and vegetables emerges.
What matters is not one flower or one vegetable,
but the interaction between
the specific characteristics of flowers and vegetables.

REFLECTIONS

July 1999

Are vegetables esteemed more highly than flowers?

In each other's presence the vegetables attract
attention mainly through
their shape and the luxuriance of their leaves,
whereas the flowers attract the eye with
their colour.
The different shades of
pink, yellow, purple, blue, and red
of the flowers
start functioning as a frame.

They alter the appearance of the vegetables
by illuminating their structures and shapes
in the otherwise quite unattractive
monotonous green
of the average kitchen garden.
As such the flowers do not become
superfluous.
They manage to maintain their identity and
even strengthen it
by making use of their aesthetic qualities.
Their blooming embraces make
the vegetables
shine.
The presence of the flowers is well balanced
in hearts and petals.
Any symptoms of discomfort or exhaustion
remain
undetected.
Free and happy delight
are part and parcel of their nature.
Their white vegetable neighbours show no signs
of suffering
whatsoever.
On the contrary,
they light up
because they are seen and thus
believed.

Are flowers more boring than vegetables?

I follow
the slow and steady growth
of the vegetable shoots
closely.
I am very curious about the
final result:
the respective shape of each fully-grown plant.
This temporary
linear growth
strikes me as
extremely intense, rigid and cautious.
The leaves of the cabbages have
closed themselves
into firm, ever expanding balls.
The courgettes have spread to
50 centimetres.
They look luscious.
The fennel is firmly rooted and
flaunts
its fancy fresh green hairdo.
The tuber of the celeriac has also taken
root in the soil.
Its stems stick out intently.

The broccoli's serrated leaves
stand out.
In their crown
they carry
a plain, somewhat old-fashioned, flower.
Individual differences among the vegetables
are huge.
Besides their specific shape,
they also differ in
the power and structure of their growth.
They distinguish themselves
more from each other than
the flowers.
The latter
endlessly
imitate each other.
They are rather anonymous.
The flowers also rant and rave
more recklessly.
First of all, they go through a shorter cycle:
they bloom, wither, and fade, ...
again and again,
until they go to seed.
This high-speed succession
of different stages,
makes their growth
seem
ethereal.
Moreover,
through their subsequent appearance
and disappearance,
they are constantly and abundantly
present.
These stabilising factors reduce
the collection of flowers to
a continuous presence.
Once these stunt stagings came into
full effect
my commitment faded. Or rather,
I began to consider the flowers, with their
apparent immobility,
rather ordinary.

How artificial is this garden?

My garden begins to look luxuriant.
I tend it regularly.
The weeds are
very aggressive:
they leave neither flowers nor vegetables
alone.
With stubborn determination
they push

through everything
and from time to time
cling to the others.
Over and over
I have to rid my beloved spot of these
non-plants.
One weed is particularly fierce.
Hypocritically, it allows easy extermination, but
its roots nevertheless
keep residing
invulnerably and proudly
underneath the soil.
Furthermore, the quiet life
on this botanical patch of land
is being disturbed
by snails and caterpillars.
They feel
a delirious love for the beautiful cabbages
that they rudely turn
into their playthings.
Their elaborate snapping at the cabbages, however, is
scant comfort.
Their wanton appetite cannot be satisfied, and
has serious consequences.
The cabbages show permanent
white spots
like impact craters.
The havoc the vermin cause
forces me to intervene.
At first they were not able to cope with
the different alternative and deliberately
applied pesticides.
However, repeated applications bring
inurement.
They keep on teasing me with their natural
cruelty.
They can even fool me.
Shall I laugh heartily about it or shall I close my eyes?
I hope there are other and more
sovereign remedies.
The broccoli are being paid a visit by plant lice
that I have to stroke off
as to not hurt
these corny vegetable aunties.
The courgettes, the fennel and the celeriac don't seem
to be susceptible
to the passes
they're being made at
by vermin of some kind or other and
even the flowers cannot be bothered
by this riffraff.

How unreasonable is this garden?

One day I discover that a sunflower has snapped!

What has come over me?

I had not planned for this breakage.

It affects me. I am sad:

I am caught up

in statistical and clean images

that find no support

in real nature.

Why this flower?

Has this been caused by the weather conditions?

Somebody has retreated in my earthly garden!

I am trapped in a cage

of mental constructions

that does not touch base.

After a few weeks all sunflowers have snapped off.

They are completely dehydrated.

What could be the cause?

Saved!

It is nature.

When shall I intervene?

Am I to replace these flowers

in order to restore the whole to its original plan:

shall I measure

the loss?

On an unexpected

visit to the garden,

I look

at these scraggs.

Why can't I leave these plants, which look dead to me, alone?

Why can I not just stop bothering them and

let them be part of this organic happening

in their own way?

It possibly is a whim of the flowers

themselves:

they are fed up

with beaming cheerfulness and goodness,

and this time they lose themselves

in a secret fantasy

of disguising themselves

in a dark shape.

From now on, I consider them

the guardians of my garden.

Their gloomy appearance and their strategic

position

at the border of the bed,

make them perfect

for scaring away
potential intruders.

September 1999

How erotic is the creative urge in this garden?

Summer is coming to an end.
The next stage is due.
The flowers continue to bloom,
the vegetables have eventually grown up.
The fennel and broccoli have bolted.
Their fully-grown shapes are complemented
by their green leaves and flowers.
These new parts are coarse and little
refined. They embellish
their original identity.
Wrapped up in a two-piece,
partly flower and partly vegetable,
the plants try to approach
the flowers.
The wind is kindly guiding
their subtle ambiguous flower-like wriggings
in the direction of
the real flowers.
Their scents vibrate
in unison.
The wheedling moans contagiously.
As if that is not yet enough,
this time without any interference,
the stems of the fennel bend over and
the broccoli grows crooked.
They fully lean over to the flowers
in order to
complete
their urging ecstasy.
The flowers are cornered by them.
Slowly they become
one.
How romantic!
From this fusion sprouts another theme:
a flowerarchy.

How independent is the garden?

The garden invited me time and again
to take care of it.
Doing so was a spontaneous response for me.
Now that autumn has come, the garden forces me to
let it take its own course and to leave it
alone.
It becomes indifferent to any intervention.
No longer can I direct and stimulate

growth
by pulling out dried leaves in time or
by chasing away vermin.
All the flowers start fading and dry up
regardless.
The vegetables go through their own stages of
transformation.
The courgettes turn yellow.
The fennel start looking like shrubs,
the broccoli like trees.
In comparison to its counterparts
the celeriac is
a late-bloomer.
Only now
the leaves become like
a crown on the tuber.
Yet,
this plant gives no impression of being frail:
effortlessly it combines
slowness with substance.
For the vermin, the cabbages are
a feast.
They bite and feed
on the irresistible small balls,
turning them
into the most amazing sculptures.
Luckily, their stalwart structure
keeps them
firmly
upright.

Are the plants dissatisfied?

Everything falls apart.
The weeds manifest themselves
even more.
The green grass of the surrounding lawn
crawls
over the borders of the bed.
The flowers wither,
their colours slowly fade.
The vegetables are overripe.
By automatically responding to
continuous change,
the plants attempt to both
forget and
transcend themselves.
This endeavour ends in disaster:
they become exhausted and do not
recover.
The flowers have always had
the courage to
repeat themselves

en masse.

This creates a cycle consisting of
continuous elevations (full bloom)
and

depressions (withering and dying).

Thus the final downfall is put
into perspective.

With the vegetables, on the other hand, it is
more painful.

In their ambition to take on
a specific fully-grown shape,
they forget

how temporary it is.

Some sustain the illusion,
seeking a way out
by growing into flowers.

As such they try
to alleviate and postpone
the decline

of their former glorious achievements.

Their attempt does not seem to be
senseless
after all.

During this brief interval
they become even
more complete:

they are both vegetable and flower.

The flowers do not seem
to feel this need.

They simply remain
flowers.

January 2000

How solitary are plants?

The sunflowers persist
in their role as guards.

Will they wait until all life in the bed
has faded?

The soil has entirely absorbed
the red flowers.

Of the purple flowers only the dry stems
remain.

The stems of their pink and yellow
counterparts look
weak.

Only cautiously
will they surrender
to this sad piece of land.

The blue flowers have gone,
but

their green underbellies still grow lushy.

Even while dying,
the solidarity
between the flowers is
striking.
They symbiotically turn into
organic waste.
Except for the sunflowers that,
much like the courgettes,
look for seclusion:
as prominently present as both plants were,
as resolutely orphaned they
fade away.
The bald cabbages show the same urge,
but less strongly.
They bend over just a little
to approach
their neighbours.
The broccoli lean towards one another and then lie
down on the bed
where the red flowers
once were.
When the wind blows softly, the fennel
sways.
For the time being,
the slow, still brave celeriac
remain
solitary.

How limited is this patch of land?

The season dies.
The bed becomes more gloomy and bleak.
The grass from the surrounding lawn
steadily conquers
my demarcated patch of land.
Traces of the flowers
are hardly visible.
I remember the once
fully-grown plants.
The vegetables enter
into a more
prolonged process of decay.
Despite their now emptied and rotten shape,
the courgettes are still
prominent.
The broccoli have put up
their feet.
They are still recognisable.
The fennel, on the other hand,
works wonders.
I am amazed.
Despite being dehydrated
from head (flower) to foot (vegetable),

it produces
a new growth of shoots,
right next to
their worn-out brothers.
They look endlessly mortal.
Soon I will hand over my garden
to the beautiful and trim lawn.
It will become simple and plain
green again,
related to
the surrounding grass.
The patch will sink into oblivion.
Maybe,
in this way, it will regain
its inner peace and
I'll have the chance
to let go of this patch,
the outlines of which are
drowsingly
starting to enclose
my imagination.
Uninhibitedly
roaming
to another nourishing area.
I wonder.