Gardening as Artistic Practice

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Abstract: The activity of gardening can be conceived as a form of artistic practice, offering opportunities for ongoing creativity while following a brief; cooperating with nature and with other gardeners; curating and editing what is present; accepting, seeking out, and then acting on assessments; surrendering control by finishing a work of art; and then surrendering ownership of the product of one's creative efforts. Gardening is an especially good way to learn and reinforce these lessons as a garden presents a near perfect opportunity to practice one's artistic skills over and over again.

Keywords: Garden, gardening, art, creativity

In 1993, Mara Miller wrote a book focused on whether and how a garden can be a work of art.[1] This question was taken up as part of a book written by Stephanie Ross in 1998 on whether gardens can be bearers of meaning.[2] And it was again taken up, although in a small way, in a book written by David Cooper in 2006 on the character of garden and gardening appreciation.[3] While Ross and Cooper both shed valuable light on the status of The Garden (capitalized to indicate the kind) as an artform, it was Miller who offered a positive argument for the claim that some gardens are indeed works of art. While Miller and Cooper both say that garden philosophy is a field that should not be restricted to aesthetic inquiry, Ross makes the point that it is with aesthetics that garden philosophy should begin – a claim to which neither Miller nor Cooper would object. So long as we agree that thinking about gardens in the ways philosophers might entails thinking about them as aesthetic objects, there is no need to settle the question here on whether a garden can be a work of art. In other words, one can engage in artistic practices even when the object of that practice is not a work of art but rather simply possesses artistic aspects. There are aspects of the character of gardening that make its practice artistic in character. Each of these ways – I have six – form the section headings of the paper.

Similarly, there is likely no need, for the sake of this paper, to circumscribe what counts as a garden and what does not. While, with a colleague, I do this elsewhere,[4] we can take a garden here as any focus of typical garden practice, since it is the practice of gardening on which this paper is meant to focus. "Typical garden practice" includes designing and redesigning the garden, preparing the site and the site's components, planting and arranging, irrigating, composting and fertilizing, weeding, controlling pests, staking and bracing plants, propagating and grafting, pruning, replacing dead or dying plants and broken artifactual components, and other activities that are meant to secure the health and virtues of a garden as well as the larger ecology (such as visiting pollinators) in which the garden is sited.

Following a Brief

In the garden theory literature, the person or persons who plans, designs, and installs a garden is called a gardenist or gardenists.[5] The analogue with "artist" is obvious, and the analogue with "architect" is obvious when, in some contexts, we refer to gardenists as landscape architects. The latter has been preferred in some circles because it connotes a level of education, credentialling, and profes-

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sionalism,[6] but it may be simpler: it may be that we think of landscape architects as working on large projects that are typically gardens that frame significant buildings, are civic parks, or are placed on public land. The dividing lines are not terribly clear – the history of the reference really amounted to personal preference — nor do they really need to be in cases that are not focused on matters like licensure or professional association.[7]

If gardenists are thinking about installing a garden on land they own, they may do as they wish, within the bounds of agreements or laws that limit how a piece of land may be developed. For instance, many in the United States live in neighborhoods governed in some measure by Home Owners' Associations, and so there may be limitations on the sort of garden one can install at one's residence. But, in general, one can plant what one wishes and how one wishes on land that is one's own. This is typically the case, too, for allotment gardens, where one working a plot may decide to plant vegetables, herbs, flowers, or some combination.

Setting aside issues of guerilla gardening (that is, gardening on land one does not own or control) for the moment, in cases where gardenists are designing and installing a garden on land they do not own (including public land), gardenists must work within a set of parameters set by whomever controls the land. I say "controls" rather than owns, because in many cases, gardens are installed on public land, university land, corporately-held land, and so forth, and it will not be owners *per se* that set the parameters, but agents whose responsibility includes disposition of that land. We may think of the "controllers" of the land in the same way we think of those who commission works of art or of art patrons. While the designs will be those of the gardenists, they must satisfy the general parameters patrons require.

Negotiating the Brief

In meeting these parameters, gardenists must anticipate the true character of the patrons' wishes, designing and installing a garden that meets parameters the patrons – supposing they are not garden experts – would have requested had they been knowledgeable enough to do so. This will require that gardenists do not simply accept the brief and move on with the planning. Gardenists must develop the parameters with the patrons, and this occasionally includes saying no or suggesting compromises. A garden patron may wish to grow brightly colored roses under their mature oaks, but the gardenist who plants roses there will not only have not fulfilled the true brief, but that gardenist will have acted unprofessionally as the roses not only will not produce flowers – or not many and not showy ones – but the plant may get sick and die, thereby wasting the patron's resources and killing a living thing that might have lived in a different setting. The parallel with artists working on a commission is similar. A patron or client might ask for something unreasonable – "I would like to be depicted in a Cubist style but I want everyone to recognize that it's me" – and the artist may need to engage in negotiation not only to the result that a reasonable compromise is reached but to the result that the client gets something they will find of optimal value, something they might not have been able to imagine but the artist can.

Deciding on the Style

When gardenists first begin to think about their gardens, they must work within the bounds of the purpose or purposes the resulting garden will serve. Every garden has a central defining purpose or a small set of purposes, and it is important for those appreciating that garden to understand it/them to appreciate that garden appropriately or compare it to others appropriately. Backyard kitchen gardens are very different from botanical gardens; allotment gardens are very different from pleasure gardens (like Longwood in Pennsylvania or Gardens by the Bay in Singapore). The purposes of some gardens – like the residential garden surrounding one's American suburban home – are modest and narrow. The purposes of others – like New York's Central Park – are grand and multifaceted. But even Central Park has a central defining identity: Frederick Law Olmsted and his partner

Calvert Vaux needed to design a metropolitan civic garden that would function as a green oasis for citizens of and visitors to Manhattan. All Central Park's secondary purposes – and there are dozens – fit into the brief of that central purpose. It is with the decision about the purpose that the garden will serve that the decision about the style of the garden is begun. After the purpose is established, the gardenist and the patron may decide on the style of the garden. Throughout the history of gardens going back 4000 years, there are many theories about what a garden should be, and there are many styles that flow from these theories or, in the case where they do not explicitly follow a theory, their formal aspects are unified into a coherent whole, suggesting that there are principles that could be extracted from the garden's formal coherence that would be theory-like. For instance, a patron might want an Arts and Crafts "English cottage garden" style garden, following the nineteenth/early twentieth century British gardenist Gertrude Jekyll. Or they may want a very formal garden, in the "*jardin à la française*" style perfected in the seventeenth century by the principal gardenist of Versailles, André Le Nôtre, with formal flower beds "embroidered" with hedges. Or they may want a garden composed of native plants arranged into a naturalistic meadow, in the early twentieth century style of Danish American Jens Jensen.

Interpreting the Style

Designing a garden that follows a particular style will require that the gardenist interpret that style for the site. This will require the gardenist to account for the size of the land – supposing the garden is placed on land – and its topography, the climate, the soil composition, and what might be available from nurseries that are either close at hand or fit the available resources of the patron. Some garden styles can be reproduced in very small areas – like the Japanese-style *tsubo-niwa* – but others – like the eighteenth-century Capability Brown landscapes created for the English upper-classes – require dozens or even hundreds of acres. Beyond this, the gardenist must avoid a formulaic rendering of the garden style, avoiding designing a garden that is seen to be "derivative," "unoriginal," or even plagiaristic. But this is a sword, in garden design, that cuts both ways, as the gardenist, recognizing the investment of resources – time, talent, and treasure – that goes into the creation of a garden (not to mention the fact that the gardenist is working with living components), cannot indulge in large-scale experimentation that jeopardizes the success of the garden.

The gardenist, therefore, must understand the formal markers of the style being pursued, and they must be able to create phenomenal elements that represent those formal markers – yet in a way that is entirely appropriate to the site, the patron's wishes, and their own creativity as a designer. Upon understanding the patron's wishes and the purposes of the gardens they plan, gardenists must develop visions for their gardens, visions of the signature aspects of the various elements that constitute the garden. These elements include the plant palette, of course, but they also include artifactual elements like benches, fountains, and sculptures. Gardenists must ask themselves whether their gardens will be open and spacious or intimate and cozy. They must ask if their gardens will be mostly on a single visual plane or whether one will need to look high in the air as trees lead the eye skyward. They must ask if their gardens will accommodate wildlife, and what kind. And, most importantly of all, they must ask themselves how all the elements their visions include will cohere together to make a unified whole, where the elements do not compete but rather support one another. This is the case with all aesthetic and art creations, and a garden provides an especially rich canvas since its formal elements are many and the various ways available components can be put together to create these elements and create a coherent whole are nearly infinite.

Vision of an Imagined Future

The gardenist typically does not install a garden in its final state but rather must imagine what the mature form of the garden will be, perhaps many years into the future – especially if trees are an integral part of the design – and so a newly installed garden is likely to seem sparce as plants are spaced out so that as they grow, the garden will become better. It is the experienced artist who creates not just for today but for the potential of appreciation that will last well into the future, perhaps for centuries. Most gardens – in terms of their site-specificity – are meant to be permanent, even though they require regular tending to keep them healthy. As mentioned, part of the reason for such design is that the installation of a garden typically costs a huge amount of money, not to mention the many other resources that go into it. The design of a typical garden holds lessons for those who wish to create aesthetic and art objects they expect to endure, but it provides a unique challenge as the gardenist must envision not a finished product that they will be able to observe and assess but rather they must envision what the mature form of the garden they design today will be — and then what successive "mature forms" of the garden will be as it continues through time, changing in both small and large ways.

Cooperation

The Limited Plasticity of the Medium

Beyond the cooperation involved between the gardenist and the patron, gardens centrally require two other sorts of cooperation. First, both gardenists and gardeners – those who maintain gardens after they are initially designed and, while they may work on the installation, typically work with gardens after the initial installation — must cooperate with nature. As mentioned, gardenists who do not plan in accord with nature – with the land, with the climate, with the habits of plants, with natural processes – have gardens that are short-lived. Nature does not accede to good intentions, and no matter how much a gardenist may want roses to grow and flower in deep shade, this is not going to happen.

Some topiaries and some hedges – such as we see bordering the parterres at Versailles — need their shapes maintained every week or even every few days at certain times of the year. Grass grown in shade tends to require more fertilizer than grass grown in sun, and it also tends to require more water as the tree roots beneath the grass take their share of available irrigation. Grass grown in lawns must be mown, and in late spring and summer this can be a weekly chore, requiring time, labor, and the resources to operate lawnmowers. Planted beds where the plants are spread out from one another may require more weeding than densely planted beds – not to mention more mulch, which means that somewhere trees are being harvested for this mulch, significant quantities of which can be expensive and require time and labor to spread appropriately and thickly enough to effect weed control. Cold-sensitive plants may need to be replaced each year in colder climates, or plants may need to be brought into greenhouses (glasshouses, conservatories, orangeries) and then moved back in the late spring. Gardens that rely on annuals require a great deal of intensive planting each spring. High-maintenance gardens are not uncommon – especially in pleasure gardens — but they require more attention, more maintenance, and more resources to stay true to their designs. This entails that if they do not receive these things, they will fade – sometimes quickly — and not be the gardens they were designed to be.

Gardenists who design in greater accord with nature do not face such extreme challenges for the longevity of their gardens, and they do not impose so much obligation and work on the gardeners who must maintain the gardens. Yet, the most "nature-friendly" gardens may not appeal to visitors in the ways that gardens with more obvious "aesthetic-forward" designs may. A garden that does not exhibit its design may not be read as much of a garden at all, and that might defeat the purpose of creating a garden in the first place. An unattractive garden might not enjoy the sort of attention that leads to sustained investment of resources in that garden.[8]

Gardenists and gardeners alike, in designing and maintaining gardens, are partners with nature, and the media with which they work – typically inclusive of living plants, typically outdoors – are not as plastic as the media of paint-and-canvas or another medium that is not as dynamic as nature. While one may argue that an artist has more control in executing their vision in a more plastic, more malleable, medium, it can be as easily argued that there is greater challenge in mastering a less plastic medium. This level of challenge leads to the acquisition of a great range and depth of skill – not merely technical skill but artistic skill as well.

Cooperation with Other Gardenists and Gardeners

In addition to cooperating with nature, gardenists and gardeners must cooperate with each other and with visitors. Some of the greatest gardenists – Musô Soseki, André Le Nôtre, Capability Brown, William Kent, Gertrude Jekyll, Vita Sackville-West, Frederick Law Olmsted, Jens Jensen, Roberto Burle Marx, Piet Oudolf – stand alone, or, when they work with others, those others follow the visions of these gardenist masters. But this is not typically the case. Many landscape design or landscape architecture firms are composed of groups of gardenists who ofttimes collaborate with one another on a design. Cooperation with others is even more prevalent when it comes to gardeners. A sizeable garden – the size of any destination garden, including botanical gardens – will have a team of gardeners, and while a particular horticulturist typically will oversee a certain area or a certain collection, gardens are fluid across the entirety of the space they occupy, and so these horticulturists will need to work with each other to maintain the whole of the garden complex optimally. In addition, gardens typically outlive the time in which one gardener works them. One gardener will be followed by another, and then another, for the lifespan of a garden, and while overlap is not required, the gardener who does not consider how successive gardeners will find the gardens they leave behind will develop a reputation for being uncooperative.

Cooperation with Audiences

Gardeners must also cooperate with visitors. This can be challenging when a particular visitor does not grasp the rules of garden-visiting, perhaps asking a gardener if they can take cuttings or pick flowers. But, in general, gardeners function in some measure as educators when they are in destination gardens – especially in botanical gardens – and, again in general, gardeners welcome the thoughtful questions of visitors about the plants in a collection or questions that both demonstrate an interest in gardens and gardening and are sophisticated enough to show that the questioner is careful not to waste the time of the gardener. Questions such as “what should I grow in my garden?” are best left for those working at nurseries, but questions such as “how often does this plant in your collection flower?” are great.

Curation and Editing

Sculptors who work in wood or stone typically remove material in the creation of their works. Gardeners, of course, typically spend most of their time “editing” the plants growing in their gardens, removing weeds and errant seedlings, pruning errant limbs and diseased parts of plants, removing plants when they are at the end of their lifespans or are threatening the lives or health of nearby plants, deadheading spent flowers, and the like.

The Non-Blank Slate

There are in the history of horticulture some gardenists who famously work only with blank slates, preferring to craft their gardens even more deeply than “from the ground up.” Capability Brown has an extreme reputation in this regard. He was known to remove all traces of former gardens – typically earlier baroque gardens – and then reshape the land, adding significant water features (lakes that resembled rivers) and recreating a topography that would accommodate his intensive and highly recognizable designs. But many gardenists do not insist on starting with blank slates. They prefer to work instead with what already exists on a site. From an environmentally sustainable point of view, this approach is the better. If the land upon which a garden is to be installed already has a river or lake, that water feature is incorporated into the design, as are large boulders, mature trees and plants that are valuable to both the gardenist and the patron. Sometimes components like boulders will be moved from one place to another. One of the best examples of working with what is present is New York's High Line garden, the principal vision and design of which is credited to gardenist Piet Oudolf. The High Line is an elevated garden, of just less than a mile and half, built on a platform of abandoned railway tracks on New York's West Side. The walk's history as a railway is obvious; Oudolf and his associates made no attempt to hide this. Instead, they worked with it to create something that attracts several million visitors annually. While many artists work with blank slates – blank canvases, blank paper (or computer screens), empty stages — the artist who curates and edits what is already present may learn the patience, cooperation, and spirit of sustainability from thinking about how these activities are practiced by gardenists and gardeners.

Starting Small

An experienced gardener will make a series of small pruning cuts over time, not only as a way not to stress the plant being pruned, but also to acquire confidence that their "edits" are ones that will enhance both the health and the aesthetic dimensions of the plant. This practice takes great patience, as the successive states of the plant being pruned do not show the completed project but rather only one stage in it. This single stage may make the plant look lopsided, and this can be a source of frustration to a gardener whose work is steered by aesthetic concerns. The patience required is similar to the patience required of the artist who develops their work slowly, even as the pace includes stages where the object or event being molded seems either to have strayed from the artistic vision or seems to have acquired negative qualities that seem contrary to the vision for the finished work. Yet the experienced gardener and the experienced artist know that the path is not the destination, and a slow and steady pace may very likely result in a product of greater quality than if the gardener/artist rushes to instantiate their vision.

A Clear Vision of the Goal

Only the artist who has a clear idea of what the ideal of the finished project is can exercise this level of patience without anxiety. This is clearly the case in the garden, as gardenists typically install immature versions of the gardens they design and envision, relying on nature and the gardeners who follow them to shape what is initially installed into the mature form that lives as an idea in the mind of the designer. Yet, both the artist and the gardener must be able to decide, on occasion, whether a "happy accident" is worth retaining or not. This level of flexibility depends on that clear vision of the goal, and occasionally a happy accident will be something an artist or gardener sees as contributory to that vision – and occasionally flexibility means that the goal and the vision leading to it change and adapt. Yet, without a clear vision of the goal, neither the artist nor the gardener can properly assess whether a happy accident is indeed worth retaining or indeed worth adjusting the vision for the project. Without a clear vision, there is no principled path forward.

Acting on Assessments

No garden is perfect, at least not for very long. Occasionally gardeners who have just finished weeding, pruning, and installing new plants and new mulch, may survey their gardens and take pride in the garden being perfect. Yet, a week later, the hedges have lost their crisp edges, the lawns need to be mown, and some particularly virulent weeds may have popped up from beneath the mulch. So, the gardener goes back to work, and perhaps after a full day's effort will survey the garden to see that it is once again perfect. But another week goes by, and – in the growing seasons – the cycle starts up all over again.

Gardeners have conceptions of what their perfect gardens look (sound, smell, feel) like. They must have these visions, or they would not be able to set goals for their efforts. They must be able to see what is wrong, and they must know how to fix those things – to whatever the limits of their resources, their abilities, and nature will allow. And these visions must evolve. A gardener cannot have taken a photograph of their perfect garden and each spring (in the northern hemisphere) work to recreate the garden in that image. Gardens do not work that way. Instead, the gardener must create a new imagined vision of what the perfect state would be of the garden before them, and they must do this not only every year but typically every season – or at least in all those seasons when gardening is possible. The perfect state of a spring garden is likely to be different from the perfect state of the summer garden.

Guidance

The experienced gardener has the security and boldness to seek out the advice and critique of fellow gardeners, who may offer suggestions for what to add, what to delete, what to move, what to reshape, and so forth. Hearing the critiques of others may be tough for gardeners who baby their gardens, but outside assessments can be very useful as gardening is such a constant endeavor that it is easy to develop a sort of tunnel vision on what one thinks needs to be done. A fresh set of eyes may mean new suggestions for plants gardeners may not have thought about on their own, and these new additions might enliven the garden and renew the gardener's enthusiasm for investing time, attention, effort, and enduring the pains – sore muscles, bug bites, sunburn — that inevitably come from gardening.

An artist must develop, first, the courage to seek out critique of their work; second, the thickness of skin to truly hear that critique, a skill that takes time and practice as the product of one's creative efforts is usually an object into which one has a good deal of emotional investment; and, third, the strength to make changes based on those aspects of the critique that the artist has decided – rationally and dispassionately – will result in a better product. These are not easy things. The artist can benefit from being a student of the garden, as the ongoing character of bringing a garden to an admirable state quickly erodes and must be re-envisioned and re-created again and again. They must be able to self-critique, to critique the state of their garden, and to be open to hearing the suggestions of others.

Experimentation

Typically, a painter working in oil has more flexibility than a painter working in acrylics, and so the oil painter may be more willing to take some risks, to try out some things, more than the acrylic painter might. Being willing to take risks can lead to artistic insights and to better finished products. A musical composer or a novelist has the option of using a pencil rather than a pen – of course, today, we all use computers, and the backspace and delete keys are readily available. In a garden, experimentation is not merely a sometime-decision, it is rather the normal state of what tending a garden amounts to. Gardeners are forced to experiment – with methods, with actions, with new technologies, with new plants, new fertilizers, new pesticides. And this makes them open to greater experimentation – perhaps with hybrids and with new garden styles. Every experiment must then be assessed, and decisions must be made about whether to continue with an experiment, alter it, or scrap it. The frequency of experimentation in a garden leads to a frequency of assessment, and this development of a culture of iterative critique leads to better gardens – and to better works of art for the artist who practices something similar.

Surrendering Control

The oldest extant garden in the world is likely the ancient Mahamevnâwa Gardens in Anuradhapura, Sri Lanka, which were founded sometime before 307 BCE. The gardens contain a tree that is widely accepted to be from a cutting of the original Bodhi tree (*Ficus religiosa*) under which the Buddha attained enlightenment. Over the course of the last two millennia, the Mahamevnâwa Gardens have been under the care of many different gardeners. Each one, in turn, has had at some point to say goodbye to the Gardens and leave their care in the hands of successive gardeners. A garden complex that is 2300 years old has had many who have tended it, and given that it continues to this day, the pattern of success as one gardener hands off the work to the next is not only astounding but suggests that entrusting future generations of gardeners is something that can be done – at least in this context – with a good deal of confidence.

It is possible for a garden to be in the hands of a single gardenist-turned-gardener for its full lifespan. This is the sort of thing that happens at London's Chelsea Flower Show each May. Given that during the week of an entry's existence it is subject to all the sorts of gardening practices any longer-lived garden typically is, and given that the plots are what one might find in an allotment or community garden, it seems uncontroversial to refer to these sorts of objects as gardens, despite their temporary character. But the gardens at the Chelsea Flower Show are exceptional because they are so temporary. The Mahamevnawa Gardens are equally – well, actually much more – exceptional. The typical lifespan of a garden lies somewhere in between, and this implies that there will be hand-offs of responsibility gardener-to-gardener during the lifespan of a garden. There likely will be such hand-offs among different parties who own or control the gardens; there may be changes to the defining purposes of gardens; and there may be successive gardens occupying the same plot of land.

A gardener who works a garden may work that garden for a period of time that dwarfs the amount put into the creation of a different sort of object, and so with the added investment of time and attention can come greater attachment. This level of attachment can be even deeper when the objects of that attachment are living things, plants the gardener may have nurtured for years. Yet, as we saw earlier, most gardens live beyond single gardeners, and so the gardener will have to face the day when the garden is no longer theirs, and its care must be entrusted to another.

Ongoing Creativity

Works of art from canonical or traditional artforms usually reach a point where they are complete and not subject to further modification. This is typical of paintings and sculptures. It has become slightly less typical with film, as we have seen George Lucas and Steven Spielberg introduce changes to some of their iconic films as either new technologies have allowed them to create sequences that more closely match their original visions – not possible with the technology available at the time of original creation – or as sensibilities have changed concerning what is appropriate and what is not. An example of the latter occurs in Spielberg's *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial,* where the instruments held by agents looking for a set of children are changed from guns to walkie-talkies. Dance admits of more change than most artforms, and improvisational music and performance does not have such limits. But, in general, traditional works of art — those objects where temporality is not a relevant aesthetic feature – as we find in paintings and sculptures – or where the work is temporally bound – as we find in film, literature, and many performances – reach a point where they are complete, and modification is no longer an option.

Yet this injunction against modification, once the artist pronounces that a work is finished, makes no sense in the garden. Every gardener is a co-gardenist, as every garden, during its lifespan, must be "revisioned" and redesigned in response to the changes that garden has experienced as it matures. As gardens mature, the aim may only be to keep the guiding vision and defining purposes of the garden intact and to keep the original design "more or less" intact as that design will speak to the coherence of its various elements. But in most cases gardeners must take on the role of co-gardenist, redesigning aspects as shade is introduced by growing plants, as plants crowd one another, and as the effects of climate change alter what can and cannot be grown in a particular garden.

But we can think about ongoing creativity in a garden in more "local" terms. Every time gardeners engage in gardening practices, they engage in creative activity. Even if their actions are responses to matters like disease, the actions they take have aesthetic dimensions. If, for instance, a branch is diseased and must be removed, few gardeners will simply chop off the branch and be done. Most will endeavor to reshape the plant so that the loss of the branch does not make the plant seem lopsided or unbalanced. Even when deadheading spent-flowers will not contribute to the production of new ones, gardeners may still deadhead plants simply because they look better that way. A gardener who decides that a morning will be devoted to weeding and is disciplined enough to stick to the weeding is rare; it is more common to see a range of items that need attention as one weeds. The "seeing" is an aesthetic activity, of course, and then doing something about those items is another.

Gardening provides a context through the ongoing creativity that is instantiated in common gardening practices for the practices described above to be reinforced again and again. The stakes here are *high* in the sense that lives – those of the plants and the various animals that might inhabit a garden – are at risk, in the sense that a garden not properly attended can fade quickly, in the sense that the resources required by gardens are sometimes intense, and in the sense that the garden may not be one's own and so there is an obligation to another person or persons to get the job done right. At the same time, the stakes here are *low* in the sense that a mistake does not mean a piece of Carrara marble has been wasted or anything of that sort, in the sense that plants grow back and so less-than-perfect pruning is not a forever-mistake, in the sense that gardens are typically so complex that an accidental "manslaughter" of a plant – say through over fertilizing or over watering – is not the end of the world, and in the sense that typically one is part of a team of gardeners, all of whom are cooperating together on a common goal, even though that goal must be reset every week or month or so. But we might say it another way: *because* aesthetic goals must be reset periodically, a garden presents a near perfect opportunity to practice one's artistic and aesthetic skills over and over, normally until one hands the gardening baton to the next gardener.

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Notes

[1] Mara Miller, *The Garden as an Art* (New York, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993).

[2] Stephanie Ross, *What Gardens Mean* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

[3] David Cooper, *A Philosophy of Gardens* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2006).

[4] David Fenner and Ethan Fenner, *The Art and Philosophy of the Garden* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2024), chapters one and two.

[5] David Cooper, "In Praise of Gardens," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 43:2 (2003), p. 102.

[6] The term "landscape architect" was first introduced in 1862 by Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux, the designers of, among many other civic gardens, New York City's Central Park. See also Roger Paden, "The Ethical Function of Landscape Architecture," *Environmental Philosophy* 15:2 (2018), p. 146.

[7] Such as is the focus of the American Society of Landscape Architects.

[8] Yuriko Saito, "Ecological Design: Promises and Challenges," *Environmental Ethics* 24:3 (2002), pp. 243-261.