

*I set out on this ground, which I suppose to be self-evident, 'that the earth belongs in usufruct to the living': that the dead have neither powers nor rights over it.*

- Thomas Jefferson

Everyone knows that gardeners are terrorists and colonists. The colonisation consists in the enclosure of land, in removing the possibility of use for the common good, and then replacing the very notion of common good with an aesthetic experience: this, the gardener says, is a good we can all enjoy, the beauty of a well-laid border, the cultivation of an exotic plant, the creation of a hybrid tea rose, the engineering of sweeter fruit, the insistence on an ancient varietal. But do not disturb this order, this delicate balance, for anything as vulgar as living, sheltering, shitting or pissing: find another place to sleep, hold it in, do not trespass, and when invited do not overstay your welcome.

The Emperor Babar loved gardens. Some of the most vivid passages of the *Babarnama* describe the trees, plants and fruit he encounters in his itinerant, marauding career. The man who makes a tower of the skulls of his infidel enemies, is also alive to how different woods burn, to their distinct smells and smoke and sound. He compares the grapes of one place he has murderously invaded with those of another. He surveys, from his carpet in his military encampment, patches of land that might be suitable for planting certain trees, at the same time as he takes note of possible points of attack and defence: the terrain of destruction and the tender, tended earth mixing with each other in the slice of vision from the opening of a war tent.

The garden came before the plantation. If we still live, as Harney and Moten insist, in the European plantocracy that yoked millions of black bodies to a foreign land – then perhaps we still live in an age of the garden; except the garden, like the plantation, is now elsewhere (and perhaps everywhere). As an ordering of desire which is also the erasure of lines of desire, of secret paths, it imposes the city and its boulevards on us, as true forms of nature. Not nature as wilderness, to be sure, not even as an autonomous and self-tending ecology, but as a transcendental or divine order knowable to man.

Man as *homo hortulanus*: God as the divine gardener. The gardener as curator of the earth. In the New Testament, when Christ returns, risen after crucifixion, Mary Magdalene first encounters him in a garden and mistakes him for a gardener. What is taking place in this act and scene of misrecognition? Is it in fact a deeper insight, a momentary blurring of time and space that allows her to see – and us through her – that we are responsible for the earth as its guardians, that our flourishing is its flourishing, that we who are made in God's image must tend to God's land given to us in trust. Untended, the earth is savage and recalcitrant, and its

inhabitants are infidels who must make way for those with the art and technology of reproducing Eden.

Everyone knows artists are colonisers and terrorists. Art now moves in advance of the invasion, where it once accompanied it. It is not a question of this 'Western' art replacing another from elsewhere, it is a question of the word art itself, the coming together of the man of art and the man of taste in murderous collusion. Balzac's fictional artist Frenhofer works on his painting of the most desired of models for years. When his friends finally see the canvas it is a swirl of lines and colours with just the contours of a foot discernible to show for all this time spent straining to look and reproduce the body in front of him. Cezanne and Picasso were greatly impressed by this tragic story, this allegory of truth: after all, isn't their art a question of a struggle with recalcitrant, obstinate, infidel matter, to form it into a deeper reality even at the cost of its vanishing?

Gardens, and modern art, have always been erasures and wars, and their real joys and pleasures are delicate and sensory and spiritual and bloodthirsty all at the same time. They are erasing, and at war, with an outside they themselves produce as a wilderness. This outside, in turn –wilderness, nature, the animal, the more-than-human, unruly matter – does not hesitate to erase us and invade our encampments. Everyone knows that nature is a terrorist.