Revisiting the Enclosed Gardens of the Low Countries (Fifteenth Century Onwards). Gender, Textile, and the Intimate Space as Horticulture

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Revisiting the Enclosed Gardens of the Low Countries (Fifteenth Century Onwards). Gender, Textile, and the Intimate Space as Horticulture
Abstract

The early sixteenth-century Enclosed Gardens or Horti Conclusi of the Augustinian Hospital Sisters of Mechelen in Belgium, form an exceptional world heritage collection from the late medieval period. Most Enclosed Gardens have been lost to the ravages of time, with this loss exacerbated by lack of both understanding and interest. No fewer than seven Enclosed Gardens, however, were preserved until the late twentieth century in their original context: the small community of Augustinian nuns in Mechelen. Like sleeping beauties, they remained secluded in the sisters’ rooms as aids to devotion. Their centuries-long slumber has recently given way to a new phase of lively debate and active scholarship, as these popular retables are now considered unique testimonies of female spirituality in the sixteenth century. Their remarkable pictorial vernacular provides new insights into life, thought and devotion in female convent communities. They testify to a cultural identity connected with strong mystical traditions; they are a gateway to a lost world, an essential part of the rich material and immaterial culture of the Southern Netherlands in the early sixteenth century.

Keywords: enclosed gardens; silk flowers; gender; remnant; horticulture; relics; sensorium; paperolles; lozenge motif; passement makers; temple curtain; Eros; nest

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She has directed several international research programs with many PhD students, such as: Mary Magdalene and the Touching of Jesus. An Intra- en Interdisciplinary Investigation of the Interpretation of John 20:17 sponsored by the Fund for Scientific Research Flanders (FWO 2004-2008), The Woman with the Hemorrhage Matthew 9: 20–22; Mark 5: 24–34; Luke 8: 42b–48. An Iconological Study of the Interpretation of the Haemorrhoissa in Medieval Art funded by the Catholic University Leuven [2008–2012], and Caput Iohannis in Disco. Object-Medium-Function sponsored by the Fund for Scientific Research Flanders [FWO], also funded by the Catholic University Leuven (2012–2016).


She founded as editor-in-chief two series: Studies in Iconology (http://www.peeters-leuven.be/boekoverz.asp?nr=9995) and Art&Religion (http://www.peeters-leuven.be/boekoverz.asp?nr=10015). In 2016, Barbara Baert was awarded the prestigious Francqui Prize for her bold approach to and pioneering work in medieval visual culture and the worship of relics. Barbara.baert@arts.kuleuven.be

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Revisiting the Enclosed Gardens of the Low Countries (Fifteenth Century Onwards). Gender, Textile, and the Intimate Space as Horticulture

Last night
I begged the wise One to tell me the secret of the world.
Gently, gently he whispered,
“Be quiet, the secret cannot be spoken, it is wrapped in silence.”
Mewlana Jalaluddin Rumi (1207–1273)

The early sixteenth-century Enclosed Gardens or Horti Conclusi of the Low Countries form an exceptional world heritage collection from the late medieval period. Most Enclosed Gardens have been lost to the ravages of time, with this loss exacerbated by lack of both understanding and interest. To reflect on their material life and to gain knowledge about their sources and techniques, an interdisciplinary research and conservation project was established in 2014 in my department (see Baert, Iterbeke and Watteeuw 2016, in review).

Eight specialized conservator-restorers were appointed to treat the complex objects (2014–2018) in the cellars of the civic museum. Historic interventions reveal the nuns’ on-going care for the objects: replacing and overpainting missing statues (eighteenth century?), adding protective glass in lead (early nineteenth century?), rewrapping the brocade silk plant stems (papierollen) with linen (early twentieth century), redecorating the damaged backing paper (late nineteenth or early twentieth century), and fixing fallen artifacts with glue, nails, and staples (mid-twentieth century; see Vandermeersch, Watteeuw, et al., 2015, forthcoming). Experience gained during the conservation of the Bentlager Reliquiengärten and the Enclosed Garden in the Nicolai Kirche in Kalkar were of great inspiration for the conservation team in Mechelen (see Von Ulmann 1999, 114–136; Brunnert, et al., 1999, 137–173; Karrenbrock and Peez 2014, 118–146; Hammer and Hauck 2014, 147–172). Just how many Enclosed Gardens were created in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries is unknown, as most were destroyed as the result of numerous religious and political conflicts from the sixteenth to the late eighteenth century.

However, the seven surviving Enclosed Gardens of the Augustinian Hospital Sisters of Mechelen (Malines), which escaped destruction thanks to the close involvement and protection of the community, now in
the Civic Museum, testify to the spiritual and material culture of a living tradition of the so-called Zwartzusters or Gasthuiszusters (Figure 1). Until the late twentieth century they were kept in the living space of the sisters as facets of their spiritual life. For the nuns, the daily care for the “artificial gardens” was a religious labor and responsibility in spiritual horticulture. (For some nuanced points of view within the methodologically rigorous division between so-called profane and sacred spaces, see Webb 2008, 27–48). One garden is documented as once belonging to the spindle room of the nuns (Azevedo 1747, 296).

The flowers and embroidered wrappings for objects such as stones, medallions, and relics in the Enclosed Gardens were created by the religious with subtle refinement and an astonishing range of effects. With silk and precious silver threads, nuns twisted knots and patterns over armatures of fine parchment, incorporating glass pearls, semi-precious stones and sequins (Figure 2). Artificial flowers and fruit, especially branches of wild roses, white lilies, and pink grapes, surround the statuettes known as Poupées de Malines (“Dolls of Mechelen”) (Figure 3).

At the back of the wooden box containing each Garden, dense lozenge patterns are created by webbed threads stitched over the rolls of silk damask that cover relics and parchment; so-called paper quilling, paperolles (French) or paperollen (Dutch) (Figure 4).

The Enclosed Gardens were not solely cherished and looked at by religious women. They were commissioned by lay people as well. This can be deduced from several testaments. A will of a certain Catherine Le Quien, drawn up in 1490, for example, states: Item, audit Colard Leurion je donne ung petit gardinet où est la Nativité de Nostre Seigneur, enclose de gourdines de soye verde, et le custode de bos. (“Item, to Colard Leurion, I bequeath a small garden with the Nativity of Christ, enclosed in curtains of green silk, and the wooden case”). Even men seem to have been in possession of these so-called “jardinets” as can be illustrated by the will of Phillip d’Escamaing of 1455 in which the following is stated: Item, je donne à demiselle d’Escamaing, femme à Robert, ung gardinet ordonné de fleurs de soye, auquel est la pourtraiture de Nostre Seigneur. (“Item, I bequeath to damsel d’Escamaing, Robert’s wife, a garden adorned with silken flowers, in which is found a representation of Christ”).

Figure 1
Enclosed Garden with Calvary and Hunt on the Unicorn, Mechelen, 1510–1520. Mechelen, Stedelijke Musea Mechelen. © KIK-IRPA, Brussels (Belgium).
Only recently have Enclosed Gardens, as a genre and a medium, come to be acknowledged and recognized as a worthwhile field of study. As they are such typically hybrid objects, they long seemed to defy the accepted terminology and conventions in research into medieval material devotional culture (Bynum 2011; also of interest is Kaspersen 2004). Then, in the 1990s, drawing from gender studies and the “anthropological turn,” Jeffrey Hamburger and Paul Vandenbroeck pioneered the recontextualization of the genre (Vandenbroeck 1994; Hamburger 1997, 2004, 113–145; Hamburger and Suckale 2005, 21–39. See also Schmitt 2004). Today, Enclosed Gardens are approached as ambivalent artifacts whose purpose lies somewhere in between retable and domestic furniture (Webb 2008, 27–48). Moreover, as they contain relics and a variety of “lesser” remnants, such as stones, bones, and bags of sand, they may also be seen as shrines. Perhaps Enclosed Gardens are best conceptualized as cabinets of curiosities, whose content conveys the character and spirituality of the religious women who assembled them. On the ambiguous typology of Enclosed Gardens within the phenomenon of the relic, the curiosity, the fetish and, by extension, research into what is a “remnant” and what is an “object.” Fragen drängen sich auf: Galten die Objekte als sakral oder eher als profan? Durfte das kuriose oder fremde Objekt ausgefallen bleiben, oder wurden darauf biblische oder dogmatische Bedeutungen projiziert? (“Questions arise: Were the objects considered as sacral or rather as profane? Was it possible that a curios or strange object remained unusual? Or was biblical or dogmatic meaning projected onto it”; Laube 2011, 31); Delvoyes zitatreiche Reliquienfabrik ... der Kunstwissenschaft zu bedenken gibt, ob sie nicht ebenfalls an der Veredlung von Resten zu
Fetischen und Reliquien beteiligt ist. (“Delvoye’s factory of relics including its numerous quotations ... makes science of art ponder if the discipline itself is also involved in the ennoblement of left-overs to fetishes and relics”; Weddigen 2008, 6); “As an object meant to embrace another object, the etui sits in an undefined interstice between received categories. It is not comfortably a work of art. Nor, when ornamented and carefully crafted, can it be placed in the vast category of functional objects known as ‘material culture’” (Stielau 2011, 5).

In short, late medieval convents in the Low Countries saw the emergence of a unique form of mixed-media art, involving recycled and readymade items that, in a very specific way, articulated the feminine devotional identity and maintained a layered relationship with sacral topography. By wrapping the stone and bone fragments in fine textiles, the nuns lifted these objects out of their inert mundanity so that they came to represent, instead, vigorous life itself. In the present article, I approach the topic of Enclosed Gardens from a broad perspective that combines a variety of methodologies with a view to attaining a renewed understanding of these exceptional pieces of cultural heritage. I deal with the gardens consecutively as a symbolization of Paradise and the mystical union, as a sanctuary for interiorization, as a sublimation of the sensorium (particularly smell), as a web of handwork, as an example of tectonics that touch upon the longue durée of the lozenge, and finally as a pars pro toto for the sublimated eros and the phantasma of the nest.

**Flowerpower**

The Dutch word hof also means “garden” and hence is associated with the archetypal paradise (Dutch paradijs), which in turn has semantic roots in the Persian language and culture. Enclosed Gardens also refer to the Song of Songs (Song of Solomon) in which a man and a woman express their desire for one another in the Garden of Love (Beumer 1954, 411–439; Reinitzer 1982; Asiedu 2001, 299–317). The groom invites the bride and says: “I have come into my garden, my sister, my bride/ I have gathered my myrrh with my spice/ I have eaten my honeycomb and my honey/ I have drunk my wine and my milk.” (Song of Sol. 5:1, New International Version) The Song of Songs was interpreted from the time of the earliest church fathers as an allegory of mystical love (Matter 1990; Astell 1995). Scholars identified the marriage between the bride and the groom with the union between Christ and his bride Ecclesia.

As a spiritual bride of Christ, a nun could relate to the implications of such exegetic interpretations.
of the Song of Songs and identify herself within this allegory of mystical love. Artistically, too, the Song of Songs became her principal iconographic source, including in relation to Enclosed Gardens, where feminine spirituality is veiled and sublimated into an intimate and highly personalized topos of love, with the flowers serving as a mysteriously concealed catalyst. Hamburger (1990) is a monographic study on a manuscript produced for nuns that contains an interesting corpus of miniatures that are suggestive of a typological relationship between the Song of Songs (and the kiss) and the Passion of Christ. The key to this unconventional iconography can be found on the accompanying text on fol. 17v. Here, verse 4:9 of the Song of Songs, “You have stolen my heart, my sister, my bride” is combined with a paraphrase on Apoc. 3:20: “I stand at the door and knock.”

Christ's side wound is that door, the cor salvatoris: the heart as the locus of love and mystical satisfaction. The imagery is directed specifically at religious women, as in Bonaventure’s (1221–1274) spiritual manual for sisters, De perfectione Vitae ad sorores: “but enter with your whole being through the door of His side into Jesus' heart itself. There, transformed into Christ by your burning love for the Crucified … seek nothing, desire nothing, wish for no consolation, other than to be able to die with Christ on the cross” (Hamburger 1990, 72).

Who made the flowers and what do we know about collaborations between men and religious women? Was there feminine exclusivity for this production or not? Many questions are still unsolved by lack of primary literary sources.

In his Die Kunstblume von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart, Brüno Schier (1957, 1–15) states that the art of making silk flowers can be attributed to both nuns and craftsmen. Furthermore, he argues that the production of silk flowers dates back to the Middle Ages. In this period, according to Schier, silk flowers were the result of Klosterarbeit mainly in Italy and were used to decorate altarpieces and statues of female convents. In a later stage these artificial flowers became a product for export. Similar arguments were also reached by Thione Rath, Horst Apphun and Manfred Schober who came to the same conclusions. These authors based their assumptions on the results of each other’s studies, which prevented them from shedding new light on the origins and devotional functions of the silk flowers (Apphun 1968/1969, 36; Rath 1981, 7–8; Schober 1994).

The consideration of two production circumstances of this sort of needlework lead to possible answers regarding the making of silk flowers; the male craft of the passementmakers (drapers), and the virtuous labor of devoted women such as the beguines of Mechelen. Considering the technical difficulty related to the making of these flowers, there were likely few people within Mechelen who had the technical knowledge necessary for their production.

The craft of the passementmakers dates back to the fourteenth or fifteenth century and was not represented by a guild. It is usually grouped with other crafts such as ribbon making or needlework, but the categorization differs in every city. The passementmakers made all kinds of textile works, such as embroidery and ribbons. They may even have made silk flowers as seen in the Enclosed Gardens. Considering the fact that the sculptures and painted panels were both made by male workshops, the flowers may come from a male production as well (Figure 5). (On statues, see: Kruip 2006; Lothar and Koldeweij 2006, 1–29). The question of female involvement within the creation of these Enclosed Gardens then arises.

Although many of the objects included within the Enclosed Gardens were made by men, the creation of an Enclosed Garden as a whole likely involved religious women. An account of Margret of Austria, published by Alexandre Pinchart, tells us about the involvement of the well-known Gerard Horenbout, one of her court illuminators, in the making of a jardin Clos. The document follows: Item, pour les vacquacions qu’il a mis autour de la façon du jardinet que madicte dame a fait faire audict Gand de fleurs de soye et aultres menutez, en quoy avec les religieuses de Guallilée il a vaequé xx jours entiers, qui, au pris de viij sous ung chascun jour. (“Item, for the works which he has conducted with regard to the production of a garden which my Lady have had made of silk flowers and other delicate (tissues), on which he has spent—together with the nuns of Guallilée—twenty full days, which [are] at a price of seven sous a day”; Pinchart 1860–1881, 17. See also Lenaerts 1984; Eichberger 2002, 395–399). For this assignment, Gerard Horenbout, who lived
in Ghent at the time, had to stay with the sisters’ priory of Gallilee of Ghent. While this account does not prove that the sisters were actively concerned with the production of the Enclosed Garden, it does demonstrate a connection between the production of Enclosed Gardens and female religious orders, as if they were the ones giving spiritual meaning to the objects of devotion.

A second circumstance in which the silk flowers could have grown is behind the walls of the beguinage of Mechelen. These religious women were actively concerned with the production and sales of textiles. Gerardus Domenicus Azevedo mentions in his chronicle an imposition of 1520–1525 which states the following: ... **Uyt de selve impositie blyckt oock, dat de Religieusen der Vrouwe Cloosters van Betanien, Thabor, Blyenberge, Leliendael ende Muysene, Lyne laeckens oft lynwaerten verkochten oft pennewerden, de welcke sy oock waerschynelijck selfs maeckten, ende de Overdracht van het gene sy verkochten, deden aan hunnen Rent-meester ofte Voorganger van’t Clooster, elck in’t sijne : als oock de Begyynen, de welcke alsdan meest alle Lyne-laeccken oster Lynwaerten maeckten, moesten van alles dat sy daer van verkochten overleren aen eenige van hunne Groote-meesteressen ....** ("The same imposition also shows that the nuns of the monasteries of Betanien, Thabor, Blyenberge, Leliendael and Muysenen sold linen cloths, linen merchandise or cheap products which they most likely made themselves, and gave the earnings of what they sold gave to their administrator or the head of the monastery, every nun in her monastery: [they did it] as the Beguines who most of the time made all linen cloths or linen merchandise and who had to give everything that they sold to a small group of great mistresses"); Azevedo 1747, 96–97). On beguines and silk workers, see Miller (2014, 173–174). However, the beguines of Mechelen also worked with silk, as proven by a painting of the activities of the beguines from the seventeenth century (Figure 6). This painting is part of the same collection as the Enclosed Gardens although it originally belonged to the beguinage of Mechelen (Philippen 1943, 52). The panel shows 46 compositions in which the lives and activities of the beguines are portrayed. Several scenes depict two sisters working with flowers, silk and embroidery. Inscriptions accompanying these scenes first explain the labor illustrated and then connect this labor with its spiritual reward. For example: **Suster sjydy besich roosenhoeden te maeken, aerbeyt om totten maechden croon te geraeken** ("Sister are you busy, making rosaries, work unto the virgins holy crown to reach"). Could
they be working on the silk flower crowns as worn by the beguines during ceremonies or as those seen on the skulls of Herkenrode too (Figure 7)?

The connection between physical work and spiritual labor can also be found as a topos within sixteenth-century devotional literature for all nuns’ congregations. It was believed that handwork counteracted idle gossip and other sins. This labor thus protected the devout women from sin and helped them to cultivate their virtues and spiritual insights. The creation of silk flowers for the Enclosed Gardens can be understood as an active interpretation of the imagery in devotional literature, such as Thoofkijn van devotien (Garden of devotion) or Den gheestelijcken boomgaard (spiritual orchard). These books describe the path of spiritual insights with the state of Unio Mystica as its final destination (Figure 8; Anonymous n.d.; D’Ailly 1487. On these books see also Baert 2001, 254; 2016, 15–16. On the imagery of flower crowns see also Stammler 1964, 410–414; Winston-Allen 1988, 81–111; Newman 2001, 269–297; Gregory 2007, 43–85). During this journey the devout developed virtues symbolized by the growth of sweet-smelling flowers. The Thoofkijn van devotien tells us that Christ receives crowns braided from the virtuous flowers of his sisters: ...

Unio Mystica

Figure 6

Figure 7

“with red roses of corporeal and carnal virginity and with white roses of spiritual purity and cleanliness … they make their love such chaplets, may give them and decorate them with such small
flowers. This is the gift that he claims and desires of his female friends”; D’Ailly 1487).

The connection between virtue and spiritual labor can finally be found in the figure of the Virgin Mary, the ultimate model for these women. The devotion to Mary led to imitatio Mariae, a practice in which the sisters imitated the labor and lifestyle of the Virgin. However, this imitation was not one-sided. A religious folk legend attributes the making of silk flowers to the Virgin Mary. In this legend the Christ child asks for flowers, and since it is winter and there are no flowers, the Virgin starts making textile ones herself (Harlizius-Klück 2016, 77–83). The precise origins of this legend are unknown but it is possible that the story arose from the very activity of making flowers conducted by religious women instead of the other way around. By attributing this artistic practice to the Virgin, the religious women attained a level of imitatio Mariae. This legend suggests that the making of silk flowers can be seen as a spiritual labor and an act of love and devotion towards Christ.

**Horticulture and New Hermeneutics**

It is worthwhile mentioning that there are many important crossovers between the Enclosed Gardens cabinets with their collections of flowers, coins, insignia, and personal belongings, the testimonies of memoria and generations of female ownerships, and the lay trompe l’oeil iconographies of contemporary Flemish book illumination (Figure 9). These manuscripts are indeed excessive in their integration of and search for the possibilities of trompe l’oeil within the Bildraum. This pictorial illusionism was more than an aesthetic change, it demonstrated a new way of experiencing art through meditation and devotion. The high degree of realism discerned in these devotional tools embodies the process of meditation itself.

One of the media in which an extraordinary state of pictorial illusionism is explored is in the borders of manuscripts. The margins of the manuscripts are adorned with shadowed, almost tactile details of flowers, insects, fruits, minerals, jewelry, pilgrimage badges, and rosaries. The effect is a pictorial phantasma, a desire to go beyond the representation within the medium. Bernhard Siegert and Helga Lutz (2011, 253–284) consider insects and butterflies in trompe-l’oeil effects in the miniature and pictorial arts indeed as sophisticated Symptoms der Mediengenealogie (symptoms of medium genealogy; see also Studničková 2009, 254–261, 258).

James Marrow (2005) develops how these images have to do with breaking down barriers, as liturgy does. The trompe l’oeil object belongs to the temporal, real and transient world, while the main scene is rendered in “a perspective of salvation,” outside space and time (Figure 10). The medial borders challenge the scopic regime. In *Pictorial Invention in Netherlandish Manuscript Illumination of the Late Middle Ages*, James Marrow (2005) states the following:

The image can thus be understood as a kind of pictorial essay on the enlarged field of activity of illusionistic art, its enhanced capacities to link past, present and future, and its new
possibilities for refocusing meaning directly upon the viewer. And that message, concerned not only with what art means, but also how it means is conveyed with special force and insight in illuminated manuscripts, whether by the way that Flemish miniaturists exploit the relationships between figures represented in marginal zones and those depicted in the miniatures to draw us in new ways into the experience of their images ... Hand-held objects intended an intimate interrelationship between the painted objects and its owner. ... These are important new claims concerning the functions and meanings of painted images ... with respect to their immediacy and relevance for the user. (29–33)

The relationship between illuminated manuscripts and Enclosed Gardens in particular was established by Isabel von Bredow-Klaus (2009) and by Jos Koldeweij (2006). Isabel von Bredow-Klaus sees the analogy in the representation and insertion of luxury goods souvenirs as an action of glorifying the sacred word appropriately, as well as glorifying the medium as such through ownership. Ersatz ohne Risiko (replacement without a risk), she refers to them at a certain point. It is indeed clear that some objects seen at the borders of the miniatures, such as the individual curiosa, the pilgrimage amulets, insignia, wax seals, etc., travel forward and backwards from the manuscript borders into the true realm of the manuscript as book objects towards the gardens (Figure 11). Jos Koldeweij pinpoints these exchanges between the depicted world, the evocated horticulture and the material single object as such. He was even able to identify some of the insigni (Figures 12a–12b).

First, Enclosed Gardens are three-dimensional “boxes,” Kunstkammern, cabinets de curiosités. Being more diorama than image, namely a three-dimensional miniature or life-size scene in which figures or other objects are arranged in a naturalistic setting against a background, the gardens demand a more brutal “direct” stepping into the “de facto” space. Where the gardens may lack the complexity of rooms into rooms, and hence the very layered subtlety of medium-spatiality and meta-Bildraum, there the garden articulates instead a more explicit Bildakt of bodily performance. This bodily performance is twofold, from the point of view of the maker as of the viewer (who is actually often also the maker). The making process is intrinsic to the meaning of horticulture. The garden lives and grows due to the continuous action of collecting, hiding and treasuring. It refers to the pure joy of making with hands—this unique immersion in the self, the happiness in the inner room—that makes the maker reach mental and emotional transcendence. Maker and viewer are partners in crime in a haptic, sensuous world. The Enclosed Garden is a memory box over generations of religious women. The enclosed garden is a pars pro toto for the community’s spirituality, collective history and prospectus.

Second, the objects in the garden refer to the lower material culture of personal devotionalia and spiritual souvenirs (Figures 13a–13b). Indeed, both the idea of collecting on the one hand and the characteristic objects that function as an uploaded
pars proto for holy places such as Jerusalem and Rome, but also small rural Flemish Wahlforten, have been the reasons why the Enclosed Gardens are treated with the hermeneutics of mental traveling. According to Kathryn M. Rudy (2011, 110–118), Enclosed Gardens actually constitute a vehicle for undertaking a mental journey without physically traveling. Examples of such “virtual pilgrimages” are found in a genre of manuscript in which holy places are visualized and described so that they could be “visited” mentally. Enclosed Gardens can similarly mediate in a spiritual journey to a physically unreachable destination, as one strolls through the garden and playfully searches for the natural objects hidden in the shrubs, and experiences delight at whatever treasure one finds (a relic, a souvenir). Rudy (2011, 114) writes: “Entering the box, the viewer enters the Holy Land on the scale of a dollhouse, an idealized microcosm of female enclosure.” The author substantiates her hypothesis by arguing that Enclosed Gardens share two essential characteristics with other forms of virtual pilgrimage: “replacement” storage by objects, relics etc., and visual repetition or “accumulation.”

The third group of hermeneutics, concern the idea that the garden sublimates fragrance as a multi-layered medium for the
Julia Kristeva (1994) writes: "Il existe une communion inimitable de la femme (sic) et de la fleur (sic). Image de la fécondité et du sexe, certes, la fleur suggère l’énigme des cycles naturels; le ravissement de la vie, le mystère de la graine, mais aussi la belle fanaison, et encore l’invisible coopération de la racine, la sève, la tige et la feuille. Et, pour finir, dans sa quiétude immobile, la fleur ne transmet à sa cultivatrice-adoratrice qu’un envoutant mais provisoire parfum. Les mélancolies féminines se reconnaissent dans cet univers fragile, fier et mortel, comme s’il leur renvoyait leur propre image, avec, en plus (sic) la promesse de la repousse à la saison prochaine, une résurrection [There are unmistakable parallels to be drawn between woman and flower. As an image of fertility and sex, the flower is certainly suggestive of the secret of the natural cycles, the ecstasy of life, the mystery of the seed, as well as the beautiful wilting and, further, the invisible working together of root, sap, stem and leaf. After all, the flower, in its immovability, in its cultivator-admirer offers an enchanting yet merely ephemeral perfume. Female melancholy identifies with this fragile, proud and immortal world as if its own image were reflected in it, holding the promise of reflowering in the coming season, the promise of a Resurrection]." (172)

In this passage, Julia Kristeva connects Enclosed Gardens with femininity—on account of their fragility, the aspect of the vegetative cycle—and their shape. She also refers to the motif of scent. The relationship between Enclosed Gardens and its evocation within the sensorium, more specifically its olfactory aspect, has hitherto not been explored (I previously explored the hermeneutics of odor (and taste) in Baert 2012, 109–152; 2013, 109–117; Forthcoming a).

I point to the fact that spirituality of fragrance, since early Christianity, was developed as evocation of the divine breath. The unknowable and ungraspable divine essence and mystery travels on the waves of breath and wind (see also Baert Forthcoming d). Fragrances and wind are connected in the conviction that they are both materializations of the invisible. Yet they make the divine “visible” through other indirect senses and phenomena. Moreover, scent was believed to be the source of an exceptional form of “knowledge”; this is knowledge through anamnesis. Last but not least, perfume forms a strong gendered and erotic catalyst. Wind I see through the trees, smell I see through incense, smoke, flowers. Yes, I blow into the garden. Look, the Enclosed Garden moves in response to my own breath. The garden offers me its subtle fragrance.

Hence it is through fragrance that we come in contact with the divine. It is scent that brings us almost bodily back to the last paradise of a phantasmoric past and anamneses. It is perfume that has the unique capability to invite us into the garden of the bride and the bridegroom of the canticum canticorum. “Awake, O north wind and come, O south wind! Blow upon my garden. That its fragrance may be wafted abroad. Let my beloved come to this garden, and eat its choicest fruits” (Song of Sol. 4:15-16, NIV).

Reindert Falkenburg demonstrated in his Fruit of Devotion that the early modern period was a pivotal moment in the mystical tradition of the garden allegory: “The first tracts to employ allegorical references to the spiritual garden as a central theme date from the beginning of the thirteenth century. However, the genre only gained wider popularity in the fifteenth and the early sixteenth centuries. In this period, spiritual garden allegories appeared as separate texts, but also as elements within other, mainly devotional literary forms” (Falkenburg 1994, 20). These tracts were also read by the laity and were stimulated by the Devota moderna. If texts and prayers can employ taste and smell as conduits of devotional experience and spiritual insight, then why might flowers and fruits as motifs in paintings and other art forms not fulfill a similar spiritual function? As Falkenburg argues: “In the perspective of ‘mirrored piety’ it is possible to look to the garden tracts for greater insight into the nature of devotional attitudes associated with the consumption of fruit and flowers in the Andachtsbilder” (Falkenburg 1994, 83). This reasoning also holds in relation to the Enclosed Garden as a topos, as a visual motif, which intrinsically evokes the (mystical) pleasures of the garden and hence may be seen as essentially “fragrant” and even having taste.

The final group of new hermeneutics consists in the methodological intertwining between medium and technique. I discern the
Figure 13
Enclosed Garden (a) 1499 and Enclosed Garden; (b) 1520. Bentlage, Canons Regular of the Order of the Holy Cross.
concept of making as meaning on the one hand and the tectonics of the grid and lozenge on the other.

**Making as Meaning**

The making processes of the Enclosed Gardens force us to review the status of the beholder. The viewer is now in a different spectrum; the spectrum of the invitation to enter the garden. It is as if we should visit them more than look at them; if we would enjoy them more from the inside outwards, than from the outside inwards. Exactly in that radicalization of thresholds, the viewing becomes an almost synaesthetical Bildakt and immersion. It is in fact exactly that interiority that the hortus conclusus, as symbol for the soul’s uplift, demands; and it is exactly that immersion that the hortus, as an iconological motif of paradise and mystical love-garden, induces.

Gregory the Great (540–604) links the sensorium and the co-operation of the senses with the agencies of desire. Palazzo (2012, 347–351) refers to the tenth book of Augustine’s *Confessions*, Chapters 9 and 11, where the author interprets synaesthesia as the door towards the soul and the inner self (see also Skinnerbach 2013, 233–257): “These [devotional] practices effected an overstepping of perception, not by extending the abilities of the individual senses, but by transforming materiality” (Skinnerbach 2013, 259). *Visus quippe, auditus, gustus, odouratus, et tactus, quasi quaedam viae mentis sunt, quibus foras veniat .... Per nos etenim corporis sensus quasi per fenestras quasdam exterior quaeque anima respicit,* *respiciens concuspicit* (Gregory the Great [1844–1850], PL 76, col. 189; Palazzo 2012, 339–366, 350). “For seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, and touching, are a kind of ways of the mind, by which it should come forth without, ... For by these senses of the body as by a kind of windows the soul takes a view of the several exterior objects, and on viewing longs after them” (Gregory the Great [1844–1850], 515–516)

The making female body mediates between the Enclosed Gardens and the world. Moreover, she is directed by the archetype of hand, thread, weaving, and spindle. Enclosed Gardens are, so to speak, a matriarchal heritage of Arachne’s web: the web is the skin-ego par excellence. The actual creative process, with its super-human detailing and the endless patience that this requires in turning, rotating, sewing etc. bears in it the same traces of a cosmic and individual creative process that has been perceived since Arachne as an unravelling, a wiring and connecting (for Arachne, see my Chapter 7 *Manuductus*. A (very) brief epistemology of the web in Baert 2016a).

Likewise, the handwork involved in creating Enclosed Gardens puts a spell on time in two senses; time that conceals as a thick jelly and moves on and time that encapsulates like a cocoon, that envelops fate, and invites the momentary in secure detail. With the introduction of the aspect of “time” it becomes clear how Enclosed Gardens constitute a scenography of the most intense meditation. Labor-intensive work, particularly repetitive chores such as embroidering or weaving, can induce a concentration flow. The hands then seem to operate automatically, detached from the body, like creatures in a closed, autonomous state. The “artistically-minded” hand as an automaton, with its own memory, in turn creates a new “flow space” or a space in which extreme concentration is reached: that of meditation and spiritual prayer.

Furthermore, if the meaning of the Enclosed Gardens coincides with the creative process, then the garden may be seen as a virtual prayer room. As a consequence, a second sense, besides smell, comes to the fore from the margins of this exceptional artistic process: hearing. Is it not likely that, during the creative process, the women in question sang, prayed, muttered words, or possibly produced rhythmic droning sounds? This rhythmic translation from manual labor to sound, song, and speech may have served as a mnemonic device, facilitating the execution of complex actions in working textiles, as in knotting taken to its most complex extreme, namely lacework (Figure 14).² Embroidering, bobbin work, knotting, turning, enveloping, and the entire semantic field evoked by the episteme of the web constitutes the corporeal *variationes* on what happens when fingertips come into contact with threads. Harlizius-Klück (2004) is a challenging study that starts from Greek semantic roots in analysing the linguistic idiom surrounding weaving. The author finds traces of the origins of mathematics as a cosmological model. Now the hands “sing” with tiny woolen voices their sophisticated love duets, perceptible only inside
the Enclosed Gardens. Now the sensorium attains a state of synaesthesia whereby seeing and hearing—and smelling—enter into an interiorized pact with meditation. Horst Wenzel also refers to Augustine (354–430) in this respect: *Foris enim cum per corpus haec fiunt, aliud est locutio, aliud visio: intus autem cum cogitamus, utrumque unum est.* “When these things are done outwardly by means of the body, then speech and sight are different things; but when we think inwardly, the two are one” (*De trinitate*, cited in Wenzel 1995, 330. See also Clanchy 1979, 202).

Finally, one could argue that the Enclosed Garden in its inherent labor intensity opens out onto an infinite space of emptiness and tranquillity (Williamson 2013, 1–43). I recognize this space in the liberated mind that is finally able to fly away by the grace of its counterpart: the *horror vacui* that stems from a metronomic ticking, gliding, grinding of harmonically concerting hands. This seemingly paradoxical relationship, between the emptiness of the ephemeral spirit on the one hand and the haptic-exuberant textile arts on the other, may be formulated as follows: “The trance [the ephemeral spirit] is a timeless connection of essences, which are expressed in part through the surrounding synaesthetic rite and a vanishing point contracting in the direction of an imageless unconsciousness. The sign, on the other hand, [the materiality of the textile arts] uses form, colour and rhythm to instigate a chain of references and associations” (Vandenbroeck 2000, 107).

This brings me towards the fascinating aspect of the paperolles, or the concept of the tectonics.

**Paperolles/lozenge**

*Paperolles* are enrolled and with textiles enwrapped paper tubes, that are inserted in lozenge patterns (Figure 15). A conservation team will open them carefully. It would be interesting to see if the paper is recycled with a meaningful purpose (or not), for example, with particular texts, words written on it. These could be biblical, or other spiritual texts and songs, that provide us with more insights about the direct sources of inspiration. Indeed, we know about gardens, smell, and bride songs of that period such as a refrain by the Bruges rhetorician Eduard de Dene composed for the Walburga church. It would be interesting to have documents or direct links that specifically relate songs to our artifacts. Several of these kinds of structures also adorn the borders and margins of the mentioned contemporary manuscript corpus. The geometrical borders consist of several cells, which can take different shapes such as triangles or rhombuses. They can be suggested in different ways, by lines or by imitation of goldsmithery. However, structuring elements on a geometrical background is not limited to manuscripts. It can be found in many other artistic
media as well: one of them is lace. The similar geometrical background of a lace pattern literally holds and connects the different ornamental motifs from which it is composed. In the sixteenth century, Mechelen was an important production center for lace. Not only were the craftsmen of the passementmakers committed to the craft of lace, but also religious women such as beguines and nuns were active in the making of these textiles. The lace of Mechelen, known as Araigne de Malines or premier Malines has a typical, evenly arranged hexagonal stitch. These pieces of premier Malines show how the grid-like pattern is used to fill up the blanks in between the needled flowers (Figure 16).

In the Enclosed Gardens the lozenges of the paperolles are arranged as building blocks of a wall, comparable to beads that form a net to cover the surface. As a single element the paperolles forms a mysterious enrolled shell, a wrapping of a some-thing that

Figure 15
Paperolles, detail of Enclosed Garden with Calvary and Hunt on the Unicorn, 1510–1520. Mechelen, Stedelijke Musea Mechelen. © KIK-IRPA, Brussels [Belgium].

Figure 16
Old lace, produced in Mechelen.
Barbara Baert

is at the same time a no-thing. It is the \textit{pars pro toto} of the above stated paradoxical relationship between the emptiness of the ephemeral spirit on the one hand and the haptic-exuberant textile arts on the other hand. \textit{Paperolles} articulate the very hermeneutical balance between technicity and decoration. Therefore they exist in their emptiness; they exist in their pure phenomenology of being wrapped and only wrapped (even if the wrapped form as such resonates the presence of a

Figure 17
Paperolles [lozenge backwall], detail of \textit{Enclosed Garden with Calvary and Hunt on the Unicorn}, 1510–1520. Mechelen, Stedelijke Musea Mechelen. © KIK-IRPA, Brussels (Belgium).

Figure 18
relic as they were often likewise “enwrapped” in relic cabinets).3

What matters is a form; that is material; that is an enveloping technique; that is a circular bead; that is the brick of a wall; that is an endless net; that is a web; that is a membrane.

Ernst Gombrich (1909–2001) focuses on the archetypical pattern of the lozenge in his The Sense of Order (Gombrich [1979] 1994, 53–54). He includes it in his chapter on harmony as a basic pattern that can have endless variations and can achieve very complex opaque structures by being ornamentally “filled” in, or “wrapped” in floral motifs, which is indeed the case when it comes to the Enclosed Gardens, with all their plastic extravagance (Figure 17).

Moreover, Gombrich sees the lozenge pattern, and by extension, every schematic ornament, in its basic mathematical form as a direct offshoot of the stem/stalk principle, therefore of nature itself. According to Gombrich, element and structure share a truncus communis. In the Enclosed Gardens that truncus communis has literally remained in harmony. That is why the Enclosed Gardens are such an important hermeneutic locus for the interweaving of form and substance; of decoration and meaning and of aniconic and mimesis. That Ur-Gestalt is cherished within the gardens, while at the same time art history gradually lost its sensible eye for such cohesion.

From the point of view of visual anthropology, the lozenge is one of the oldest ideograms in the world (Vandenbroeck 2000, 196–199). The longue durée of the net symbol stretches from recurring patterns on objects; from the Magdalenian period (Dordogne, 100,000 BC) up until the patterns of embroidery and sewing with its cross-stitching. It is also a core motif in Berber weaving (Figure 18). The lozenge pattern is in fact the endless repetition of the diamond or uterus and shares the notion of “becoming” with this vulvatic pictogram. The net and the lozenge symbolize creation and the power of reproduction: the net motif is a “cloth” that is “placed” on the subject, on the body, on the textile, to articulate it as a duplicating membrane and the pattern is in se infinite. The membrane can expand and “grow” endlessly. No other form can be so pregnant of continuum as the lozenge and the grid. No other formula has the unavoidable écriture of expanding in repetition, giving humankind the comfort of stability, and the consolation of potential future creation processes.

In his book Lines: A Brief History, anthropologist Tim Ingold sets out in search of the origin and the effects of lines in our interaction with the world. In relation to the knot and, by extension, the notion of connecting, tying, or braiding a cord or a thread, the author refers to an association with meshes, with lacework and with the labyrinth, all of which used to be considered to possess apotropaic qualities (after Alfred Gell, Art and Agency; Ingold 2008, 53; based upon a study by Gell 1998, 83–90). By analogy, the complex knot work in Celtic miniatures, created by a process of filling and linking by means of threads and lines, may have served an apotropaic purpose (Figure 19). The idea is that the demon is lured by its fascination with the complexity of the pattern or braid and that, in trying to solve it, it becomes entangled and is thus rendered harmless by its own diabolical fascination. The mesh or knot work—the art of lacework is believed to have originated in the making of extremely fine fishing nets—functions as an interface between this world and the underworld: it is a black hole, much like the navel. In this context, Ingold uses the term “dissolution of surface.” Celtic miniatures allow the surface of the parchment to disappear: we see not so much the knot as whatever it is that the knot seals, conceals, covers, opens, and shuts. The mesh, the labyrinth, the web all arise at the threshold: there where the maelstrom and the magical abyss beckon, there where horror vacui is motivated in order...
to take unaware and to shelter: these are the functions of “tectonics” (Ingold 2015, 85; Ernst Gombrich (1979) 1994) in The Sense of Order prefers the term amor infiniti over horror vacui).

Rosalind Krauss on the other hand, writes about net, grid and lozenge:

Now it is in this ambivalence about the import of the grid, an indecision about its connection to matter on the one hand or spirit on the other, that its earliest employers can be seen to be participating in a drama that extended well beyond the domain of art. That drama which took many forms, was staged in many places. ... Therefore, although the grid is certainly not a story, it is a structure, and one, moreover, that allows a contradiction between the values of science and those of spiritualism to maintain themselves within the consciousness of modernism, or rather its unconscious as something repressed. In order to continue its analysis—to assess the very success of the grid's capacities to repress. (Krauss 1979, 54–55)

In this matrix or ambivalence, the grid helps us to see, to focus on. Regarding the lozenge in particular she uses the following words:

Diamond shaped as if we were looking at a landscape through a window, the frame of the window arbitrarily truncating our view but never shaking our certainty that the landscape continues beyond the limits of what we can, at that moment. (Krauss 1979, 61–62)

In short, where Ingold emphasizes tectonics “as” dissolution and Krauss emphasizes the drama of dualism between spirit and matter, both authors share an interpretation of the lozenge walls as a specific scopic regime that needs the structural “support” for a seeing beyond. Although being part of the realm of symmetry, the grid keeps the capacities to un-limit form to uncompromise structure. In short, it is the inner structure that prevents the garden from collapsing and keeps the viewer’s eyes in place. It gives the eye the possibility to “hook” into the room. It prevents him from what William Butler Yeats (1865–1939) predicted in The Second Coming (1920): “Things fall apart, the centre cannot hold.”

This brings me to a final excursion about the paperolles lozenge as a Biblical image of the sacred.

Lozenge Patrons and the Temple Curtain(s)
The reason the lozenge pattern is charged with such energy can be explained by the fact that it is literally intertwined with the textile medium: the crossing of threads in such a way that a lozenge/net pattern becomes inherent to the cloth goes back to the Old Testament. In the Book of Exodus it says that the Aaronic High Priest should wear fine white linen with a checkered pattern: “And thou shalt weave the coat in checker work of fine linen, and thou shalt make a mitre of fine linen, and thou shalt make a girdle, the work of the embroiderer” (Exod. 28:39, NIV).

Furthermore, the different textile curtains of the sanctuary in the tabernacle are associated with a special lozenge pattern, which was considered to be an especially refined technique, rich in the same way the lozenge pattern was later used in damask (Kessler 2000a, 53–54). The temple curtain features a lozenge membrane. By extension, the lozenge pattern is also a symbol of the Divine secret, the secret that is denoted exactly because of its concealment. The lozenge pattern is the perfect membrane of the sacred secret. Within the lozenge pattern, the ineffability is shifted to the archetype of potential, creative urge and the universe itself.

Since early Byzantine art, the iconography of the lozenge pattern has been attached to cloth, veils, clothing, and curtains (often highlighted in gold) to either depict the cosmos and firmament, in a Marian context, or finally as a carrier of the true form of Christ. It will become apparent that these three Christian symbolic interpretations of the pattern are important for our interpretation of the Enclosed Gardens as yet another branch of the complex family tree of our longue durée motif (see Krischel 2015, 1–100, n. 250–253).

Herbert Kessler collected examples from ninth century Byzantine manuscripts where gold work textiles with a net pattern were used to show the Second Coming of Christ (Figure 20; Kessler 2000a, 53–54, color image nr. III; Vatikan, Biblioteca Apostolica., Cod. Gr. 699, fol. 89r).

In an eleventh century codex from Saint Catherine's Monastery, the concealing temple curtain consists of a lozenge pattern
Figure 20
Christ of the Parousia with lozenge motif on curtain behind, ninth century. Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica., Cod. Gr. 699, fol. 89r.

Figure 21
Temple curtain with lozenge motif, miniature from Topographia Cristiana, eleventh century. Sinai, Saint Catherine’s Monastery, Cod. 1186, fol. 82v.
filled with lilies (Figure 21; Kessler 2000a, 53–54, 57–59, images 3.3, 3.4. See also Kessler 1993, 63–64). Herbert Kessler defends the pattern as being a formal support of the iconography of the cosmos, the firmament, and, as a temple curtain, even an eschatological reference to the Heavenly Jerusalem and thus the return of Christ and the restoring of paradise. In some cases, the lozenge pattern is seen in connection with the brick wall, and thus with the structure of the masonry of the Heavenly Jerusalem, which immediately resonates with the Enclosed Gardens in our discourse (Figure 22; Kessler 2000b, 74, fig. 14, Constantin of Antiochia, Topografie Cristiana, Sinai, Santa Katharina, cod. 1186, fol. 79r).

The Marian connotation is also quite important when it comes to the Enclosed Gardens. Mary weaves the temple curtain with precious purple wool (Figure 23). We already established that the textile arts and by extension handicrafts, such as those developed making the Enclosed Gardens, were considered to be an imitatio Mariae. Like the mother of God, the nun “weaves” another part of the grand canvas of the heavenly Ecclesia itself. Enclosed Gardens are microfields with “organisms” that keep up this task in an eschatological perspective. The nun spins Mary’s endless thread throughout the generations and thus ensures a new incarnation time and time again. Each time, the nun’s hands sing the praises of the miracle of a God turned flesh, born from the body of a virgin like herself. The Gardens are like electrical boxes where the Marian exemplary spirituality is retained under the highest of voltages by means of the textile handicraft.

This brings me to the second important branch of the lozenge pattern as an energetically charged carrier of textile: the acheiropietos or the face of Christ as an epiphany of God. Both the vera icon of the West as well as the prototypical Byzantine mandylion had textile as
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Figure 24

Textile charged with a sacral veil-owing to show that which is invisible.

Kessler 2000a color image IVb). Textile charged with a sacral veiling to show that which is invisible.
shifts to the bestowed face of Christ. The figure of The Son, the New Covenant has become visible; the face now floats in front of the woven curtain that conceals the Tabernacle of the Old Covenant. There is now a “duality” of cloth and face, of old and new, of invisibility and visibility, both a Janus head on the threshold of a shared “visible invisibility.”

In the Byzantine iconography, the mandylion often shows the lozenge pattern on damask, directly referencing the above-mentioned triple layer of power of the Biblical curtains on the one hand, and by extension the anthropological creation and fertility schemata (sublimated in Mary) on the other. The figurative visibility of the Son is thus literally able to attach itself in front of or on top of the cloth as an apparition as well as a definition of a new pact between the invisible God of Moses and his visualization in the Son. The face becomes a new organic manifestation of the primal secret of the Old Testament. The textile with net pattern is meant to incorporate the past, with its energy to continue the secret, but at the same time functions as the perfect “safety net” for showing-that-which-must-be-shown. The woven net pattern is the only membrane that is strong enough to show something as powerful as the face of a God in the form of His son (Baert 2000, 10–43).

Back to the Enclosed Gardens. As a wall and membrane, as the carrier of a net that maintains and supports the gardens, the paperolles wall of the paradise or the Heavenly Jerusalem is comparable with the new pact that the nun also makes at a micro level. The tight lozenge pattern is the aniconic, diagrammatic écriture, which is pregnant with the full organic volume of that which shall appear in front of the curtain. The brooding micro-cosmos of garden, relic, eros, and thanatos is supported by a carrier that symbolizes silence, secrets, and safety. The lozenge pattern is necessary both to make the horticulture of this handicraft possible given the symbolism of the creation process, and to protect it when it comes to its charged meaning in the langue durée. That is why these gardens are feverish shrines, excessive sanctuaries. They are the new tabernacles, in which all shapes, all archetypical patterns, all elements of nature, all senses, all relics, and all primal memories converge into one sacral choreography, in with they can implode to make a new abundant Magnificat for a Son born from a virgin.

By Way of Conclusion. Eros/ Nidus

By way of conclusion, I would like to confront our phenomenon with the erotically sublimated window (together with Origen (184–253) and Roland Barthes (1915–1980)) and with the nest/ grid (together with Origen (184–253) and Gaston Bachelard (1884–1962) and Rosalind Krauss).

The first issue is intimately related to the prototypical text for the Enclosed Gardens: the Song of Songs (osculator me). Canticle 2, 9–10 says: “Look, there he stands behind our wall,5 gazing in at the windows, looking through the lattice. My beloved speaks and says to me: ‘Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away’.” Origen interpreted this teichoscopic passage of the Canticum as follows. The word of God, the bridegroom, is found not in the open courtyard but covered over and as it were hiding behind the wall. He would enter like the lover, like an erotikos. He would first look through the window at the Bride. With a leap he reaches the window of the house having in mind to peep at her. This is peeping in the time when she will unveil her face to go outside and to find him (Miller 1986, 241–253; Couzel 1961).6 The word window originates from the Old Norse “vindauga,” from vindr, “wind” and auga, “eye”; that is in fact: wind eye.

The text of the Song of Song is a bliss. One cannot speak “on” such a text, one can only speak “in” such a text. This we can compare with Barthes’ “paradise of words”: “we are gorged with language”.7 The verbal pleasure “chokes and reels into bliss.” This emptying of the unspoken is experienced by the Bride as an “ingrafting”: insero as in Rufinus’ Latin translation. It means an erotic sowing in the mind: “Thy name is as ointment emptied out” (Barthes 1975, 8). The kiss by the bridegroom is a kiss of insight, a little flash that lights up in the dark, in the speech of the text. Yet, words are not stripped naked by it, words are not bare. They are visible provocations towards the invisible—the unspoken—and they do not pass away. By analogy, this going into the paradise beyond the word by using teichoscopia, viewing from the walls, or this emptying one out into the pleasure of the making text (in this case the horror vacui of flowers), yes, these visible prov-
locations towards the invisible and the unspoken, is indeed an energy as well as a dynamic between our Enclosed Garden and its maker/viewer.

Second, might these Enclosed Gardens—on the basis of their contents of curiosities and relics, their treasuring of precious pearls, their function as a homelike shelter, their techniques of binding, knotting, sewing, gluing together, and finally the psycho-energetic and physical contamination with the makers’ body—not just as easily be referred to as “nests” (Figure 25)?

The word “nest” is etymologically related to the notion of an Enclosed Garden through “niche.” French niche is most likely derived from the verb nicher “to build a nest,” which in turn comes from Latin nidicare or nidificare, from nidus (nest). Hence, the spatial connotation of niche emerged through formal similarities with the most intimate shell around something extraordinarily precious and fragile.

Gaston Bachelard writes in his *The Poetics of Space* about the nest:

The philosophical phenomenology of nests is being able to elucidate the interest with which we look through an album containing reproductions of nests or even more positively, in our capacity to recapture the naïve wonder we used to feel when we found a nest. This wonder is lasting, and today when we discover a nest it takes us back to our childhood or, rather, to a childhood; to the childhoods we should have had. For not many of us have been endowed by life with the full measure of its cosmic implications. (Bachelard 2014, 114)

The dialects between forest love and love in a city room is between wilderness and a nest, yes, between nature and the Enclosed Garden. A nest is never young; we come back, it is the sign of return and of daydreams (Bachelard 2014, 119). It is past and present.

In the nest and garden, the shelter built by and for the body is taking form from the inside, like a shell. It is a formal and performative intimacy that works physically. The body is exactly the tool for making the nest. (This makes me point to the curious fact that the same technique for the flower stitching is used with women’s hair. The making of the female hair into a paradise-nest, as we see here with a bird added is a mysterious metonymy for the bodily and performative gardens we are studying here also.)

Bachelard (2014, 121) adds that “the female gender, like a living tower, hollows out the house, while the male gender brings back from the outside all kinds of materials, sturdy twigs and other bits. By exercising an active pressure, the female makes this into a felt-like padding.” I quote from Jules Michelet’s (1798–1874) observations on birds:

The house is a bird’s very person; it is its form and its most immediate effort, I shall even say, its suffering. The result is only obtained by constantly repeated pressure of the breast. There is not one of these blades of grass that, in order to make it curve and hold the curve, has not been pressed on countless times by the bird’s breast, its heart, surely with difficulty in breathing, perhaps even with palpitations. (Michelet 1858, 208) The form of the nest is commanded by the inside. On the inside the instrument that prescribes a circular form for the nest is nothing else but the body of the bird. It is by constantly turning round and round and pressing back the walls on every side by the bird’s belly, that it succeeds in forming this circle. (Michelet 1858, 208)

The nest is a swelling fruit, pressing against it limits. It is an expression of praise of its felt-like fabric. (Bachelard 2014, 122)

Here, Gaston Bachelard and Rosalind Krauss meet each other unexpectedly. He, the bridegroom: intuitive, obsessed with the infant space and hence praising the curved inside-outside nest warmth of the garden. She, the bride: modernistic, anti-developmental, antinarrative, antihistorical, and hence praising the sticky ambivalent grids of the garden.
Gaston Bachelard says to Rosalind Krauss:

The grace of a curve is an invitation to remain. ... For the beloved curve has nest-like powers; it incites us to possession, it is a curved ‘corner’, inhabited geometry. Here we have attained a minimum of refuge, in the highly simplified pattern of a daydream of repose. But only the dreamer who curls up in contemplation of loops understands these simple joys of delineated repose. (Bachelard 2014, 165)

Krauss answers Bachelard:

I have witnessed and participated in arguments about whether the grid portends the centrifugal or centripetal existence of the work of art. Logically speaking, the grid extends, in all directions, to infinity ... By virtue of the grid, the given work of art is presented as a mere fragment, a tiny piece arbitrarily cropped from an infinitely larger fabric. Thus the grid operates from the work of art outwards, compelling our acknowledgement of a world beyond the frame. This is the centrifugal reading. The centripetal one works, naturally enough, from the outer limits of aesthetic object inward. The grid is, in relation to this reading, a re-presentation of everything that separates the work of art from the world, from ambient space and from other objects. (Krauss 1979, 66)

So, maybe, after all, the daydream for the lost paradise with its typical anamnestic, melancholic, and infinite tectonics constitutes the intimacy of the excessive space of the Enclosed Garden, yet, without ever losing its safety net its limits, as an “introjection of the boundaries of the world into the interior of the work. We deal with a mapping of the space inside the frame onto itself. It is a mode of repletion, the content of which is the conventional nature of art itself” (Krauss 1979, 66). Ultimately, any artistic act is about a fear of emptiness or absence, as Ulrike Gehring argues in Semantik der Absenz: “Der Wunsch, Unsichtbares sichtbar zu machen, ist der Kunst von Anbeginn an zu eigen. Bildenden Künstler verleihen ihren Ideen und Vorstellungen eine materielle Gestalt, indem sie unsichtbare Prozesse oder Empfindungen in die Antlitze ihrer bildlichen Stellvertreter einschreiben.” (“The wish to render the invisible visible is inherent in art from its beginnings. Artists give their ideas and imaginations a material shape by inscribing invisible processes or feelings into the face of their pictorial representative”). (Gehring 2011, 3)

It is precisely through this continuous desire for this phantasmatic restoration that the fear of emptiness is conquered and that the absent is sublimated into artistic expression. This aspect is also contained in the horror vacui of Enclosed Gardens: the garden as a nest that protects against emptiness and as a preparation for the final pact. This final pact is eschatological in nature, as it draws its significance from the ultimate expectation regarding the fulfilment of the promise: the absolute coincidence of the artistic image with the artificial image of God and the return to His Garden, His Paradise, the Heavenly Jerusalem. That is why the ultimate epistemology of Enclosed Gardens is the “state of expectation” and the slow action of hands that are wrapping up, sewing, buttoning: the manuductus that takes over the choreography of the waiting and incorporates it. That is why the genre of the Enclosed Garden echoes the lamentations from the chthonic underworld. If one listens hard enough, one can still hear the song of Orpheus and Persephone about the promise they were once made: the reunion with the beloved, the return to the flowering garden.

When a breeze enters the room, the nest shivers. Arachne’s web rocks, and all the flowers rustle and all the little leaves attached to them murmur like a sigh, like a shudder.

“We never eliminate all vestiges, though, we never manage, truly, once and for all, to silence that past matter, and sometimes we hear an almost imperceptible breathing” (Javier Marías, “The Infatuations”).

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Notes
1. I am grateful to Jan Van der Stock and Catherine Reynolds for this information on the testaments (see Société historique et archéologique de Tournai 1897, 271, 334).
2. I wish to extend my thanks to Ellen Harlizius-Klück and Marie-Louise Nosch for their input at seminars at the Centre for Textile Studies, Copenhagen, December 2–3, 2013. On mnemotics, see Carruthers (2010).
3. With thanks to Jim Marrow for this suggestion.
4. Many thanks to Roland Krischel, Wallraf-Richartz-Museum & Fondation Corboud, who alerted me to this fact during the workshop in Weimar, mentioned in the first note.
5. Teichoscopy or teichoscopia meaning “viewing from the walls,” is a recurring narrative strategy in ancient Greek literature. One famous instance of teichoscopy occurs in Homer’s Iliad, Book 3, verses 121–244. Teichoscopia makes it possible to describe an event taking place in the distance while integrating it into the narrative frame.
7. The same conceptual osmosis between novel and love, body, and erotic readership, is analyzed by Barthes (1975).

References


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Revisiting the Enclosed Gardens of the Low Countries


