



The Garden of Being

A Dialogue

Words and Photography by O. KRISTINA PEDERSEN

Subject LEE COSTANZA

visual dialogue

Novalis: "...and Nature in truth is nothing more than a vast belly."

KAVLINE: Middle-aged serial entrepreneur, self-proclaimed Gemini

CYRIL: Twenty-something non-specific Creative, prone to weeping

THE SCENE: A public patio. A large, faded blue outdoor couch, with about a thousand too many pillows, sits on the patio in front of a barren brick fireplace. A rustic wooden table sits in between the couch and the fire place. It has not been moved from that spot in three years. Despite the successfully rugged appearance of the whole set up, everything on the patio is really only three years old. It's a sunny day and the city around **THE SCENE** is, audibly, in full Monday swing. Cranes are moving and sidewalks are getting busted up and just absolutely crazy sounding shit abounds. The McD— International Headquarters just finished their new building down the street: Ah, what Walnutt Street has become for this town: the people religiously fuel their spirit on Brunch, the revolving bi-weekly street art is well-administered, eligible divorcees have regular parking spots at the new A— Hotel, the streets smell of chocolate (there is actually chocolate in the atmosphere, all mixed up with street dust and garbage and exhaust and whatever kind of particles into which that black sludgy snow evaporated). The city feasts upon itself around **THE SCENE**. The sun is shining on the patio. **CYRIL** is lounging on the couch, trying to write a good caption.

KAVLINE enters the outdoor patio from inside, looks at the sky, and tisks.

KAVLINE

[Angry] Can't it just be nice?
Can't it? Just? Be? NICE?

Is it too much to ask of the sun to be warmer? Is it really too much to ask of our only sun? You are all we have. I sometimes wonder, do you need us?

We have been here, without warmth, for what feels like ages. Months and months of uncertainty at best. Will it ever be warm again? Sunny? Beautiful? We are out here getting yanked around. Getting the old One-Two. And now on this day, I come outside for one fucking second, taking one fucking second away from my Creative Project, out here trying to make the world a better place, hello, and I come outside to pay some deference, because I'm humble, and I'm grateful, and my successes are nothing without the sun, yada yada, so I come outside for one God damn second, put my phone down, everything—investors could be emailing any *minute*, we are talking about being at the point of *minutes* with this Project. It's going to shake shit up. For me. And for people who want to sell their gently-used GNB clothes. It's going to revolutionize retail. I'm talking like... the Uber of a genderless Amazon. One Day. That's how we're pitching it at least. I'm telling you. Really powerful shit. So I sacrifice one fucking second to come outside and see the outside and see the sky and whatever ... and it's, like, sunny, but it's not even, like, nice. I just don't think it's too much to ask. For all I'm doing, at least. In there.

CYRIL

Excuse me, but are you really suggesting that we deserve the sun? that it is at all possible that a ball of gas is, in any way, concerned with our *service?* our utility? The only real utility for the sun is your very being, your mandate *is to be*, though it is probably not your duty.

KAVLINE

[Still considering the sky]

Yes... sure... but can't it at least just be nice? I want to feel the sun on my skin and the breeze in my hair and maybe even break out a sleeveless jumpsuit, if the spirit so moves me. We all deserve to bask in our light, it is integral to being. But I'm not making any metaphysical commitments, those always get politicized—

[Notices **CYRIL**]—

Cyril! Dar. Ling. It's been forever since your last Instagram Story—feels like I haven't seen you in ages. What are you doing out here in the freezing cold?

CYRIL

I wanted to feel the sun on my skin and the breeze in my hair. And then I just couldn't be bothered to get up. I'm writing an ode to flowers, which I guess is really just an ode to the sun. Though I don't think it has even half the attitude as your wonderful tantrum. Shall I read it? May it please the garden to proceed?

KAVLINE

An ode to flowers? Oh yes I love flowers, they have those at Whole Foods. Please proceed.

CYRIL

[reads]:

We are all flowers in the garden of being. Tulips, hydrangeas, milkweeds; those homely cabbage-y purple-y ones; those big soft pink-and-white ones that, by the time they are at their most beautiful, in full bloom, can't support their own weight and fall face-down onto the sidewalks, where they remain to slowly die out the season. These flowers, these cosmically precise manifestations of the arrangement of molecules into colors—whatever those are—, these delicate happenings. Beauty feels like the thin, wet flesh of a petal; it is a fragile place, an attitude as vulnerable as the skin of a grape. Beauty is a receptivity so fertile it quiets all other frequencies. There is but water between beauty and immanence. Beauty makes no impositions—neither likeness, nor sameness, nor continuity—it is not a system, it is a site. And to enter this place, to wear the skin of this state, for the first time—to be a flower! A flower is a becoming in the garden of being.

But the object of the garden of being is not to produce a perfect or beautiful flower. (To demand the perfect rose in the name of God is to mispronounce the name of God). The garden of being does not have; the garden is and is and is and is.

The beauty of the garden does not derive from any one flower, the beauty is that there *are* flowers, that the garden is alive and becoming.



The garden is more than merely beautiful, it is Beauty ad infinitum. The garden of being—being alive—is a site of infinite reiterations of Beauty, a steady transition through all the light in the universe.

The garden of being is Beautiful when it flowers with becomings. Those corners of the garden that bubble with activity, those edges in transition: the blossoms, the changing leaves, the buds, the blooms: what beautiful becomings. A blossoming, a beginning, a not-so-pinned down, an in-touch-with immanence, the thin veil between being and nonbeing, the becomer, hovering so delicately in the breeze, in a state of life, a low buzz, exchanging light with more light, all else left to be determined in the sleep of reason.

KAVLINE

[...] Very...creative! You know me, I appreciate all things creative. You mean to say that I am a flower? That is so funny, I get that all the time. Well, not that exactly, but just the other day someone was telling me—well, it wasn't really someone telling me, but this influencer I follow posted this video saying that I deserve boundaries. Or something like that. You should follow them.

CYRIL

No, we are not flowers! That is not what I mean at all.

KAVLINE

You said I am a flower in a garden. And I'm saying that this person in Brooklyn made this wonderful video about how you should honor yourself and allow your "garden" to have boundaries because our boundaries define and protect us. Our boundaries make ourselves ours. The better we know our boundaries, the better everyone else knows our boundaries, the more *self* we can fully *be*.

CYRIL

But we *are* not the flowers, we are the garden! We *are* in the garden of being. The flower is only the beautiful consequence of interbeing, it is a becoming that we share with other beings in the garden. For some reason, metaphysics—and from the sound of it, all of Brooklyn—has always stopped short at the self and never departed. My God, we are so entrenched in the tradition of the self. Surely we have exhausted the self! Surely there are now so many 'boundaries' marking the self that the map is nothing but a monolith of black ink. Or pixels. Can't we move on to the question of actual, lived being-in-the-garden, as in *being amongst beings*?

KAVLINE

But how are we supposed to make sense of the world, of being amongst beings, if we can't make sense of our self?

CYRIL

Who would reject a beautiful flower with the vulgar remark that it doesn't make any sense? What has sense got to do with it? The garden of being is Beautiful not because it makes sense but because it is absolutely fragile: it is vulnerable to becomings.

And becoming is a singular functioning of interbeing, we are all becoming each other. A self alone—a lone being—an *I* in solitude—never becomes anything: it is only ever a static and diminishing echo of *I am*. How could it know anything else? Or anything at all? But *I's* together can become each other, and these becomings—these flowers!—make the garden beautiful.

KAVLINE

But here I am, a self, and look at all that I've done. All my actions and performances and accomplishments. Are you telling me that public murals *aren't* fostering nonviolence? That independent podcasts *aren't* making media more accountable? I am making the garden better by more than just my being. Mere being is sort of just, like, rotting. You are starting to sound like a Marxist: am I to just do nothing? We all know what happened there, that idea is sort of *contre la nature*.

CYRIL

Against nature! How is anything *against nature*? What is nature but whichever culture is defining it? People always say 'nature' when what they really mean is 'reason.' No words can be against nature; or, in that case, all words and ideas are against nature. People have such a bad habit for confusing their rationality with the divine. Like I said earlier, there is no duty in the garden. There can be no Better garden of being because there is only this one. Though, a radical acceptance of the garden seems like the best way to become—

[Loud bang: a crane delivers steel beams to the skeleton of a massive development]

—one with the garden of being.

KAVLINE

They are growing a lot of luxury condominiums in your garden. Open floor plans must be in season.

[SCENE.]

O. Kristina Pedersen is a photographer and writer whose work has appeared in Pitchfork, VICE, Under the Influence Magazine, and Temporary Art Review. Her work concerns performance, both spectacular and personal, and production/consumption cycles in creative labor. This year, she received a Luminous Endowment grant to continue her work documenting nontraditional creative communities in the rural Midwest and Northeast. She is primarily interested in investigating the aesthetic and spiritual aspects of these communities, and with examining vernacular modes of social performance.

THE GARDEN of BEING

O. K. P. and Lee Costanza met in college and have been certifiable best friends ever since. Lee recently started their transition and both Kristina and Lee wanted to document the experience, making photographs throughout their treatment and emphasizing non-terminal flux. The project is an ode to the state of transition and personal pilgrimage and its aim is not to document or create a hierarchy between any given points in a transitioning identity, but, rather, to emphasize the multiplicity of identity performance that happens always and in any given context (e.g. in a private, domestic space or in the photographer's studio).

