

Entropy by design: Gilles Clément, Parc Henri Matisse and the Limits to Avant-garde Urbanism

MATTHEW GANDY

Abstract

Derborence Island, an inaccessible concrete structure set in the middle of Lille's Parc Henri Matisse, is an intriguing example of recent landscape design. The park, which was completed in 1995 as part of the vast Euralille development, was designed by the French landscape architect Gilles Clément. The idea for the park is derived from several sources, including the aesthetic characteristics of uncultivated ground, the symbolic reconstruction of a fragment of primary forest and the enhancement of urban biodiversity. It is suggested that Clément's novel synthesis of nature and culture is significantly different from prevailing discourses of landscape design and is best interpreted as a form of site-specific art. Clément's project reveals tensions between the aesthetic and scientific significance of so-called 'waste spaces' in contemporary cities and the widening scope of utilitarian approaches to landscape design.

Introduction

We will protect a forest for the future produced by time and the vagaries of history; a natural process has been transformed into a vertical symbol, coveted and unreachable, yet the focus of our attention and astonishment; a fragment of nature left to itself in the heart of the city, an island.

Gilles Clément¹

The public and politicians are not yet ready to accept abandoned areas or wastelands as part of public space.

Sonia Keravel²

This article was first presented as the IJURR Annual Lecture at the 2010 Annual Meeting of the Association of American Geographers in Washington, DC. The lecture is available to view on the IJURR website at <http://www.ijurr.org>. I would like to thank the IJURR referees for their useful comments on an earlier draft along with various seminar audiences who have contributed to the ideas under discussion. Thanks also to Claire Colomb for sharing her knowledge of planning and politics in Lille and to Emilie Koefed for her assistance in tracking down some of the more obscure sources.

- 1 Gilles Clément and Louisa Jones, *Gilles Clément: une écologie humaniste* (Geneva: Aubanel, 2006), p. 142, my translation. The original French reads: 'On protégera une forêt du futur, forgée par le temps et les aléas de l'histoire, un système de nature érigé en symbole, aux parois verticales, inatteignable et convoité, un sujet d'attention et d'étonnement, un morceau de nature laissé à lui-même au coeur de la ville, une île'.
- 2 Sonia Keravel, 'La participation du public au projet de paysage. Comparaison et analyse de deux exemples: le Parc de Lancy et le Parc Henri-Matisse', *Projets de Paysage: Revue Scientifique sur la Conception et l'Aménagement de l'Espace* (14 December 2008), p. 10, my translation. The original French reads: 'Le public et les politiques ne sont pas encore prêts à accepter que des friches ou des délaissés puissent constituer une part de nos espaces publics'.

Parc Henri Matisse, which lies in the city of Lille in northern France, contains one of the most unusual examples of recent landscape design: an inaccessible concrete plateau, some 2,500 square metres in size, named Derborence Island. This feature, clearly visible from the Lille TGV station, is something of an enigma and is often mistaken for a huge bunker or some other fortification left over from the Second World War. In fact, it is an experimental structure designed to emulate an inaccessible fragment of primary forest now recreated as the centrepiece of an urban park.³ The surface of the island, some seven metres high, has been made intentionally inaccessible so that processes of ecological succession can occur without any human interference.⁴ In this article, Derborence Island and Parc Henri Matisse will form the basis for a wider reflection on the significance of anomalous spaces in the contemporary city. In particular, we will consider the difficulties in bringing together disparate discourses of urban ecology, landscape design and environmental politics in an experimental intervention that appears to contradict prevailing understandings of the role of culture in urban regeneration. The park illuminates a series of issues: the degree to which the independent agency of nature can be incorporated into urban design; the pedagogic limits to complex aesthetic and scientific discourses in the public arena; and the metaphorical parameters of ecological science in the politics of urban nature.

The park, completed in 1995, forms part of the Euralille project, which remains one of the most ambitious attempts to 're-brand' a post-industrial city, replete with vast retail opportunities, expanded office space, state-of-the-art conference facilities and a new high-speed rail hub. The creation of Euralille involved a panoply of high-profile architectural commissions including Rem Koolhaas, Jean Nouvel, Christian de Potzamparc and Xaveer de Geyter.⁵ No longer simply a provincial French city set in the industrial belt of Nord Pas-de-Calais, Lille was remodelled as a 'European city', reconnecting it with its former role as a regional centre for European commerce, only minutes away from Brussels. In many ways, Lille exemplifies the shift from a manufacturing to a service-based urban economy, but its transition masks persistently high levels of youth unemployment and social inequality. Detailed analysis of the wider impact of Euralille suggests that much of the boosterist rhetoric of the 1990s was overblown and that longer-term trends have seen significant degrees of working-class displacement from the centre of the city, with little in the way of economic regeneration or employment creation within the metropolitan

- 3 The term 'primary forest' — also referred to as old-growth forest, wildwood or *forêt vierge* — refers to relatively undisturbed woodlands that are characterized by many centuries of forest cover and have never been clear-felled for agriculture or other purposes. 'The chief differences', suggest Packham and Harding, 'lie in the possession by the wildwood of senescent trees, standing dead timber and decomposing logs, which encourage a diversity of birds, insects and other organisms'. John R. Packham and David J.L. Harding, *Ecology of woodland processes* (London: Arnold, 1982), p. 107.
- 4 Ecological succession can be defined as a 'non-seasonal directional change in the types and numbers of organisms present in a particular habitat over a period of time'. Packham and Harding, *Ecology of woodland processes*, p. 108. The concept has been modified since its original formulation by Frederick Clements to recognize a diversity of potential outcomes influenced by practices such as selective felling or the exclusion of animals that eat or damage young trees.
- 5 For greater detail on the Euralille project see, for example, Marc Bonneville, 'Internationalization of non-capital cities in Europe: aspects, processes and prospects', *European Planning Studies* 2.3 (1994), pp. 267–86; Federico Cuñat, Philippe Longuet, Anne-Marie Burdèse and Corinne Tiry, *Les mondes du secteur des gares à Lille* (CNRS Université de Lille, 2000); Martin K. Meade, 'Euralille: the instant city', *Architectural Review* 196 (December 1994); Peter Newman and Andy Thornley, 'Euralille: "boosterism" at the centre of Europe', *European Urban and Regional Studies* 2.3 (1995), pp. 237–46; Andy Thornley and Peter Newman, 'International competition, urban governance and planning projects: Malmö, Birmingham and Lille', *European Planning Studies* 4.5 (1996), pp. 579–93; and Max Rousseau, 'Re-imagining the city centre for the middle classes: regeneration, gentrification and symbolic policies in "loser cities"', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 33.3 (2009), pp. 770–88.

region.⁶ Parc Henri Matisse forms part of this wider cultural and economic dynamic within which architecture and landscape design have played a significant role.

The park was designed by the French gardener, landscape architect and horticultural engineer Gilles Clément, in collaboration with Eric Berlin, Claude Courtecuisse and Sylvain Flipo. It comprises two main elements: an expansive open area that is accessible to the public, and a raised island at its centre that is inaccessible. We encounter from the outset, therefore, a paradoxical public landscape that contains a closed space at its core. Though the large lawn-like space surrounding the island gives the impression of a rather uniform topography, there are also a variety of more secluded areas towards the perimeter of the park. The irregularly shaped concrete island at the centre of the park was partly constructed from the earth and rubble left behind after the excavation for the new Eurostar TGV station. The project has been presented as a large-scale ecological experiment to create a 'fallow' space in the middle of the city, removed from further human impact. The top of the island cannot be entered without the use of a ladder and is periodically monitored for its biotic diversity to observe changes in its flora. For Clément, the island will serve as an 'ecological refugia' or seed bank to allow more vulnerable species to survive and recolonize the surrounding area.

The name of the island is taken from the Derborence Forest in Switzerland, which acquired ecological significance during the twentieth century as one of very few remaining primary forests left in central Europe that have not been extensively modified by human activity since the last Ice Age because of their relative isolation and inaccessibility.⁷ In Heinz Ellenberg's landmark study *The vegetation ecology of central Europe*, for example, the Derborence Forest is regarded as 'very isolated' with a 'near natural mixed *Adenostyles-Fir* wood (*Adenostyles-Abetietum*) on a limestone substrate' and is discussed alongside other classic 'near-natural' European woodlands such as the Białowieża Forest in eastern Poland.⁸ For the historian Simon Schama, forests such as Białowieża have long held a fantastical draw on the European cultural imagination as the last remnants of a pagan arcadia and the final redoubt for larger mammals such as elk, lynx and bison, which were gradually hunted to extinction elsewhere.⁹ The artificial creation of an urban wilderness carries a cultural echo of the long-standing European fascination with 'wildness' in nature: a neo-romanticist strand that connects the eighteenth-century rediscovery of nature in poetry and literature with contemporary landscape design.

In this article we explore the significance of Parc Henri Matisse through a variety of sources, ranging from the reflections of the original designers to a series of ethnographic observations of the park and its surroundings. While we cannot consider the words of architects, planners and others as definitive in delineating the context, purpose or implications of a project of this kind, their recollections are nonetheless an indispensable dimension of the critical evaluation of their work. The analytical framework adopted here combines social scientific insights into the production of space with ideas drawn from urban ecology and the humanities. The combination of these different approaches for the study of urban space presents a series of challenges ranging from the mode of exposition to more deep-set barriers to the inclusion of aesthetic theory or art-historical approaches within the social sciences.¹⁰

6 See, for example, Frank Moulaert, Elodie Salin and Thomas Werquin, 'Euralille: large-scale urban development and social polarization', *European Urban and Regional Studies* 8.2 (2001), pp. 145–60.

7 The mystique surrounding the Derborence Forest and its mountainous environs has also been embellished by Charles-Ferdinand Ramuz's historical novel *Derborence*, first published in 1934, which evokes a remote eighteenth-century community. However, the shape of the island is derived from a completely different source: the Antipodes Island in the South Pacific Ocean.

8 Heinz Ellenberg, *The vegetation ecology of central Europe*. Fourth edition, translated by Gordon K. Strutt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

9 Simon Schama, *Landscape and memory* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995).

10 Denis Cosgrove, 'Geography within the humanities', in Stephen Daniels, Dydia DeLyser, J. Nicholas Entrikin and Douglas Richardson (eds.) *Envisioning landscapes, making worlds: geography and the humanities* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), pp. xxii–xxv.

Part of the intellectual context for this article is the emerging emphasis on the 're-wilding' of landscapes and the inclusion of 'wild nature' in urban design, whereby spaces that had hitherto been regarded as marginal or aesthetically problematic have gradually gained an increasingly significant role in urban discourse.¹¹ In part, these changes have been driven by the changing aesthetic characteristics of cities themselves and the proliferation of anomalous or 'empty' spaces, but they have also been spurred by an increased interest in examples of spontaneous urban nature from fields such as architecture, art and urban ecology. These developments can be interpreted as part of a longer-term change in the relationship between nature, landscape and modern culture. During the eighteenth century, European cultural sensibilities towards mountains and other wild places shifted in response to the rise of romanticism, the changing aesthetic and recreational tastes of metropolitan elites, and at a later stage, improvements in transport connections.¹² Similarly, in the last quarter of the twentieth century there has been growing interest in the intrinsic aesthetic qualities of abandoned, interstitial or uncultivated spaces that have proliferated through processes of industrial decline and demographic change.¹³ The 'un-scenic', to use Yuriko Saito's expression, has come to play a role within cultural discourses of nature.¹⁴ What is different about contemporary shifts in the urban culture of nature — as opposed to the culture of urban nature — is that there is an interrelationship between, on the one hand, the changing material characteristics of urban space and, on the other hand, the ways in which these spaces are experienced, represented and incorporated into the wider cultural and political arena. As Arnold Berleant, Jonathan Crary and others have pointed out: we cannot disentangle questions of aesthetics from the history of perception.¹⁵ Furthermore, nature itself, whether encountered directly or in an abstracted form, is a cultural product or synthesis so that the epithet 'wild' — especially in an urban context — is laden with pre-existing connotations. Above all, the ultimate reference point for 'the wild' — as exemplified by the European fascination with primeval spaces — represents one moment within geological time so that the more precise point of departure is the imaginary state-of-nature that existed after the last Ice Age, some 10,000 years ago, before the accelerated human impact of recent centuries.¹⁶

We can also observe that whilst these contemporary changes in urban cultures of nature have strongly international dimensions encompassing much of Europe, North America and even parts of east Asia and the global South, they are nevertheless characterized by a strong attachment to the particularities and distinctiveness of specific

11 In North America the emphasis on 're-wilding' has been primarily oriented towards remote or wilderness areas, whereas in Europe there has been greater emphasis on agro-cultural landscapes, including cities. See, for example, C.J. Donlan, J. Berger, C.E. Bock, J.H. Bock, D.A. Burney, J.A. Estes, D. Foreman, P.S. Martin, G.W. Roemer, F.A. Smith, M.E. Soule and H.W. Greene, 'Pleistocene rewilding: an optimistic agenda for twenty-first century conservation', *The American Naturalist* 168.5 (November 2006), pp. 660–81; Dave Foreman, *Rewilding North America: a vision for conservation in the 21st century* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2004).

12 See Raymond Williams, *The country and the city* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973).

13 See Richard Mabey, *The unofficial countryside* (London: Collins, 1973).

14 Yuriko Saito, 'The aesthetics of unscenic nature', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 56.2 (1998), pp. 101–11.

15 See Arnold Berleant, 'The aesthetics of art and nature', in Salim Kemal and Ivan Gaskell (eds.) *Landscape, natural beauty and the arts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 228–43; Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the observer: on vision and modernity in the nineteenth century* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1990); and Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of perception: attention, spectacle, and modern culture* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1999).

16 Constance Heau, 'Pour conclure, provisoirement... entretien avec Gilles Clément', in Thierry Paquot and Chris Younès (eds.) *Philosophie de l'environnement et milieux urbains* (Paris: Éditions la Découverte, 2010), pp. 163–78.

places.¹⁷ Whereas in Britain or Germany, for example, the effects of de-industrialization, and at an earlier stage war-time destruction, were significant spurs to the study of disturbed or newly created sites, the pattern in France has encompassed a more diffuse definition of the 'rural' and the 'urban', with particular emphasis on the term '*friche*', meaning fallow or unused land.¹⁸ Unlike the word 'wasteland' — which predominates in the Anglo-American literature — the use of the term *friche* denotes a sense of connection between past use and possible productive use in the future: as land lies fallow it may 'recuperate' and rebuild its soil structure, nutrient base and other features. This is significant because the presence of so-called 'weeds' may, in fact, be reinterpreted as a specific ecological assemblage that performs tasks such as nitrogen-fixing so that the agency of nature is subtly highlighted through the choice of vocabulary.

As we shall see in the case of Gilles Clément, it is his initial observations of uncultivated rural areas that were then applied to landscape design in an urban context that underpinned the early development of his professional practice. Though the 1970s mark a kind of watershed with its emerging confluence of environmentalism, urban ecology and the proliferation of marginal spaces within European cities, we can, in fact, trace the aesthetic and scientific roots of this change to a much earlier date: since the early decades of the twentieth century, and in some cases even earlier, there have been meticulous botanical surveys of spontaneous assemblages of plants in Berlin, London, Paris and many other European cities.¹⁹ And within the practices of architecture and urban design more generally there have been significant precedents to the current emphasis on reworking relations between ecology and urban form that pre-date the first wave of environmentalism in the 1960s.²⁰ In the French context alone it is necessary to acknowledge the multiplicity of cultural, philosophical and scientific connotations attached to the concept of urban nature that encompass not only its systematic study but also diverse reformulations through the practices of architecture, engineering and urban design.²¹

A paradise of weeds

The growing interest in marginal urban landscapes has tended to repeatedly emphasize the utilitarian potential of so-called 'waste spaces' rather than their intrinsic qualities.²² There is an implicit mistrust of 'letting things be' or thinking creatively about how spontaneous processes of ecological change might enrich the city in unexpected ways. What is especially interesting about Clément's design for Lille is an attempt to deliberately include a 'wild space' within the urban landscape as a novel synthesis between an aesthetics of disorder and recent advances in ecological science.

17 Examples of the urban appropriation of 'wild nature' outside of Europe or North America include the Sanjay Gandhi National Park at the northern edge of Mumbai and the Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve in Singapore. In both these cases, fragments of original landscapes and ecosystems have been incorporated into urban space.

18 See, for example, Michael Jakob, *Le paysage* (Gollion: Éditions Infolio, 2008); Yves Lacoste, *De la géographie aux paysages: dictionnaire de la géographie* (Paris: Armand Collin, 2003); Henri Lefebvre, *Du rural à l'urbain* (Paris: Anthropos, 1970).

19 See, for example, Rodney Burton, *Flora of the London area* (London Natural History Society, 1983) and Paul Jovet, 'Evolution des groupements rudéraux "parisiens"', *Bulletin de la Société Botanique de France* 87 (1940), pp. 305–12.

20 On earlier combinations of ecology with urban design see, for example, David H. Haney, *When modern was green: life and work of landscape architect Leberecht Migge* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2010) and Volker M. Welter, *Biopolis: Patrick Geddes and the city of life* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2002).

21 See Paquot and Younès, *Philosophie de l'environnement et milieux urbains*.

22 Examples of contemporary utilitarianism in landscape design include Alan Berger, 'Drosscape', in Charles Waldheim (ed.) *The landscape urbanism reader* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2006), pp. 197–218; and Richard Weller, 'An art of instrumentality: thinking through landscape urbanism', in C. Waldheim (ed.) *The landscape urbanism reader* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2006), pp. 69–85.

Clément has characterized abandoned or overlooked spaces not as ‘brownfield sites’ or ‘waste ground’ in the conventional sense but rather as a ‘paradise of weeds’ marked by unexpected assemblages of species and new aesthetic formations.²³ Clément, who has been teaching at the *École du Paysage de Versailles* since 1979, has consistently sought to combine his interest in landscape with developments in ecological science and the politics of biodiversity. He has used the ecological dynamics of waste or fallow spaces as the starting point for his distinctive conception of landscape design. His first significant project originated from an abandoned field in Vassivière-en-Limousin, central France, which he bought in 1977 to enable detailed observations of ecological, structural and aesthetic changes on fallow land. He later extended this first project called *La Vallée* (The Valley) to a nearby site called *Le Champ* (The Field) in 1995 where the only interventions made were an annual mowing during the second week of September (to enhance botanical diversity) and the construction of a simple wooden observation platform, which he called the *radeau des champs* (literally ‘raft of the fields’) after the botanist Francis Hallé, who used an inflatable structure called the *radeau des cimes* (‘raft of the peaks’) to observe the canopy of tropical rainforests in Africa.²⁴ From these field experiments Clément developed his conception of the *jardin en mouvement* or ‘garden in movement’, which follows its own logic of change with minimal human interference. Clément found that under a temperate climate a seven-year period is typically needed for a new ecological assemblage to take shape and that certain biennial genera such as *Digitalis* and *Verbascum* — which are themselves characteristic of disturbed ground — play a special role, because they continually rearrange their presence to produce an unpredictable mosaic that confounds formal conceptions of garden design.²⁵

Clément first gained international prominence with the garden he designed for Parc André Citroën in 1992, in collaboration with Allain Provost and others, on the site of the original Citroën car factory in Paris that had been in operation from 1915 until its dismantling in the 1970s (see Figure 1). This large site next to the river Seine provided an opportunity for a major international design competition for the redevelopment of a post-industrial space with the construction of one of the most significant public landscapes since the parks of Jean-Charles Alphand in the Haussmann era.²⁶ This park, along with Bernard Tschumi’s 1982 design for the Parc de la Villette on the site of an extensive abattoir and meat market in the north of Paris, represents a key development in the recent history of urban design.²⁷

Clément has referred to Parc Henri Matisse as a ‘fragment of the third landscape’, a concept he first introduced in 2002 after observing aerial photographs of variations in land use in the Limoges region of central France.²⁸ Clément noticed that uncultivated reservoirs of biodiversity can be seen as fragments or islands nestling among vast monocultural landscapes devoted to industrialized agriculture or plantation forestry. His use of the term ‘third landscape’ references the revolutionary anti-aristocratic tract on the ‘third estate’ written by Emmanuel-Joseph Sieyès in 1789 and underlines Clément’s interest in

23 Alain Roger, cited in Giovanna Borasi ‘De la nature à l’environnement, “en vérité, il est difficile de faire une place à l’homme”’, in Giovanna Borasi (ed.) *Gilles Clément/Philippe Rahm: environ(ne)ment: manières d’agir pour demain* (Montreal: Centre Canadien d’Architecture; Milan: Skira, 2006), p. 41. See also Gilles Clément, ‘Je ne veux pas être un jardinier qui tue’, interview with Martine Robert, *Oeil* 599 (February 2008), pp. 124–9; and Gilles Clément, ‘What about grass?’ in *Les Cahiers de l’École de Blois: Landscapes* (March 2009), pp. 44–7.

24 See Jean-François Pousse, ‘The end of scorn?’, *Techniques and architecture* 486 (October/November 2006), pp. 48–53.

25 Gilles Clément, *Le jardin en mouvement: de La Vallée au parc André Citroën* (Paris: Sens et Tonka, 1994).

26 Lorette Coen, ‘Gilles Clément: the planetary gardener’, *scape* 2 (November 2007), pp. 46–61.

27 See Charlotte Ellis, ‘Parc André Citroën: the rage in Paris’, *Landscape Architecture* 83.4 (April 1993), pp. 59–65.

28 Sonia Keravel, ‘The art of transmission: mediating meaning in contemporary French landscape design’, *Journal of Landscape Architecture* 5.1 (Spring 2010), pp. 60–71.



Figure 1 Parc André Citroën, Paris, November 2008 (photo by the author)

'landscapes of resistance' against either neglect or utilitarian erasure.²⁹ For Clément, the 'third landscape' or *tiers paysage* is characterized by its higher biotic diversity than surrounding areas and has three forms: the abandoned or *délaissé* space associated with past agricultural or industrial uses; the *réserve* spaces that have been scarcely modified by human activity whether by chance or inaccessibility; and designated nature reserves — the *ensemble primaire* — which enjoy some form of legal protection.³⁰ It is the idea of *délaissé* space, however, that is of particular significance for urban wastelands. If we apply Clément's distinction between these three forms of 'third landscape' to Derborence Island we find that it is an artificially created *délaissé* space (since the space has been removed from production) that has been designed to resemble a *réserve* space (the recreation of a primary forest) and might over time acquire the legal protection associated with an *ensemble primaire*. In Lille, we have an opportunity to observe directly a range of Clément's concepts in practice, ranging from his early emphasis on the 'garden in movement' to his more recent concern with marginal spaces, global species assemblages and attempts to link landscape design with environmental politics.

For Clément, the ecological vibrancy of *délaissé* or abandoned space evokes 'wonder and enchantment'.³¹ These sites serve as scientific observatories for the recording and enjoyment of biodiversity so that the experience of landscape becomes a shared scientific project. The emphasis on 'attentive observation' is both a form of aesthetic pleasure and a form of ecological advocacy.³² The ecological interest in waste spaces fostered by

29 Gilles Clément, *Manifeste du tiers paysage* (Paris: Éditions Sujet/Objet, 2004).

30 Clément, *Manifeste du tiers paysage*.

31 Gilles Clément, 'Faire avec (et jamais contre) la nature/Working with (and never against) nature' in Giovanna Borasi (ed.) *Gilles Clément/Philippe Rahm: environ(ne)ment: manières d'agir pour demain* (Montreal: Centre Canadien d'Architecture; Milan: Skira, 2006), pp. 56–101, 90–103.

32 Gilles Clément, *La sagesse du jardinier* (Paris: L'Oeil neuf Éditions, 2004).

Clément raises wider questions about the biodiversity of cities in comparison with surrounding areas: some studies suggest that an increasing diversity of habitats acts as a kind of sanctuary for many threatened species, whereas contrasting research has emphasized how higher levels of urban biodiversity may persist for geological reasons in spite of the presence of cities themselves.³³ However, it is certainly true that abandoned or uncultivated spaces in cities provide more aesthetic variety than many of the designed landscapes associated with ‘globalized uniformity’.³⁴

Cities provide specialized micro-habitats that have enabled an enormous diversity of species to flourish, especially those that would have only prospered before human occupation through the impact of dramatic events such as fires or storms, which opened up forest canopies for sudden concentrations of fast-growing species favouring disturbed ground. The relationship between urban nature and ruderal ecology (derived from the Latin word *rudera*, plural of *rudus*, meaning rubble) can be traced to early botanical studies of walls, ruins and other artificial substrates, but it is in the wake of twentieth-century aerial warfare in the 1940s that sustained ecological attention has been given to disturbed ground in cities.³⁵ In terms of the aesthetics of waste spaces there are specific properties of nutrient-poor calcareous or stony sites that foster a rich variety of flowering plants, including many rare or adventitious species.³⁶

Clément’s interest in the global mixing of species through his conception of *brassage planétaire* is at variance with ‘nativist’ approaches to landscape design that seek to eliminate ‘alien’ species — a sentiment that reveals an intellectual lineage between regionalist or static conceptions of landscape and contemporary forms of landscape design that valorize certain species on historical grounds.³⁷ It is for this reason that Clément seeks to distance himself from variants of ecological politics that prioritize indigenous species or adopt anti-humanist or neo-Malthusian positions towards social justice.³⁸ Like Bruno Latour, Clément tries to differentiate his conception of nature from the use of nature — however arbitrarily defined — as a blueprint for social policy.

33 On the high biodiversity of urban wastelands see, for example, Richard Mabey, *Weeds* (London: Profile, 2010); Linda M. Puth and Catherine E. Burns, ‘New York’s nature: a review of the status and trends in species richness across the metropolitan region’, *Diversity and Distributions* 15.1 (2009), pp. 12–21; Jean-Pierre L. Savard, Philippe Clergeau and Gwenaëlle Mennechez, ‘Biodiversity concepts and urban ecosystems’, *Landscape and Urban Planning* 48.3 (2000), pp. 131–42; Stefan Zerbe, Ute Maurer, Solveig Schmitz and Herbert Sukopp, ‘Biodiversity in Berlin and its potential for nature conservation’, *Landscape and Urban Planning* 62.3 (2003), pp. 139–48.

34 Michèle Collin, ‘Nouvelles urbanités des friches’, *Multitudes* 6 (2001), pp. 148–55.

35 On the emergence of urban ecology as a distinct sub-field of ecological science see, for example, Ian C. Laurie (ed.) *Nature in cities: the natural environment in the design and development of urban green space* (Chichester: John Wiley, 1979); Mike Davis, ‘Dead cities: a natural history’, in *Dead Cities* (New York: New Press, 2002), pp. 360–99; Olivert Gilbert, *The ecology of urban habitats* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1989); Gerhard Hard, ‘Vegetationsgeographie und sozialökologie einer Stadt’ [Vegetation geography and social ecology of a city], *Geographische Zeitung* 75 (1985), pp. 125–44; Jens Lachmund, ‘Exploring the city of rubble: botanical fieldwork in bombed cities in Germany after World War II’, *Osiris* 18 (2003), pp. 234–54; and Herbert Sukopp, *Stadtökologie: das Beispiel Berlin* [City ecology: the Berlin example] (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer, 1990).

36 Norbert Kühn, ‘Intentions for the unintentional: spontaneous vegetation as the basis for innovative planting design in urban areas’, *Journal of Landscape Architecture* 5.3 (Autumn 2006), pp. 46–53.

37 See, for example, Gert Gröning, ‘Ideological aspects of nature garden concepts in late twentieth-century Germany’, in Joachim Wolschke-Bulmahn (ed.) *Nature and ideology: natural garden design in the twentieth century* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1997), pp. 221–248; Anthony D. Kendle and Julie E. Rose, ‘The aliens have landed! What are the justifications for “native only” policies in landscape plantings?’, *Landscape and Urban Planning* 47.1–2 (February 2000), pp. 19–31; and Jan Woudstra, ‘The changing nature of ecology: a history of ecological planting’, in Nigel Dunnett and James Hitchmough (eds.) *The dynamic landscape* (London: Spon, 2004), pp. 23–57.

38 Gilles Clément, *L’Eloge des vagabondes: herbes, arbres et fleurs à la conquête du monde* (Paris: Nil éditions, 2002); and Gilles Clément and Louisa Jones, *Gilles Clément: une écologie humaniste* (Geneva: Aubanel, 2006).

However, unlike Latour, Clément's disaffection with conservative strands of political ecology does not lead towards the network-oriented ontologies of post-humanism but to his evolving conception of *écologie humaniste* (humanist ecology) that remains rooted in a clearly differentiated reading of the human subject.³⁹ In this sense, Clément's political project can be read as an elaboration rather than a repudiation of modernity: the sciences of botany, ecology and other fields are enlisted into a synthesis that holds parallels with various strands of 'eco-socialism' and other environmental ideas that have developed within the European arena since the 1970s. He rejects the hyper-specialization of contemporary science and enlists eighteenth-century polymaths such as Alexander von Humboldt into his neo-romanticist world view.⁴⁰ However, what is distinctive about Clément's contribution to urban environmental discourse is his search for a radical combination of environmental politics with landscape design. Yet in the case of Parc Henri Matisse the inaccessibility of the central island runs counter to the Lefebvre-inspired emphasis on the 'right to urban nature' and wider connections between nature, landscape and urban environmental justice.⁴¹ It also mirrors — albeit unintentionally — the exclusionary dynamics of the political machine that underpinned the Euralille development.⁴²

Encountering the park

In order to enter Parc Henri Matisse from the Lille TGV station it is necessary to pass through a plaza within the Euralille shopping complex. The space is dominated by a public sculpture comprising three giant tulips by the Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama, which dates from the city's designation as 'European culture capital' in 2004. A few metres further, at the edge of the park, stands a bronze statue of the former French President François Mitterrand, designed by François Cacheux and installed in 1998. Both these public art commissions — the giant flowers and the commemorative statue — stand in sharp contrast with Clément's design for Parc Henri Matisse. The park itself consists primarily of a large lawn-like open space (a somewhat ironic feature, given Clément's widely expressed antipathy towards lawns) with Derborence Island set prominently at its centre (see Figure 2). The 'lawn' is in many respects the material and symbolic antithesis of any conception of urban nature that might place greater emphasis on biodiversity, spontaneity or the aesthetic delights of 'wild nature'. However, on closer inspection, what appears to be an expanse of short grass actually includes many other non-grass species such as *Plantago lanceolata*, *Ranunculus repens* and *Trifolium repens*, mowed down to a neat turf so that this space is better interpreted as an urban meadow subject to a frequent mowing regime. Various infrastructural fittings are also set in the ground, including drainage grids, access plates for telecoms and other services, and a series of

39 One interesting alternative to Clément's close reading of urban space through 'attentive observation' is that provided by Bruno Latour and Emilie Hermant in their study of Paris. See Latour and Hermant, *Paris: ville invisible* (Paris: La Découverte-Les Empêcheurs de Penser en Rond, 1998). The term 'posthumanism', notoriously difficult to pin down, generally denotes a degree of de-centering or questioning of the omniscience of the human subject. For a contemporary overview see Carey Wolfe, *What is posthumanism?* (London and Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

40 Gilles Clément, 'Un jardinier naturaliste à l'aube du XXI^e siècle', interview in *L'actualité Poitou-Charentes* 42 (October 1998), pp. 14–19.

41 See Mark Whitehead, 'The wood for the trees: ordinary environmental injustice and the everyday right to urban nature', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 33.3 (2009), pp. 662–81.

42 See Romain Garbaye, *Getting into local power: the politics of ethnic minorities in British and French cities* (Oxford and Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005).



Figure 2 Parc Henri Matisse, Lille, March 2010 (photo by the author)

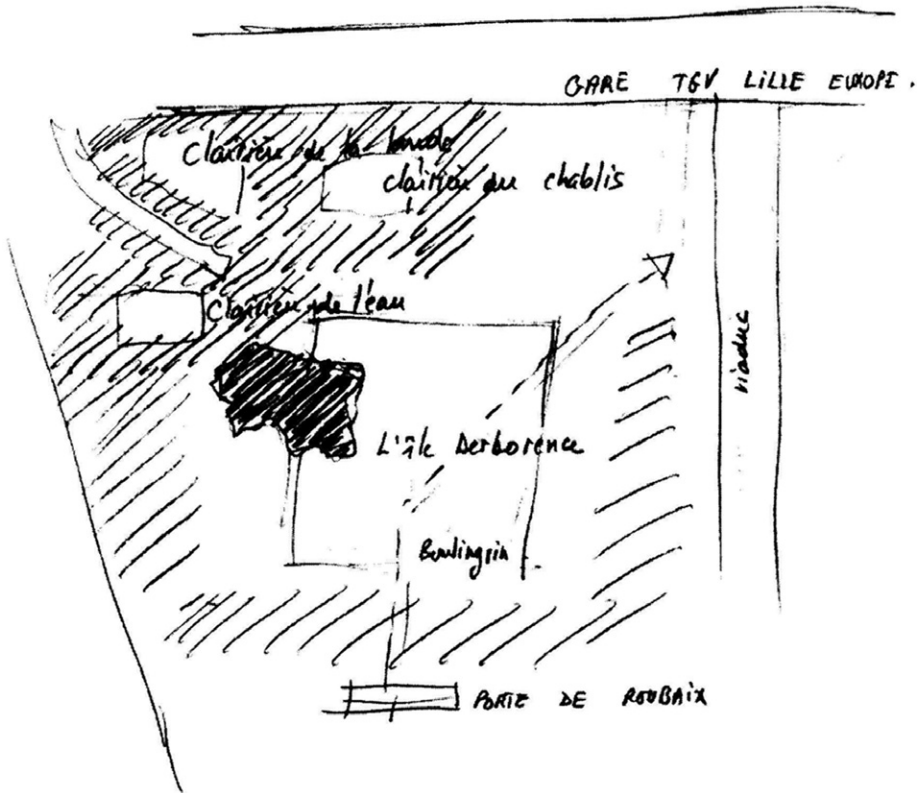


Figure 3 Sketch for Parc Henri Matisse by Gilles Clément (c. 1990), reproduced with permission

lights around the island itself in lichen-encrusted casements. The park is a closely managed and intricately engineered piece of metropolitan nature that renders the central island even more anomalous in relation to the highly organized surrounding landscape: with the exception of three small patches of woodland to the north and west of the island — *la clairière du Marais*, *la clairière du Chablis* and *la clairière de la Lande* — the landscape appears to have little topographic variation (see Figure 3). In fact, the park actually contains many smaller islands of ‘wild nature’, since there are numerous patches or spaces around individual trees or paths that are only mowed intermittently, creating a series of verdant edge-like effects (there are signs that indicate that these overgrown areas are created by *fauchage tardif* [late mowing] to provide refuges for wildlife). On a warm day the open grassland is crowded with people, including families, couples and people sitting alone, while more secluded areas can be found to the north of the central island or towards the Porte de Roubaix.

Although the park has been generally well received in professional journals, the response in Lille itself has been much more muted or even hostile. Writing in *Lotus International*, for example, Giuseppe Marinoni suggests that Clément’s project develops from ‘the recognition and exaltation of the intrinsic values of a *terrain vague*’.⁴³ But it is precisely this uncertain relationship with design expectations that underpins the problematic relationship between the park and the city. Fears have been expressed about the park becoming a ‘gathering place’ for ‘undesirable’ people, perhaps because of its proximity to the main railway station or the restricted lines of view created by the concrete island.⁴⁴ The mayor of Lille since 2001 and leader of the French Socialist Party, Martine Aubry, adopted a populist stance and initially derided the island as ‘visual pollution’ and residents in high-end apartments overlooking the park have expressed consternation at the presence of what appears to be *friche* (fallow land) beneath their windows.⁴⁵ By contrast, the previous mayor, Pierre Mauroy, strongly supported the project and was a member of the original jury for the design competition.⁴⁶ Mauroy, mayor of Lille from 1973 to 2001 and President of the Lille Métropole Communauté Urbaine from 1989 to 2008, clearly viewed the park as integral to the larger Euralille development, yet over time its anomalous characteristics have become more apparent.

The landscape designer Sonia Keravel describes how Parc Henri Matisse is radically different from most other contemporary approaches to French landscape design and can be clearly differentiated from the unambiguous historicism of figures such as Bernard Lassus. Yet Keravel’s perceptive analysis also reveals the limits to ‘landscape design’ as an appropriate conceptual paradigm for the interpretation of urban landscapes. There is an implicit didacticism and utilitarianism that runs through the discourse of landscape design, which presupposes the existence of a relationship between professional practice and public culture. If the intellectual context is complex, obscure or only partly formed, however, a connection with a pre-existing public discourse is harder to establish and sustain: the example of Lille is interesting in this respect because Parc Henri Matisse is modelled on a mix of aesthetic and scientific ideas and its design is unrelated to the local context, apart from the history of fortifications on the site.

43 Giuseppe Marinoni, ‘The Henri Matisse Park’, *Lotus International* 122 (November 2004), p. 113.

44 A survey of over 2,000 inhabitants on behalf of Euralille found that only a third of the people questioned frequented Parc Henri Matisse. Criticisms of the park included the lack of trees or flowers, along with fear of crime. From <http://www.saem-euralille.fr/ACTUALITIES> (accessed 30 March 2010).

45 Sonia Keravel, ‘The art of transmission: mediating meaning in contemporary French landscape design’, *Journal of Landscape Architecture* 5.1 (Spring 2010), pp. 60–71. In June 2010 Martine Aubry launched a campaign, ‘la mission friches’ (mission fallow land), for the ‘reconquest’ of industrial wastelands in the Lille metropolitan region.

46 Gilles Clément, e-mail to the author, 8 March 2011.

The imposing presence of Derborence Island at the centre of the park clearly raises difficulties in terms of public comprehension or engagement. The park's information plaques suggest that the island is an invitation to reflect on the relationship between nature and the city but the site must nevertheless remain inaccessible on scientific grounds. 'Through its symbolic composition', explains the plaque, 'it invites the visitor to reflect upon the place of nature in an urban environment'. Yet the actual scientific rationale or the preliminary results of site surveys since the completion of the park in 1995 have not been made publicly available. One of the difficulties is that the original design for the island included a research and education centre with a giant periscope to enable ecological changes on the top of the structure to be observed by the public. The relationship between the potential acceptance of urban wilderness and opportunities for public access, education and other forms of involvement is now widely recognized as a key element in successful attempts to create 'wild' urban spaces.⁴⁷ Yet the final outcome in the case of Parc Henri Matisse was greatly simplified on grounds of cost, leaving the park with no educational or observational facilities, which has proved to be a significant element in the lack of public interest or understanding.⁴⁸ Indeed, 'shutting people out' on the ostensible grounds of scientific necessity — even if initially driven by fiscal constraints — has statist connotations that run counter to the creative, liberatory and pedagogic possibilities engendered by less ordered spaces within the contemporary city. The crucial issue here is the role of scientific knowledge in the enhanced aesthetic appreciation of nature, which differs from the neo-Kantian tradition of 'disinterested contemplation' rooted in a restricted conception of both the human subject and the object of contemplation.⁴⁹ By emphasizing the interrelationship between scientific knowledge and aesthetic appreciation, as Clément originally intended, the socio-ecological relations of nature or fragments of nature become much more significant. Science not only plays a role in making nature 'visible' but also contributes towards the aesthetic experience. We can argue that whilst Derborence Island represents an 'aesthetic symbiosis' of art and nature the park as a whole can be conceived as a 'third object' produced dialectically from the antinomy between the island of disordered nature at its core and the more closely controlled features that surround it.⁵⁰ Perhaps the most successful features of the park are not the striking island at its centre but the numerous 'edge' spaces towards the perimeter that present a tangible and accessible combination of *friche*-type landscapes with the more familiar components of a municipal park.⁵¹

But what are we to make of public landscapes that require extra 'work' in order to be appreciated or understood? It is difficult to conceive of any other recent park design that is so uncompromising in terms its underlying rationale. An experimental space of nature could potentially involve years of botanical or entomological study to produce the desired degree of aesthetic-taxonomic rapture. This notion of additional 'work' presents formidable difficulties in relation to nature or landscape as opposed to cultural artefacts placed in the institutional setting of a gallery or sculpture garden. Conceptions of nature, natural beauty and landscape are so tightly bound up with the 'naturalization'

47 Dieter Rink, 'Surrogate nature or wilderness? Social perceptions and notions of nature in an urban context', in Ingo Kowarik and Stefan Körner (eds.) *Wild urban woodlands: new perspectives for urban forestry* (Berlin: Springer, 2005), pp. 67–80.

48 Gilles Clément, e-mail to the author, 8 March 2011. See also Gilles Clément, interview with Isabelle Menu and Frank Vermandel, in *Euralille: the making of a new city center* (Espace Croisé, Basel: Birkhäuser, 1996), pp. 132–35.

49 See Allen Carlson, 'Appreciating art and appreciating nature', in Salim Kemal and Ivan Gaskell (eds.) *Landscape, natural beauty and the arts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 199–227.

50 See Donald W. Crawford, 'Comparing natural and aesthetic beauty', in Kemal and Gaskell, *Landscape, natural beauty and the arts*, pp. 183–98.

51 See also Bernadette Lizet, 'Du terrain vague à la friche paysagée', *Ethnologie Française* 40.4 (2010), pp. 597–608.

of capitalist urbanization that it is extremely difficult to alter or challenge public expectations. Furthermore, if the aesthetic value of Derborence Island stems partly from the ecological processes that it contains, and also the wider geo-physical dynamics to which it alludes, then a different kind of aesthetic scale is implied that transcends the site-specific aspects of Land Art as conventionally conceived. If we can find aesthetic value in the ecological process itself, as Yuriko Saito suggests, then the ultimate object of appreciation may be vast.⁵² And if we accept the legitimacy of making intellectual demands on the public for the appreciation of nature and landscape, this poses a particular challenge for Clément's park design, since its interpretation requires an understanding of multiple fields of knowledge.

For Galen Cranz, a distinctive feature of modern parks has been 'an accumulated set of intended moral lessons', yet for Parc Henri Matisse this didactic impulse has been rendered so obscure that the project remains largely an object of aesthetic contemplation or derision.⁵³ Following Manfredo Tafuri, Cranz suggests that the ideal park should play an integrative function as a utopian space in dynamic opposition to the wider strictures and injustices of everyday urban life. But where does Cranz's dialectical reading of park history leave Parc Henri Matisse? The interplay between the classic municipal park and the industrial city that Cranz describes does not morph easily into a simple relationship between an ecological park in the sense that Clément has sought to achieve and the socio-cultural characteristics of the late-modern or post-industrial metropolis. The science of ecology is itself complex and dynamic, irrespective of the metaphorical and ideological power of 'ecology' as a conceptual tool within urban design: we find, for example, emerging tensions between nativist preoccupations with landscape authenticity and alternative readings of socio-nature adopted within urban political ecology and other fields that acknowledge the distinctive forms of nature produced by urbanization.⁵⁴ In the case of Parc Henri Matisse, for example, it is difficult to conceive of an ecological design rooted within a narrow definition of 'ecological restoration', since the literal transformation of the site into its original state would serve little cultural, historical or ecological purpose. Even more nuanced readings of ecological restoration that encompass the particularities of human history also sit uneasily alongside this project.⁵⁵ What is really at stake within urban design discourse is a spectrum of anthropogenic landscapes with varied scientific underpinnings and symbolic resonances.

This lack of connection between Derborence Island and Lille is reflected in its limited cultural or cartographic presence within the city. The programme for Lille's environmental '21 festival' held in 2010, for example, includes a detailed 'green map' of the city, but the island is only present as an unidentified grey space. In fact, most maps of Lille simply present Derborence Island as an unnamed amorphous area within Parc Henri Matisse adjacent to the historically significant Porte de Roubaix. This cartographic lacuna is telling because it underlines the degree to which this vast structure has no iconic status within the city: it appears to provide no cultural or representational coordinates of any kind. An urban profile or portrait emerges in which there is an effective abnegation of a highly visible part of the city.⁵⁶ A historical parallel might be found in the controversy over Richard Serra's public sculpture entitled *Tilted Arc*, which was installed in New York's Federal Plaza in 1981 and was eventually removed and destroyed in 1989.⁵⁷ Thus far,

52 Saito, 'The aesthetics of unscenic nature'.

53 Galen Cranz, *The politics of park design* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1982), p. 253.

54 See Nik Heynen, Maria Kaïka and Erik Swyngedouw (eds.) *In the nature of cities: urban political ecology and the politics of urban metabolism* (London: Routledge, 2006).

55 See, for example, Eric Higgs, *Nature by design: people, natural process, and ecological restoration* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2003).

56 See Louis Marin, 'The city in its map and portrait', in *On representation* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press [1994] 2001), pp. 212–13.

57 See Richard Serra, 'Introduction', in Clara Weyergraf-Serra and Martha Buskirk (eds.) *The destruction of Tilted Arc: documents* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1991), pp. 3–17.

however, despite Mayor Aubry's high-profile intervention, Derborence Island has not become the focus of any sustained campaign for its modification or removal.

The limits to avant-garde urbanism

Rather than a designed landscape in the conventional sense, Derborence Island is better conceived as a public sculpture: a site-specific commission that is more abstract than most examples of park design, not least through its inaccessibility and forbidding concrete exterior. In this respect Clément's structure bears significant similarities with the kind of art pioneered by Herman de Vries, Michael Heizer, Robert Smithson and other artists during the late 1960s and early 1970s, which revolved around the practice of what the art historian Rosalind Krauss has termed 'site construction', characterized by the 'combination of *landscape* and *not-landscape*'.⁵⁸ For Krauss, these radical extensions and inversions of twentieth-century sculptural practice form part of a nascent postmodernism in the 1970s that she terms 'the expanded field', arising from an erasure of distinctions between different materials, practices and institutional settings. Narrowly teleological understandings of art were being challenged and displaced by new understandings of cultural practice that incorporated a variety of site-specific works. We find that Clément's design for Parc Henri Matisse defies straightforward categorization through its radical combination of architecture and landscape. Rather than abstractions from nature, the creation of site-specific fusions between art and nature blurs the boundary between nature and culture and exemplifies the complexity of ecological metaphors in urban space.

We can find precedents for Clément's Derborence Island in other works such as Robert Smithson's *Floating Island* (1970), a microcosm of the original nature of Manhattan Island to be installed on a barge and towed around the Manhattan shoreline (though never completed in his lifetime, the project was eventually realized in 2005). An interesting parallel can also be found in the Dutch artist Herman de Vries's *sanctuarium* series, which involves closing off parcels of land so that no human intervention is possible. De Vries draws a distinction between the uncultivated spaces of the city, which he calls *terrain vague* (a term ascribed to the Spanish architect Ignasi de Solà-Morales Rubió) and the 'culturally impoverished nature' that is to be found in conventional parks.⁵⁹ De Vries's second *sanctuarium* project in Münster, for example, is a round brick structure created in 1997 with no entrance and only four oval observation points at eye level. These *oculi* allow changes in the landscape inside the structure to be observed, but the public cannot enter the site.⁶⁰ Like Clément's Derborence Island, de Vries's *sanctuarium* series is notable because it consists of long-term projects placed in public spaces. In general, however, experimental forms of Land Art in an urban context have tended to be either temporary (for example, Christo and Jean-Claude's wrapping of bridges and buildings), located in marginal zones (Robert Smithson's explorations of de-industrialized New Jersey) or contained within institutionally demarcated spaces (Walter de Maria's *Earth Room* in Lower Manhattan). Even the most experimental contemporary park designs, such as Bernard Tschumi's Parc de la Villette (1982–90), contain a variety of unusual features such as follies that are at least symbolically recognizable even if they have no obvious functional role. It is the size, complexity and long-term presence of Clément's Derborence Island that is distinctive.

58 Rosalind Krauss, 'Sculpture in the expanded field', *October* 8 (Spring 1979), p. 41.

59 Herman de Vries, 'Terrain vague', in *No art — no city! Stadtutopien in der zeitgenössischen Kunst* [No art — no city! Urban utopias in contemporary art] (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2003[1999]), pp. 156–7.

60 Mel Gooding, *Herman de Vries: chance and change* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2006).

Clément's conception of a self-organizing or spontaneous landscape involves the incorporation of processes such as ecological succession and the arrival of adventitious species. Yet the incorporation of wild plants into landscape design is not new: in 1870, for example, William Robinson published *The Wild Garden*, in which he argued that 'wild plants' can thrive with little intervention and rival cultivated species in their aesthetic appeal. Robinson distinguished his 'wild garden' from picturesque landscapes that might resemble 'the old idea of "wilderness"' but can only be sustained through 'ceaseless care'.⁶¹ Yet as Clément remarks, 'even with Robinson, the garden is still a representation, a spectacle' rather than a parcel of land shaped only by the dynamics of nature.⁶² Central to Clément's vision is a redefinition of the role of designer as a 'guide' to steer innate processes of landscape change and reintegrate the natural and the artificial. This is not a call to dispense with design altogether, since this would surely undermine the *raison d'être* for Clément's own work, but rather an argument for greater acknowledgement of the independent agency of nature. The enduring appeal of Robinson's 'wild garden', as Anne Helmreich suggests, lies in its ambivalence towards modernity and its ideological malleability.⁶³ The idea of 'wildness' in landscape design owes its historical origins to the eighteenth-century picturesque, in which the most prized vistas appear to have been magically invoked by the powers of nature alone rather than human design.⁶⁴ Yet this idea of a view that artfully improves upon elements of nature does not readily apply to Clément's Derborence Island, since the raised plateau cannot really be seen from the park apart from the overhanging branches and vegetation spilling down the concrete walls: this landscape within a landscape must be largely left to the imagination.

The use of wild rather than cultivated plants in landscape design has more recently undergone a reprise in response to the 'on-going decline of public landscape maintenance'.⁶⁵ In addition to the proliferation of wild spaces associated with de-industrialization and demographic decline, the shift away from more intensive forms of landscape maintenance such as regular mowing, weeding and other activities has contributed towards the changing character of urban landscapes. The rise of the 'natural garden movement' in Europe since the 1970s, the popularization of urban botany and the greater community use of 'empty spaces' in many cities has also produced a wide-ranging challenge to conventional models of park management and the provision of urban nature.⁶⁶ The closely manicured municipal park, as it evolved in the nineteenth century, was a labour-intensive landscape that is now increasingly difficult to replicate. The inclusion of relatively autonomous elements such as semi-natural flood plains and other features in contemporary park design clearly has fiscal as well as ecological

61 William Robinson, *The wild garden* (London: John Murray, 1884 [1870]).

62 Gilles Clément, 'Changing the myth', interview with Anne de Charmant in *Art and Design* 12 (1997), pp. 35.

63 Anne Helmreich, 'Re-presenting nature: ideology, art, and science in William Robinson's "wild garden"', in Joachim Wolschke-Bulmahn (ed.) *Nature and ideology: natural garden design in the twentieth century*, pp. 81–111.

64 In Kantian terms, 'the purposiveness in its form must seem to be free from all constraint of arbitrary rules as if it were product of mere nature'. Cited in Crawford, 'Comparing natural and aesthetic beauty', in Kemal and Gaskell, *Landscape, natural beauty and the arts*, p. 187.

65 James Hitchmough and Nigel Dunnett, 'Introduction to naturalistic planting in urban landscapes', in Nigel Dunnett and James Hitchmough (eds.) *The dynamic landscape*, p. 1.

66 See Gaëlle Aggeri, *La nature sauvage et champêtre dans les villes: origine et construction de la gestion différenciée des espaces verts publics et urbains: le cas de la ville de Montpellier*, unpublished PhD dissertation, École Nationale du Génie Rural, des Eaux et des Forêts, Paris, 2004; Norbert Kühn, 'Intentions for the unintentional: spontaneous vegetation as the basis for innovative planting design in urban areas', pp. 46–53; and Ingo Kowarik, 'Wild urban woodlands: towards a conceptual framework', in Ingo Kowarik and Stefan Körner (eds.) *Wild urban woodlands*, pp. 1–32.

origins.⁶⁷ Yet there remains significant public antipathy towards ‘unkempt’ landscapes that partly mirrors socio-economic differences, with younger, wealthier and better-educated people more likely to accept the presence of urban wilderness as an alternative to highly managed landscapes.⁶⁸ The exceptions tend to be sites that have become associated with collective memory within poorer neighbourhoods and adopted into a vernacular imaginary for urban nature, such as canals, impromptu playgrounds and other spaces: where empty plots burst into bloom their appeal can be quite widespread and even provide a poignant contrast with more conventional parks or recreational spaces. Greater hostility or indifference is encountered where waste spaces are merely perceived as symbols of wider processes of decline or impoverishment.⁶⁹ In such circumstances the presence of ‘weeds’ and ‘decaying ecologies and infrastructure’ becomes associated with neglect and political marginalization.⁷⁰

Clément’s emphasis on ‘non design’ should also be placed in a broader aesthetic context. His design for the influential ‘garden in movement’ in Parc André Citroën, for example, reveals some interesting anomalies: the choice of plant species, whilst including many non-indigenous species to the Paris basin, nonetheless largely excludes new arrivals such as buddleia (*Buddleja davidii*, of Chinese origin) and locust tree (*Robinia pseudoacacia*, of North American origin) that typify the global mixing of species on waste ground in Paris. Clément reveals that his choice of species was significantly driven by aesthetic considerations after all, so that the stark contrast with more formal design traditions might ultimately be misleading.⁷¹ Similarly, the top of Derborence Island was planted with a variety of trees chosen on the grounds of cost, ability to withstand harsh conditions and autumnal colour display rather than their correspondence with the original Derborence Forest in Switzerland: whilst some of the planted species are native to the European flora, others originate from elsewhere, such as the Persian Ironwood (*Parrotia persica*) from northern Iran. However, over time, other trees have now naturalized themselves on the site, such as willows (*Salix* spp.), hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*) and bird cherry (*Prunus avium*), and the proportion of spontaneous rather than planted species has gradually increased. The site was never a *tabula rasa* to observe ecological succession but rather a symbolic assemblage that serves a medley of aesthetic, ecological and political purposes.⁷² The architectural critic Giuseppe Marinoni is wrong, therefore, to suggest that the island is a ‘botanical experiment in the cloning of a natural landscape’, since the similarity with the original site in Switzerland is largely symbolic. Marinoni, like many other architectural commentators, elides the material and metaphorical dimensions to ecological design. In referring to the expanse of grass around the island as ‘a ritual enclosure that adds to

67 See Nigel Dunnett, ‘The dynamic nature of plant communities — pattern and process in designed plant communities’, in Nigel Dunnett and James Hitchmough (eds.) *The dynamic landscape*, pp. 97–114.

68 See James Hitchmough, ‘The wild garden revisited’, *Landscape Design* 5 (1994), pp. 54–9; and Anna Jorgensen, ‘The social and cultural context of ecological plantings’, in Dunnett and Hitchmough, *The dynamic landscape*, pp. 293–325.

69 Jörg Dettmar, ‘Wildnis statt Park? [Wilderness instead of park?]’ *Topos* 27 (1999), pp. 43–7; Zachary Falck, *Weeds: an environmental history of metropolitan America* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010); Dieter Rink, ‘Wilderness: the nature of urban shrinkage? The debate over urban restructuring and restoration in eastern Europe’, *Nature and Culture* 4 (2009), pp. 275–292; and Stephane Tonnelat, ‘“Out of frame”: the (in)visible life of urban interstices — a case study in Charenton-le-Pont, Paris, France’, *Ethnography* 9.3 (2008), pp. 291–324.

70 Alec Brownlow, ‘An archaeology of fear and environmental change in Philadelphia’, *Geoforum* 37 (2006), pp. 227–45.

71 Danielle Dagenais, ‘The garden of movement: ecological rhetoric in support of gardening practice’, *Studies in the History of Gardens and Designed Landscapes* 24.4 (2004), pp. 313–40.

72 Gilles Clément, e-mail to the author, 8 August 2011; Yohan Tison, Ecologue Direction Parcs et Jardins, Ville de Lille, e-mail to the author, 23 August 2011.

the aura of impenetrability and inaccessibility of this fragment of unspoiled nature', Marinoni does not acknowledge the artificiality of the site.⁷³

The work of Clément appears to provide a contrast with the nineteenth-century legacy of urban beautification and its complicit relationship with the underlying dynamics of capitalist urbanization. Interviewed for *La Liberation* in May 2007, for example, on the day after the election of Nicolas Sarkozy as French president, Clément stated that he would not allow his work to be implicated in the *projet ultralibéral* and its failure to respond adequately to either human or environmental needs.⁷⁴ Yet Clément's Derborence Island is also a political island at the heart of the Euralille project. The island metaphor works on different levels, since any park or landscaped garden is a designed fragment within a larger metropolitan dynamic: in the same way as the remarkable parks of Jean-Charles Alphand were created as part of Haussmann's rebuilding of Second-Empire Paris, Clément's design for Lille represents one element within a larger arena of connectivity and urban regeneration. The relationship between art — including radical or experimental gestures — and capitalist urbanization is complex.⁷⁵ In the case of Lille, the contemporary epicentre for art-led gentrification has occurred in other parts of the city such as Wazemmes, but we cannot view these developments in isolation from Euralille and the wider processes that were set in train during the city's 're-modelling' in the 1990s.⁷⁶

Conclusions

The work of Clément connects with growing public interest in urban ecology, natural history and the return of nature to post-industrial cities. However, in the case of Derborence Island these elements are less clear: the scientific rationale appears more symbolic than actual, since the island is not a real fragment of primary forest but an artificially constructed biotope. There is little possibility for public contact with the island apart from its graffiti-covered walls and even Clément himself has admitted some dissatisfaction with the final outcome.⁷⁷ Yet if the park is indeed a partial failure it is an extremely interesting one, since it lies at the edge of contemporary urban discourse. What we find in Lille, therefore, is an ecological simulacrum that represents a form of 'entropy by design' so that the possibility for long-term ecological succession can be introduced into the middle of a modern city. Despite the park's stated rationale, however, the precise ecological role of Derborence Island within the Lille metropolitan region for the protection or enhancement of biodiversity remains unclear.

Clément's design for Parc Henri Matisse is both provocative and didactic — even if not quite in the way it was originally intended — and opens up a series of dialogues within and across different disciplines and professional practices. Where 'waste spaces' have not been absorbed into processes of urban development they present an intriguing presence within the fabric of the city. Some spaces have been utilized as part of a vernacular 'green infrastructure' through the creation of recreational spaces, walkways, community

73 Giuseppe Marinoni, 'The Henri Matisse Park', p. 113.

74 Eliane Patriarca, 'Le paysagiste Gilles Clément explique qu'il annule ses engagements avec l'État', *La Liberation* (19 May 2007); Jonathan Skinner 'Gardens of resistance: Gilles Clément, new poetics and future landscapes', *Qui Parle* 19 (2011), pp. 259–74.

75 See, for example, Andrej Holm, 'Gentrification und Kultur' [Gentrification and culture], in *Skulpturenpark Berlin_Zentrum* (Cologne: Walther König, 2010), pp. 238–45.

76 See also Claire Colomb, 'Culture in the city, culture for the city? The political construction of the trickle-down in cultural regeneration strategies in Roubaix, France', *Town Planning Review* 82.1 (2011), pp. 77–98.

77 Gilles Clément, e-mail to the author, 8 March 2011. See also Hemming (2007), Parc Matisse, Lille [WWW document]. URL <http://nhryerson.blogspot.com/2007/06/parc-matisse.html> (accessed 9 April 2010).

gardening projects and other activities.⁷⁸ Conversely, in the case of Lille's Derborence Island the inaccessibility and artificiality of the site sets it apart from other examples of 'spontaneous spaces' that have become significant elements in public culture.⁷⁹

The incorporation of radical difference into urban space unsettles preconceptions about the limits to urban design. In this sense Clément's project can be conceived as a form of aesthetic provocation about the possibilities for re-materializing spatial politics and enriching the public realm by encouraging us to regard space differently. In the Ruhr region of Germany, for example, the creation of landscaped parks out of former industrial areas has been widely driven by the search for 'optimal landscapes' that rest on a synthesis between nature and culture that might bolster tourism and new forms of economic development.⁸⁰ In Lille, by contrast, Clément's project has not been driven by utilitarian concerns with the re-use of 'unproductive' land; it has actually sought to enhance rather than assimilate the presence of marginal spaces within the city.

The practice of landscape design has been undergoing a transformation since the late 1980s that reflects a range of new opportunities generated by processes of industrial abandonment, urban redevelopment and new understandings of public space.⁸¹ The widening of expertise to include, for example, urban ecologists or site-specific artworks, has also been accompanied by various attempts to reconceptualize the production of landscape as a 'collective enterprise' that involves greater public participation. Yet a precise definition of 'the public' or 'the public realm' in relation to urban landscapes remains elusive. There is a tension between impulses towards disciplinary integration and participatory inclusion, and new fissures emerging between the underlying dynamics of urban restructuring and the socio-cultural matrix of existing cities. Landscape design is emerging as a central element in these shifts since the downgrading of urban planning as a strategic or democratically accountable process has been accompanied by a proliferation of small-scale multi-disciplinary design interventions that may provide little more than an aesthetic veneer for underlying processes of capitalist urbanization. Public consultations over landscape design, where they do occur, are usually restricted to minor features rather than fundamental questions about the scope and purpose of development projects: in the case of east London, for example, vernacular green spaces in the Lower Lea Valley have been erased to make way for an Olympic Park that exemplifies utilitarian dimensions to contemporary landscape architecture. The rhetoric of biodiversity and social inclusion has been skilfully deployed as a cover for publicly subsidized land speculation.

If the role of the landscape designer is to enhance 'the existence of a relationship between a place and a public', as Sonia Keravel suggests, then this implies some kind of pre-existing cultural discourse about specific sites.⁸² But to what extent should

78 See, for example, Richard Reynolds, *On guerrilla gardening: a handbook for gardening without boundaries* (London: Bloomsbury, 2008) and Marit Rosol, 'Public participation in post-Fordist urban green space governance: the case of community gardens in Berlin', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 34.3 (2010) pp. 548-63.

79 Examples include Natur-Park Südgelände, Berlin, and Le square Juliette-Dodu, Paris.

80 See, for example, Susanne Frank, 'Rückkehr der Natur: Die Neuerfindung von Natur und Landschaft in der Emscherzone' [Return of nature: the reinvention of nature and landscape in the Emscher area], in *EMSCHERplayer* (October 2010); Susanne Hauser, *Metamorphosen des Abfalls: Konzepte für alte Industrieareale* [Metamorphoses of waste: concepts for old industrial areas] (Frankfurt a.M: Campus Fachbuch, 2001).

81 On recent trends in landscape design see, for example, Daniela Colafranceschi (ed.) *Landscape* (Barcelona: Gustavo Gili, 2007); and Christophe Girot, 'Towards a landscape society', in Thies Schröder (ed.) *Changes in scenery: contemporary landscape architecture in Europe* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2001), pp. 6-9.

82 Sonia Keravel, 'The art of transmission: mediating meaning in contemporary French landscape design', *Journal of Landscape Architecture* 5.1 (Spring 2010), p. 70.

cultural practice, including art or landscape design, be obliged to simply meet rather than challenge public expectations? It is the prominent setting of Parc Henri Matisse that makes the design intervention of Clément both politically poignant and also culturally problematic. The deliberate removal of a centrally located space from any form of use introduces a provocative element into existing understandings of landscape design: this is no meticulously crafted ‘eye of the storm’ in the capitalist land market à la Central Park, but a space that confounds the socio-cultural dynamics of urban development. A cultural landscape produced out of intellectual curiosity is not to be confused with a more narrowly conceived ‘public landscape’ that is created in response to a predetermined set of ideological or functional criteria. Wherever the state or private capital serves as a patron for the creation of new public spaces there will always be an innate tension with more autonomous forms of cultural practice.

Postscript: If over time, however, a unique ecological assemblage really does emerge in Parc Henri Matisse then perhaps the cultural and scientific aspects to the park’s design will begin to elide more closely. In fact, this may already be happening: on a warm afternoon in early May 2011, just below the concrete island, I stumbled across the bee-mimicking beetle *Trichius zonatus*, which may conceivably be among those creatures whose urban presence is now being sustained by Derborence Island (see Figure 4).



Figure 4 Bee beetle, *Trichius zonatus*, Parc Henri Matisse, 1 May 2011 (photo by the author; species determined by Pascal Stéfani)

Matthew Gandy (m.gandy@ucl.ac.uk), Department of Geography, University College London, 26 Bedford Way, London WC1H 0AP, UK.

Résumé

L'île Derborence, structure de béton inaccessible au cœur du Parc Henri Matisse de Lille, est un exemple fascinant de conception paysagère récente. Le parc, réalisé en 1995 dans le cadre du vaste aménagement d'Euralille, a été créé par l'architecte paysagiste français Gilles Clément. Le projet a eu plusieurs sources d'inspiration, dont les caractéristiques esthétiques d'un terrain non cultivé, la reconstitution symbolique d'un fragment de forêt primaire et l'enrichissement de la biodiversité urbaine. La synthèse novatrice entre nature et culture qu'effectue Clément est très différente des courants dominants de la création paysagère et trouve sa meilleure interprétation comme forme artistique propre à un lieu. Le projet de Clément met en évidence des tensions entre l'importance esthétique et scientifique des espaces dits 'à l'abandon' dans les villes contemporaines, et la dimension accrue des approches utilitaristes dans l'aménagement des paysages.