

GREEN

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*Gum Drop Trees. (Probably Yews) Is this gardening or is it just clipping?
Painswick, Gloucestershire, England*





Eugene Atget spent much of his life photographing Paris. In 1911, while standing on a path in Parc Monceau, he took the photo of the tree on the left.

Eighty-five years later, in 1996, the same tree was found (above) to be alive and flourishing. Somebody cares quite a lot about this tree and has been taking care of this tree for a very long time. My guess is that the caretakers are the citizens of Paris.



Seen here in 2003, on the West Side of Manhattan, *The Highline Rail* network was a two and a half mile long cast off from an earlier manufacturing era. Twenty six feet above the street level, it became a dumping ground and remained derelict for half a century before the City of New York did anything about it.



Taking the lead from an earlier project in Paris (Viaduct des Arts) and with design led by James Corner at *Field Operations* the *High Line* (seen here in a summer downpour) has become a vibrant garden park and verdant stripe in the city sky. Gardens are a difficult municipal responsibility.



Having abandoned Thoreau's quiet meditation on nature, we are now pacified, even content, with pretending we have seen the natural world by merely going past it. The tourist mantra is, "We've seen it, let's go."

Ayers Rock (Uluru) in Kata Juta National Park, seen from a tourist bus
Northern Territory, Australia



Our passion for what is left of the natural world has developed extreme sport as an industry with irony as an offshoot. It is no longer cool enough to do something merely dangerous, it must be “*extreme*” to qualify. Something ridiculously difficult and life threatening. Why would you go skiing when you can jump off a cliff wearing a squirrel suit and the now ubiquitous video-camera-on-the-helmet?

This is a poster inside a very urban building in San Francisco. It demonstrates an extreme sport most people will only perceive on a video and yet it attempts to persuade us that we need the same clothing to protect us ordinary folk. The adjacent alleyway is very real. The poster makes our relationship with nature merely vicarious.



In 1990, Kilauea Volcano erased this beach and the surrounding rain forest and 200 homes with fifty feet of lava. No one seemed to know why the palm trees were cut. The surfer was only interested in the next wave.

*Kalapana Beach (now called Kaimu),
Big Island, Hawaii*



These bushes and sand mounds are part of an artist project to make a 'Braille Garden.' The intent was to walk along the beach and feel the bushes in the same way a blind person would read a giant Braille word. The word it spells is "*schätzen*," to care for, to respect. It refers to the adjacent estuary where life begins. Most of us would see this place as a mud flat and hence be blind to it being called a garden.

*The light stripes are caused by passing ships, near the mouth of the Elbe River
Cuxhaven, Germany*



Boundless, exuberant and even out of bounds is the motion of youth and tells us that nature, like our energy is without limits.

Redhead in a hurry.

Doolin, County Clare, Ireland



The activities of animal husbandry demand pasturage and so the sheltering forest disappears. The idea of protection shifts from that of fences and walls to one of distance. You can see your enemy coming from a long way off.

*Sheep pasture and solo farm house
Isle of Skye, (Eilean a' Cheò), Scotland*



In the single-family dwelling, the new-found exterior spaces are often merely leftovers marking the edge of the property and filled with all manner of random and unrelated activities. Entertaining and drying laundry are common, but the real reason is to separate from neighbors. This desire for distance is the reason we abandon apartments for single-family homes. What we do with this space rarely becomes an elaborate or even moderately interesting garden.

*Pampas grass decorating the corner of the backyard. Drying laundry next to the septic tank, next door to the river.
Firth of Fourth, Scotland*



We seem compelled to decorate the left over space between our houses and the street with all manner of unusual and bizarre items with no other purpose than to announce that we are different from our neighbors. Any other purpose for placing a statue like this on your front lawn remains lost and should perhaps stay hidden.

Statue with dried flowers.
Suburban home, Copenhagen, Denmark



The remaining ruins of medieval Cistercian monasticism are now stones and grass. Victims of the Black Death and politics The Abbey is now a historical site, but also a tourist park. In the public imagination parks are always confused with gardens.

*Fountains Abby
Studley Royal, Yorkshire, England*



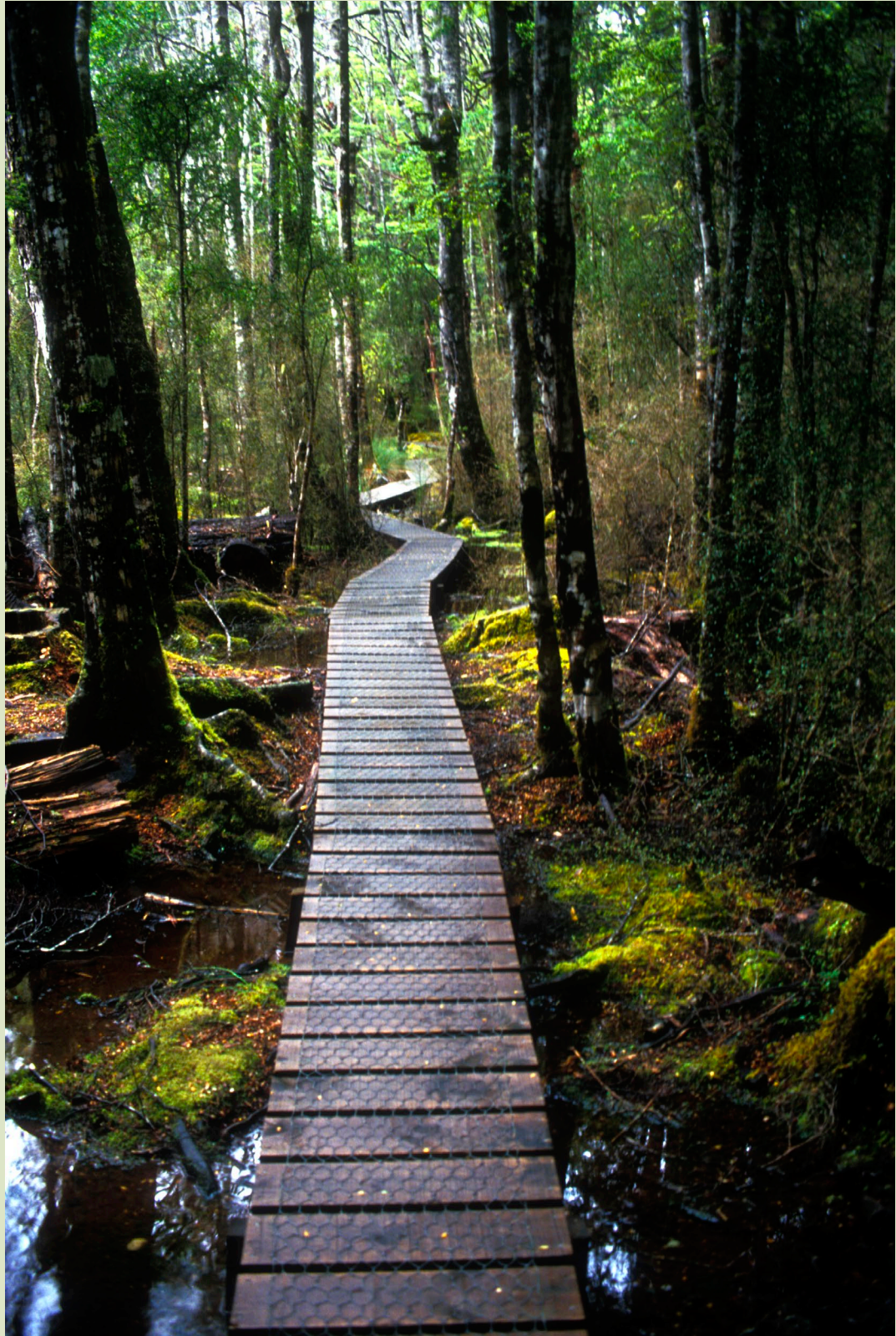
Even the most awful, horrific place can seem park-like, even gardenesque, if there is enough green grass and blue sky. The most important thing is the green grass, really green.

*Berkenau Concentration camp
Oswiecim, Poland*



Of course Paradise is a garden. Para-daza. A walled, (irrigated) place that kept the desert at bay.
Hell is the dryness, the arid places here on earth. Heaven is green and lush.

*View from the post office parking lot.
Hanalei, Hawaii*



Instead of wild, untrammelled and dangerous nature the great mass of people would rather have a guide through (unknown) nature. A path is at least focused in direction and will do in place of a real guide. Going it alone presupposes we know what we are doing.

*The Kepler Track,
South Island, New Zealand*



These tea-trees are thought of as an invasive and non-indigenous species by some and sacred and diminishing by others. To many, a view like this is uninviting and fearful because in this scene there is no obvious place for humans.

Melaleuca swamp forest
North Island, New Zealand



Aside from the fact there are no beaches, vineyards or mountains, many would associate this image with a long ago vanished vision of California as Eden.

A little scrutiny reveals a much more complicated picture. The leaning fence indicates the dairy farmer cut through the hillside long ago. The citrus tree is the only one left as the rest of the orchard died out. The power line crosses the property bringing electricity to someplace else. The mustard has the legend of being delivered by the Spanish Missionaries, but more likely came as windblown seed from the nearby freeway. The lone bird is a Turkey Buzzard, not a Red-tailed Hawk.

Still somewhat rural, California



The bottom lands are where the tillage starts and the hillsides are left to pasturage. The Spanish missionaries brought the idea of organized nature to California. Putting plants in repetitive rows produced a greater likelihood of dependable harvest. We continually confuse agriculture with garden.

*Alfalfa fields with riparian Sycamores and Oaks.
Arroyo Grande, California*




Illusions about nature seem limitless. Even the skewed vision in this infrared photograph becomes acceptable because we see things we expect from the natural world. In the case of this image, we are wrong on all counts. The wheat growing in precise rows was only possible after machine planting and irrigation started in the 19th century. The forest has been replanted after it was cut down for firewood during World War Two and the rainbow was made by irrigation sprinklers.

There is a reason
a lawn

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is

not even close
to

garden

A high-resolution photograph of a green lawn. Sunlight filters through the grass, creating a pattern of bright, dappled patches and deep shadows. A few dry, brown leaves are scattered across the grass, adding texture to the scene.

In recent years lawns have fallen out of favor because of the water they use and the work they require. If we didn't have to take care of them and if the water didn't cost anything, then we would probably love them as much as we did in the nineteen fifties.

The *green carpet* is something we associate with the fecundity and repetition of agriculture and the promise of a bountiful harvest. We also associate lawns with wealth and it is a hangover from earlier eras. Gardens may have lawns in them, but a lawn in itself, is not a garden. The magazines called, "Lawn and Garden," Better Homes and Gardens," all demonstrate with their titles the distinction between lawns and gardens, but because we have our green fetish, lawns will probably be around forever. A lawn is a single color.

A garden is a full pallet of possibilities.



It is strange that some of our most persistent myths about the garden come from agriculture. The kitchen garden is what we eat from, even if we farm for others. The cornucopia not only provides for us but we see it as beautiful. We might see it as beautiful *because* it provides for us.

*Unplanted, totally volunteer, poppies flank a plowed field soon to be planted in wheat.
Oise river valley, France*



The predictability of agricultural plants are also their major problem. A single field of wheat can be thought of as small scale mono culture and hence whatever affects a wheat plant becomes the problem of the adjacent wheat plant as well.

Oise river valley, France



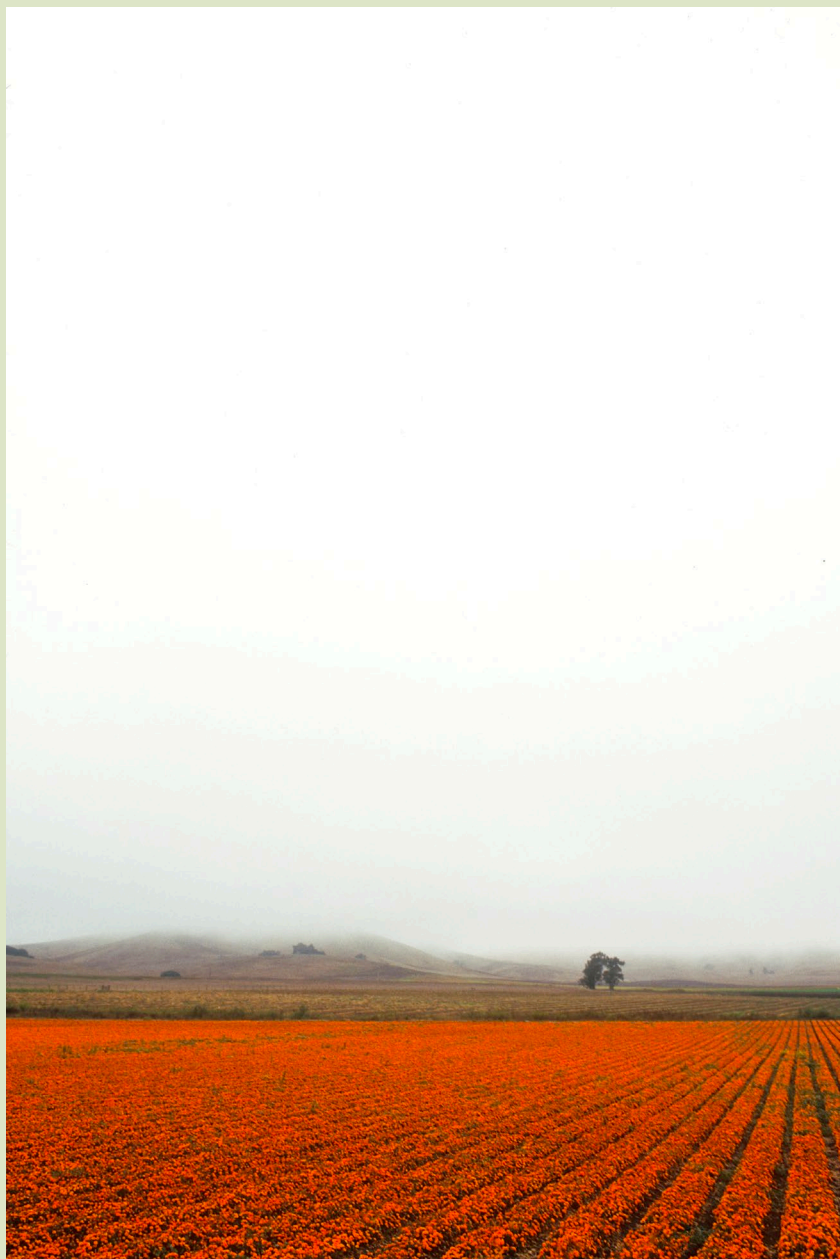
Too much of this and not enough of that has led to agricultural extremes and for gardens to be planted in locations that require enormous amounts of maintenance and nurturance to survive. To be able to drink a glass of wine at sunset from these arid and bird threatened (netted) vineyards required vast amounts of energy and effort unnecessary in wetter regions.

Shandon, California



No one is quite sure if agriculture is an extension of the garden or the other way around. They are a bit like distant relatives with uncomfortable relationships. Most often there is a barrier between the two. As though they have stopped talking because of some argument, long ago.

*Private residential back yard lawn and garden and the annoying neighbors field.
Avebury Plain, England*



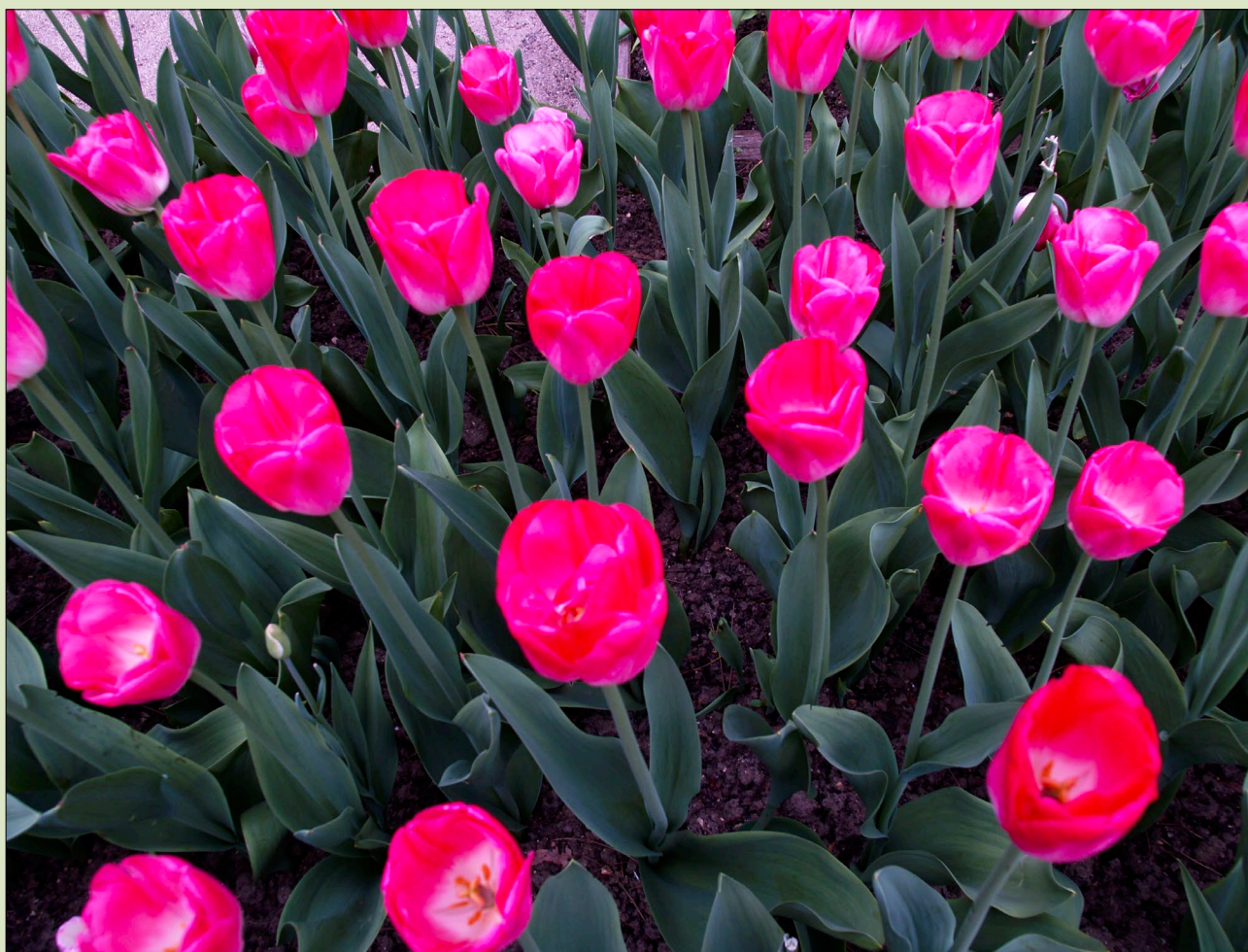
Late summer Marigolds slam the eye like a hot iron slab. Fields of flowers like this convince us that gardens and agriculture are the same, because this is a row crop grown for seed and it is beautiful. We get both at once. Even though flowers don't fill our stomachs, they seem to fill our eyes as much we are willing to forgive them. They provide visual sustenance and also hope.

Los Osos Valley, California



Irrigation, like adrenaline, is fabulous for getting things going, but difficult to sustain. The water to irrigate this vineyard came not from local aquifers, but from an enormous aqueduct system bringing water from hundreds of miles away and taken away from local usage. Water is already the war in California. Water will be the war in other places soon.

*Vineyards growing Cabernet and Sauvignon Blanc
Creston, California*



Our relationship with flowers is somewhat similar to our relationship with dogs. We expect their exuberance, we nurture them and are delighted with their youth and presence. And we are saddened with their short lives and early passing.

Jardin des Plants, Paris



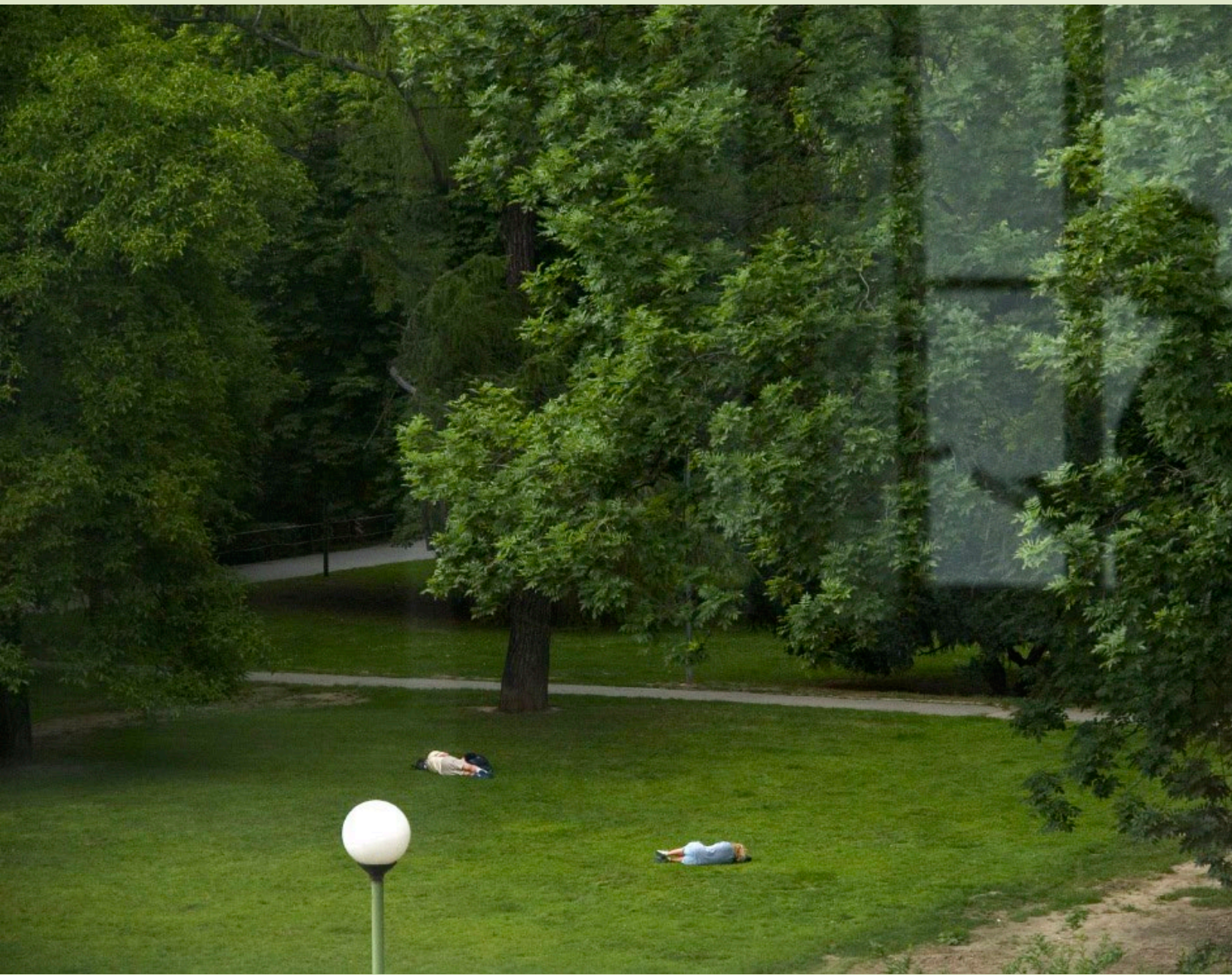
We think of flowers the way we think of Aspirin. If one is good then fifty must be much better. A single blossom might be elegant, but gardeners speak of “masses,” of flowers. Bunches of flowers, beds of flowers. Lots and lots of flowers. They are precious as individuals, but powerful in groups.

Jardin des Plants, Paris



Frantic gardening. This hanging garden nearly obscures the entire front of the house. The residents of this region spend much of the year in the grey, wet, and cold. And when the opportunity for warmth and greenery happen, they do everything possible to celebrate that brief and encouraging moment.

Bergen, Norway



Participation is the word nagging in the background of all our ideas about nature and gardens. Are they things we can simply watch? Are we only green voyeurs? Some people never think about these things and respond autonomically and become part of the place. Whether falling asleep in the sunshine or looking at a park through the window, we love being near evidence of the vitality of things botanic.

Prague, Czech Republic



When the animals stand at the edge of the forest and look out on the plains it is because the forest provides refuge and the plains provide prospect. We do the same thing when we sit in our safe little houses and look out at nature.

MacDowell Colony, Peterborough, New Hampshire



When we want to exert power over nature, we make a garden. When we sit inside our villa and look out at our garden we are looking at the extension of ourselves. Looking at nature has nothing to do with it.

Menaggio, Italy