



TEMPORARILY ABLE-BODIED

V
I

ix

INSTITUT DE FRANCE
ACADÉMIE DES BEAUX-ARTS
—
FONDATION CLAUDE MONET
—

TÉL. 32 51 28 21
FAX 32 51 54 18

GIVERNY – 27620 GASNY

What are the Aesthetics of Nature?

What is Beautiful?

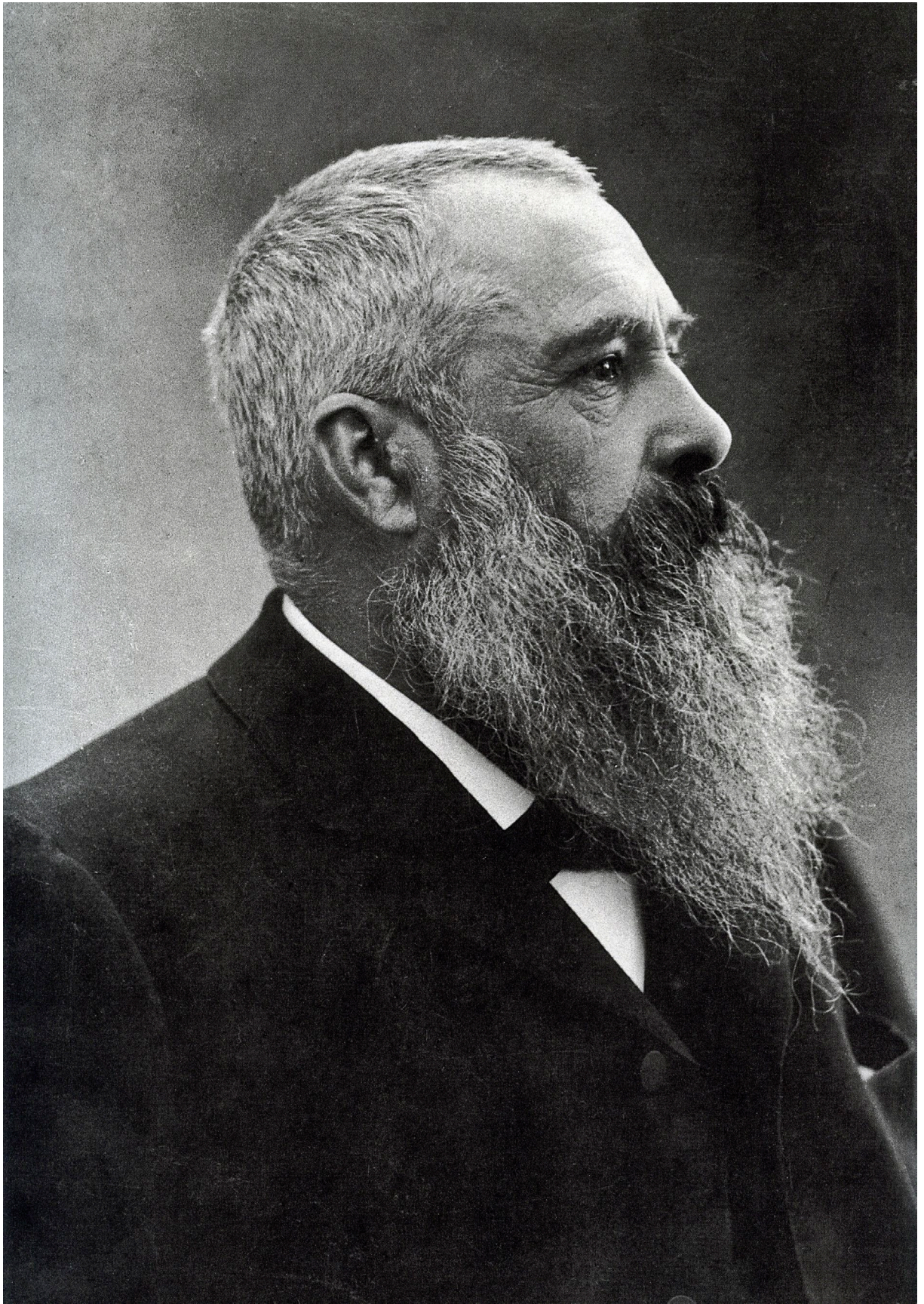
Since most of our information comes in through our eyes, we are tempted to think of beauty as primarily visual, but where do we put the idea that one of the things I most appreciate about nature is silence. Another thing I love is standing still while it moves. After a storm, slack-jawed in awe, just standing still and watching the swirling is a pleasure of this clumsy and complicated life. Just watching. Where the hell does that fall in the realms of reason and beauty?

In his book, “Second Nature,” Michael Pollan makes a beautifully crafted argument for ‘the garden’ as the solution to the controversy between development (use by humans) and conservation. He presents the case that if we become aware of our adjustment activities, in the role of a gardener, as opposed to that of either a rapist or a savior, we will have a better relationship with nature. For the most part, he may be right. The part he doesn’t really get, as Noel Perrin said, “A generation ago, the environmental quality light turned from green to yellow.”

The place where Mr. Pollan is right on the money, is in his perception that we are very happy when we are actively involved in working with elements of the natural world. We really get off on screwing around with natural things.

I want to increase the clarity in my relationship with the natural world and I thought the idea of the garden just might hold some keys to improving my understanding. I have spent some serious time designing landscapes but I have never spent any serious time learning from a garden. I wanted to understand the idea of a garden.

Leonardo Da Vinci said, “Ideas have consequences.” And having the idea of spending some time in a great garden caused me look for one that would help me see what gardens were about in some new way. It had to be more than a merely decorative place. It needed to be of substance. I needed a garden layered with complex meanings. *What I wanted was a symbol, and I found it in the garden of Claude Monet.*



Claude Monet
Photo: Ralph Nadar

The cofounder of **Reader's Digest**, Lila Acheson Wallace was so upset when she saw the condition of Claude Monet's garden that she wrote a check to pay for the restoration. And while she was at it, she paid for the restoration of a group of buildings that became studios and apartments for visiting artists. People, like myself, who wanted to learn something from this famous place.

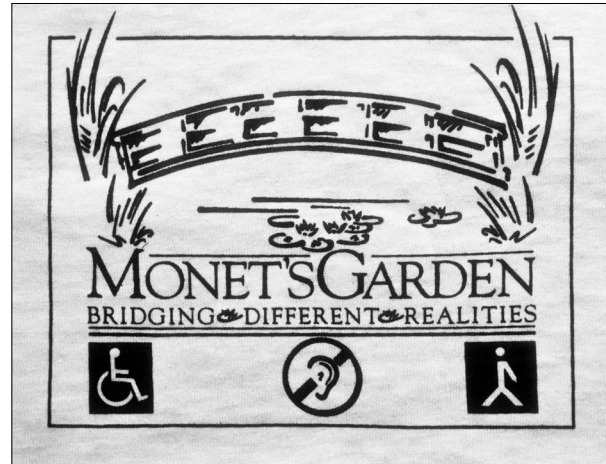
In order for an artist to become a resident at the garden, you had to be awarded a grant for a project that would provide some social good through the use of the garden and studios. Our project was called "Bridging Different Realities."

The Americans with Disabilities Act had passed in 1990 and yet few designers knew what it meant or how to deal with it. In partnership with a Non-profit organization called Associated Students Incorporated, I made a proposal to take a team of disabled college students to famous gardens in France to discover what they could learn and to confront places conceived before anyone was thinking about the needs of the disabled. The caveat was that when the students returned to California they would act as a team of advisors to Architects and Landscape Architects who were learning to address Universal Design.

The entire process was extraordinarily complex and very successful. The members of the disabled team were students from California Polytechnic State University and Cuesta College and they called me a "TAB" and it means a, '*temporarily able-bodied*' person, because eventually, we are all disabled in one way or another.

Watching a blind man eat a meal in a fancy Paris restaurant, seeing a deaf man dealing with dangerous traffic and hauling a wheel chair up into a train are very poignant memories.

When the team returned to California, design studio projects were created in the College of Architecture and Environmental Design around Universal Design and the results were exhibited in the Cal Poly University Gallery. Seminars, panel discussions and substantial media coverage of the students projects increased awareness of the need for universal design and the quality of the outcome of the project was far beyond any expectations.



The back of a promotional tee shirt attempts a connection between the disabled and the famous Japanese bridge in Monet's water garden.





After a sixteen hour flight, it was a long ride from Paris in the head gardener's pick up truck. I expected much more humble accommodations. This was my apartment and studio across the street from Monet's house. The address, appropriately enough, is *Les Nymphéas, Giverny*.



This group of smiling faces is the Disabled Team and their assistants. Left to right: Benny, Miriam, Erik, Ellen, Betty, Jeannie, Gary and Robert. The Photograph was taken by team member Danille.

Giverny, France June 1993



The hearing impaired member of the team said he was not hearing impaired, he was deaf. And that the only class he ever flunked was French, because he could not make any sense of the pronunciation. He called this place "VER-Sail-eez.

We got special permission for Benny to touch the sculptures because he could not see them. He can read Braille as fast as I can talk.

Versailles, France June 1993

NOTES FROM MY JOURNAL:

The disabled team departed last night and I was glad to come to the end of this phase of the project, but sad to see them go. Some place in the fourteen rolls of film I have already shot, there must certainly be a few really splendid images. The team recorded their perceptions of Monet's garden by writing journals, doing photography and painting watercolors. Most of the process is on video as well as in still photography. They are on the plane now, and I am sitting here trying to figure out what actually transpired during the time they were here.

I have begun to wonder if all truly inspirational experiences begin by dashed preconceptions and failed expectations. I would hate to think that humans are that far down in the evolutionary order. If recent experience can be any guide at all, there seems to be a need for at least some mechanism to our behavior patterns and experience might be one of the very few things we have to guide us. Certainly there are moral and religious and ethical compasses we depend upon, but the stick of our own experience seems the one we trip over the most often.

It may have been William James who said, "Wisdom consists of knowing what to overlook." Regardless of the author, I have been trying to learn from that statement and the project with the disabled team has allowed a much closer understanding of the value of that idea.

I have no intention of changing my profession, nor do I intend to spend much time riding some "politically correct" bandwagon, but many of the feelings I used to have about the disabled have changed or been erased. Much of the change had to do with the rather exceptional nature of the people on the team, but some of it had to do with me and that part is what I wanted to share with you.

Two nights before they departed, we were doing some final videotaping to get some closure on their thoughts and the video camera seemed to pull their hearts and minds into a focus more pointed than any of the time before. Their emotions were sewn like patches on their chest. Each one a little more powerful until there was not a dry eye in the room. The young woman with cerebral palsy and spastic quadriplegia also has hearing loss and speech defects. And, she is a real delight to be around. The most surprising thing about Danielle is the quality of her perception. She is more careful about the things she sees. It might be that she sees so well because it is one of the things she can do on her own, one of those independent things that help her be herself. She is unabashedly childlike in the perceptions of the soft and cuddly things she finds attractive. At twenty-two, animals and flowers still make her happy in ways I have long since forgotten. Her smile is infectious, clear and honest. When she begins to discuss the rational behind the architectural orientation of the palace at Versailles, you see instantaneously a person with many of her facets not only intact, but, intact in ways common people can only wish for. Deception has skated over this person. Greed and corruption don't appear in her countenance. Because I have yet to read the journals I requested from the team members, I'm not sure what Danielle learned by coming to Monet's Garden. What I am sure of is that I may never learn as much from Monet's Garden as I have already learned from Danielle.

Benny is writing his journal entries in Braille and will send me the transcriptions later. He types around 120 words per minute so I don't think I will have to wait long. On the surface, Benny is almost a stereotype blind person. He is a musician, he reads Braille, has difficulty with the acoustic chaos of contemporary life. Underneath that surface is a richness and depth. His visual darkness is brighter and more optimistic than the light in most of Monet's paintings. He has found passion, humor and even glee in his darkness. The obvious idea is to assume it is because he listens harder. The less obvious idea is that he thinks before he talks or moves. Forethought is the accurate term, but we most often call it foresight. And it is available nonstop, from a blind man, no less. What an amazing idea. Foresight seems in such short supply today, I have been

wondering if Benny has considered giving seminars in advanced seeing for the leaders of our country.

Benny has been swimming in the ocean while I have been sailing on a small lake. His tools are the submarine and the bathyscaphe. And while I have seen the sky and watched the light upon the water, he has felt the deep. When he was a small boy, before it went dark, he could see a little, now that he is older, he can see much better even if his eyesight is gone. Watching the way he sees helped me try to pay attention better than I had before. Like a pinpoint of light, the after-image of Benny lingers long after he has moved out of what I ineptly call sight.

It is rather odd to think of Erik as teaching listening when he doesn't have what most of us call hearing. He had spinal meningitis when he was four years old. He is quite the vital young man at the moment and mentioned something in the video interview that shook me down to the core. He said, "You can't fall in love if you can't have a conversation."

Not only did he remind me of all the times I had been in countries where I couldn't speak the language, but he also reminded me of all the times when I had been in countries where I couldn't understand what I heard. I thought about the times when I retreated into myself and there were many times when myself was not much of a refuge and I simply felt alone, isolated and angry. So often I have not understood what I heard. And in those times, have pressed on regardless, as if increasing the volume were the only option available. Erik let me in on a secret: The ability to listen is the ability to love. Erik listens with his eyes. He possesses a kind of visual sonar and it allows him to see the roundness of things. He lingers over the visual surface and thinks about what he sees. Pondering and wondering his way through a world he has just barely introduced me to. I will always deeply appreciate his introduction.

At the conclusion of our interviews, I mentioned the reason we laugh when a comedian falls down a flight of stairs is that we are happy that we are not the ones falling and glad that someone else is taking the fall. The thought is connected to my tendency to look away when I see someone who is disabled. Of course a part of that reason is I don't want to invade anyone's privacy by staring at them, but I have

averted my eyes in the past because I was afraid of them. Afraid I might become one of them. Well, I have been one of them in the past, I am one of them now and I will become one of them sooner or later. And the lesson they all have taught me is I need have no more fear. And I am very thankful for having developed this opportunity for them to teach me.

Down the street from my house is the churchyard where Monet is buried. I wonder what he would say if he knew what his garden has done?



Monet's House (*Le pressoir* - the cider press house) practically turns its back on the street. The garden is surrounded by high walls that are part of the local tradition, but also it was a long time before Monet got along with his neighbors. He wanted his gardens to be very private. Monet liked nature as long as he could order it the way he wanted.



Having access to Monet's Garden and living across the street was a lot more intimidating than one might think. The oddly shaped round brass key on the lower left is the key to Monet's house and garden. A lot of people would like to have it.

"I always perceive more and otherwise than I see."

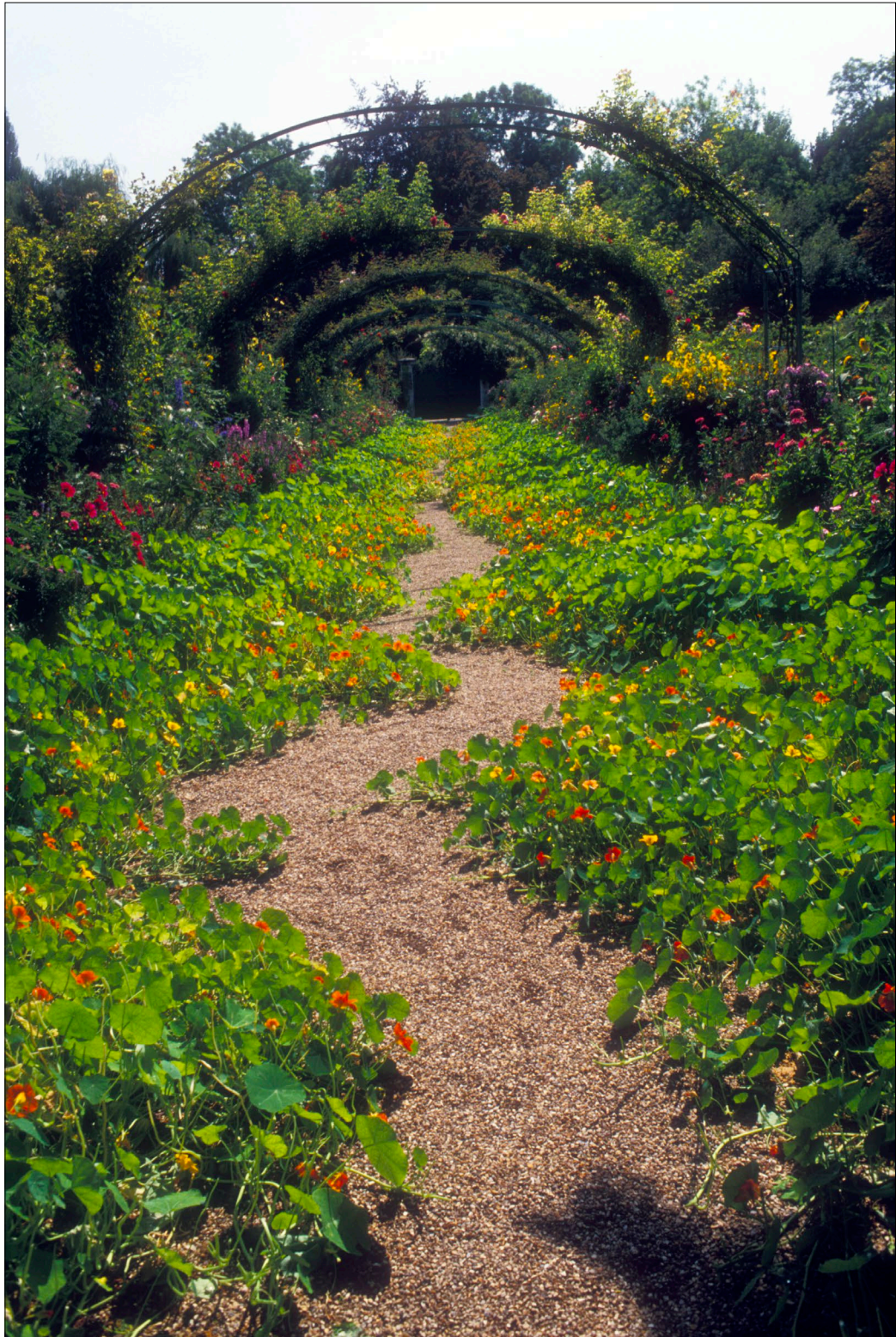
Jean-Paul Sartre

Today is Quatorze Juillet, Bastille Day and I have been living at the house and garden of Claude Monet over a month. It is about time I write some notes regarding what I have learned from being in France and particularly from being in Claude Monet's garden. I have, indeed, been in Monet's garden. Many people spend time visiting the garden but I am becoming familiar with it in ways that are only possible if one is able to be in a place for an extended period. In effect, it is, a kind of affair. The initial blush of attraction has worn off me now and we are slowly getting to know each other in a variety of subtle ways.

There is still some dancing going on between me and the garden. What I mean by that is we are not really intimate yet. Even though it is simply across the street from my house, there are days when I will intentionally not go to the garden. It has to do with the fact that I have not given myself up to the cult of the garden that is so pervasive here in the community of Giverny and even in the surrounding towns.

I have a deep appreciation and respect for this place, but there is still a little clinical distance in my observation and it is because I want to discover what is hidden here. The obvious part is that people come here from all over the world to be thrilled by beautiful colors and fabulous flowers. The second part of the obvious is to realize that Monet may have talked about impressions and argued with himself about how and what he saw, but his paintings have to do with beauty. They have to do with the world of the pictorial. A place of visually pleasant surroundings where the light and air and the landscape are in peaceful harmony. His paintings delete or at least carefully avoid depicting the stench, grime and dynamic of his time.

I am beginning to believe the primary reason people come here is not because they have some inherent love of gardens but because the life of the ordinary person is filled with noise, squalor, chaos and the tragedy of regularity. The garden is beautiful and it is relief from the visual insults of modern life.



Monet had between five and eight gardeners at any given time. By the time of my residency, there were ten gardeners. Monet might have thought of himself as a gardener, but he was much more of a garden director.

Central entry alley in Early September when the Capucine (Nasturtiums) are trying to swallow the path

The garden is a biological connection to the land. And to make that connection it is far simpler to come here and see the work of a continual army of gardeners than it is to attempt the same work at home. I admit there is a great number of avid gardeners among the visitors and their motivation is an outright love of things botanic. Plants hold a special place in their worlds and the attention and affection they bring to the garden is the simple realization that it is possible to have a relationship with plants in a manner deep and rewarding and that particular relationship is simply unavailable in relationships with other people. The real gardeners here surely agree with Beethoven when he said, 'Given the choice between people and trees, I would always choose trees.'

European and American cultures are primarily urban and currently view nature simplistically and think of it as being almost totally botanic. We spend most of our time with pavement under our feet and, almost without interest, we have watched the gradual vanishing of wild animals and have come to understand nature almost entirely as an abundance of plant material. When we drive into the countryside and see a greater proportion of plants than buildings we are drawn to the fallacious conclusion that we are re-entering the natural world. Since so few of us are active participants with livestock we have even lost the domesticated animal link to nature. We have come to see a forest as a natural garden, even if we have little understanding of what constitutes a forest environment. The mere appearance of large numbers of trees immediately conjures up visions of the health and vigor of nature. We love plants because we see them as evidence of the fecundity and infallibility of nature. We assume any large quantity of plants demonstrates the blossoming of the soil and have come to internalize the vision of a 'wasteland' as one with no plants. Consequently, we have little understanding of the value of the desert regions of the world and find a great affinity with those areas dominated by anything vegetative.

There is a passion among these gardeners, which they seem to identify by discussing beauty. But when pinned down, beauty is still a rather vague notion to them. They certainly have given themselves up to the notion of botanical beauty without any deep thought as to what actually constitutes this supposed beauty. The descriptions they offer have to do with values they have awarded to contrasting colors, textures and sensory experiences. From almost any rational philosophical stance, the gardeners will have difficulty defending this argument. This issue of being able to defend one's position is substantive and yet, most of the visitors don't have any difficulty at all with deciding that seductive colors and textures and smells have both instrumental and even intrinsic values. They seem quite content to simultaneously hold multiple and conflicting values.



The water garden was so much more fun to photograph and so much more comfortable to be in, I spent most of my time there.

Preferences for particular plants, particular varieties, particular groupings or styles seems to be something visceral which allows personal taste be imposed with complete impunity. Some prefer Roses to Irises and when queried about that preference stare at me wondering how anyone could ever prefer an Iris to a Rose?

I have read that the only colored foliage plant Monet would allow in his water garden was a copper beech tree. That particular tree is still there and it is beautiful. Much of its beauty comes from the contrast it provides to the great mass of greens in the adjacent areas, but the purity of only allowing one colored foliage plant in the garden becomes completely illogical when one looks at the riot of color in the enormous diversity of plants elsewhere in other parts of the garden. A friend with extensive gardening experience once told me she would never allow a Liquidambar tree in her garden. Monet certainly planted a Liquidambar in his garden and this issue of plant preference seems somewhat like a religious belief. Either one gets it, or one doesn't. At the moment, I don't.

Fortunately, beauty is different from preference. Beauty has qualities we can identify and many of those qualities have to do with the kind of person who decides this garden is worthy of a visit. Some have to do with the garden itself:

- Unlike most of the impressionist painters, Monet was a successful bourgeois and his garden is an expression of successful middle class life. The plants are not only symbolic, but real indications of luxuriousness and abundance. The plants are close and intimate and they are intended to be seen as such.
- There is a great density of the decorative experience available in the garden. It is capable of temporarily covering many problems with a blanket of distracting and diverse sensory experience. This flower garden is a form of botanic television. The less tolerant might even be inclined to think of it as a botanical Buchenwald or some aberrant form of an ecologically based 'virtual reality' where things really are the way you wish they were.
- It is a very private family garden and consequently, it has become an icon of the quiet, peace and luxury everyone aspires to. It is a mark of success; it is a symbolic return to nature.
- Impressionism is an idealized version of life. It establishes a very careful detachment from the problems that have always been part of daily life.

palatable than precise truth. Modernism, by contrast, wanted to scrape the plate clean and tried to do so. Impressionism knew that nothing can be scraped off the plate and the more vague we are about something the more we like it.



The house has been restored with as much care as the garden. The family must have used nearby homes to house the staff as well as the steady stream of visitors.

This tree is at the edge of the Water Garden and it seems to have colored foliage. Off to the side is a smoke tree. (*Cotinus coggygria atropurpurea*) That *atropurpurea* part means it has purple foliage. Monet said, only a copper beech? Really? Plant and color preferences are a matter of opinion, or, taste. Choices like these are not about reason.

“Taste and colors we don’t discuss.”

“Des goûts et des couleurs, on ne discute pas.”

Les goûts et les couleurs ne se choisissent pas selon des critères rationnels. Il est donc inutile d'essayer de convaincre son interlocuteur que les siens sont bons ou mauvais. Personne ne peut en effet avoir raison. L'usage de ce proverbe est souvent étendu aux opinions.









Considering his first wife died from the deprivations of poverty, Monet became astoundingly successful during his later years. During his time at Giverny, three studios were constructed and two enormous and costly gardens. His house is big, but not enormous. There were lots of children, (eight total) numerous household staff and at one time *ten gardeners*. That is quite some payroll to keep going. From time to time, Georges Clemenceau, the Prime Minister, would come to Monet's house to discuss painting and especially horticulture. I have a hard time imagining Woodrow Wilson dropping by Georgia O'keefe's studio to discuss anything.

Standing in his last studio (now a gift shop) contemplating his large elliptical series on the water lilies. (Les Nymphéas)

- Almost as a contradictory idea, nothing precise in its reference is ever popular. Impressionism knew that life is vague and smeary. Impressionism was and is clever enough to know the imagery of vague success is more

A few symbols in Monet's Garden are relatively obvious but worthy of repetition for the sake of clarity as the obvious isn't always so obvious:

1. Flowers are an archetypal symbol. The flowers are close to you in both parts of this garden, (in the formal garden near the house and in the water garden across the road.) They are intimate and they are the ultimate feminine expression. They are the goddesses of love and at least since the Middle Ages have been symbols of innocence. They are not crops or fruit. They come to us gratis and are a spontaneous emanation of nature.

The flower as a motif is an image of being. And the Lotus or water Lilly is the most universal symbol, with its feet in the chaotic muck of life, the slime of death and decay, and yet the resulting flower is clean pure and symmetrical. Flowers, and especially the water Lilies, are universally symbolic, nearly trite and yet still quite believable. Beginnings and endings have the most weight for humans and we must take flowers quite seriously since we take them to funerals and weddings where our gestures of respect have the most sincerity.

2. Water is another hackneyed symbol and yet Monet was able to assist in the public understanding of something intensely private. Endless change and depth. Literally, a place of reflection. On a meditative or contemplative level, a still pond allows us not to see the water, but to see the sky in reflection. Some of his paintings even look upside down because he looks so intently at the reflection. One of his last paintings, (now in the Musee Marmottan) initially appears to be a painting of a green boat sitting in a quiet corner of the water garden. The boat is only the superficial topic; the real subjects are the waving bands of grass undulating slowly beneath the surface. The garden allows us to look closely enough and slowly enough at something so that the obvious is able to elude us. Monet's painting of the boat simply allows us to get there without all the work of sitting in the garden until we no longer see the boat.

Finally, people from the middle-class, have enough disposable income to make a pilgrimage to this garden, and in advance they know they have been deprived of nature. They realize their life is like the flowers here, beautiful, transitory, fragile and fleeting.



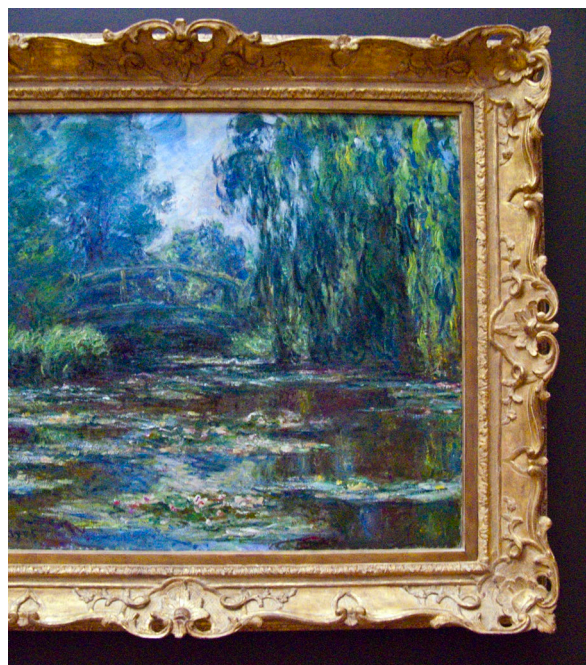
A field of wild Poppies a few miles from Monet's garden. Pavot coquicot, (fr.) and are supposed to indicate ephemeral charms



What the visitors don't seem to understand, at least on any rational level, when they enter the garden they are not looking at nature, what they are looking at is culture.

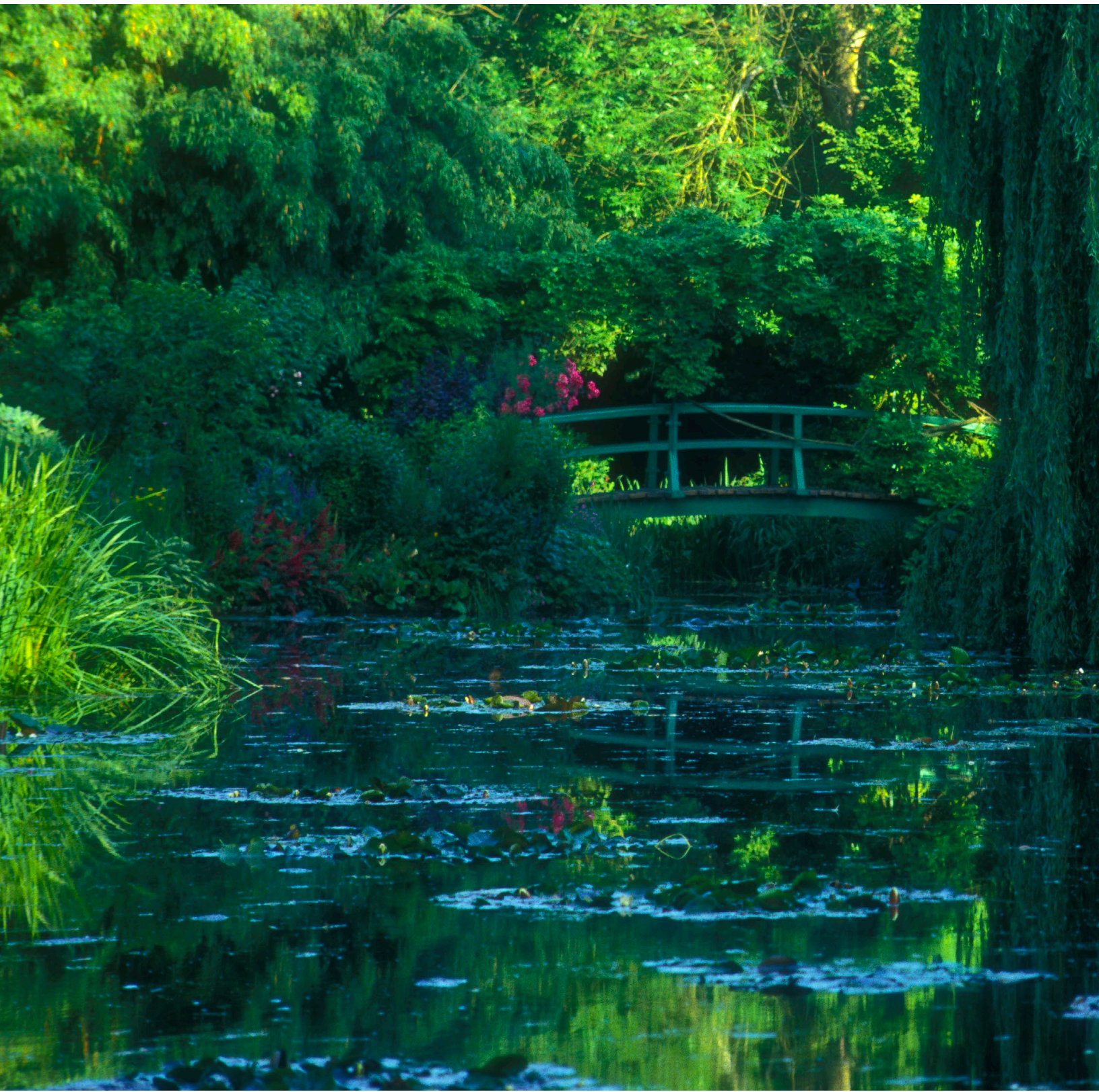
How did we come to look at culture rather than nature? Certainly it started with philosophical ethics regarding human values. Even though the sets of values leading to this conclusion were developed before the Renaissance, we can use the pre-revolutionary thinkers in France to help understand the sequence of thoughts leading to our current perception of culture rather than nature.

After the fall of the Roman Empire, the central question attendant to the evolution of western civilization was the existence of God. Everything revolved around this issue. As various groups were establishing territories and methods of government, the peasants would rally behind a strong individual or family for protection. Eventually these families became dukes, earls and princes and finally entire monarchies. And the authority of these leaders was established because there was physical strength and political power, but the reason any of this was possible to be understood as an ongoing process of organizational structure was the pervasive belief that the leaders were descended from God.





The two images on the left are from two different trips to the Getty Center in Los Angeles. They were taken years after my residency at Monet's garden and yet, to my surprise, I remember his gardens through his paintings as much as having lived there. I don't quite know what to make of that.



The Japanese bridge in July, nearly engulfed by Wisteria.



If you believed in the existence of God, by extension, you believed in the divine rights and powers of your leaders; Par La Grace De Dieu and Durch Gottes Gnaden. And even though this system worked rather well, it was fickle and unpredictable. The only two constants were power and fear. The Renaissance began the unstoppable changing of the tide but it was not truly visible in Europe until Voltaire. Voltaire functioned best in a lofty intellectual and rational realm but his wit and encyclopedic knowledge had to exist within a monarchy and always under the attentive eyes of royal censors. His writing tonality and expression always had to recognize he was in a delicate position. The metaphor of children was of particular use when he wanted to say one thing and mean something else. The title of his famous work 'Candide' is in itself a metaphor as 'Candide' means innocent. The question the critics didn't seem to ask was, 'What kind of innocence?' A little later, Jean-Jacques Rousseau was able to go much further with some of the undercurrents only hinted at by Voltaire.

Born in Switzerland, Rousseau was an outsider, one of society's discontents. He may have not said it directly, but he implied that science and religion had established a hokey alliance of self-reinforcement. He was continually hounded for his writings and his sexual orientation. He was called a libertine and a rake. Long before Freud, Rousseau became a beacon of light indicating the slow return of the repressed. He was in favor of self-expression and expressed the amazing and revolutionary idea that man had a right to be happy.

It seems preposterous that history could hang on a thing as simple as an idea, but it has proven to be the case over and over again. Rousseau realized the monarchy was an arm of the church and that the religious monarchy was only selling obedience. His idea: God was not in the church, God was not in the monarchy, and God was in nature. And the only way a person could restore their soul was in nature. (*If God was in nature and people had a right to happiness, what was the need for the monarchy and the church?*) (This is real heresy.)

Prior to the Age of Reason, when one looked at a tree, the only question occurring in relation to that tree was: Who's tree is it? The age of reason helped us to understand that the word religion means literally "to bind" and that inherent in this understanding is the realization that if things are bound together then they are held together by commonalty and there is no room for diversity. If, God is truly in nature and nature requires diversity, then Western European religions are in conflict with nature. Chateaubriand and other early romantics were beginning to side with nature and the paintings of Albert Bierstadt implied that you could actually see 'The hand of God,' in the unspoiled places where nature was new and that was in America.

Diderot certainly wrote important laws and Robespierre hated the old system so much he even changed the name of the months, but in the end, it is Rousseau who can take much of the credit for making all those royal heads roll, and it occurred just by him thinking that God was in nature instead of somewhere else.





Salix alba tristis, **The weeping white willow**, loves to have its feet in the water. This willow on the right side of the bridge is over a hundred years old and nearly at the end of its lifespan. The composition of the entire water garden will change when this single plant dies.

Above: 1895

Left: 1993



Considering all that has been written about impressionism, it is amazing how little commentary has been made of the seasons. We hear so much about the romantic, even Venetian (pellucid) light, there is a tendency to forget how much of the year is grey and dull in Giverny. Flaubert said, “*You are as likely to find sunshine in Normandy as you are to find a diamond in a pig’s arse.*”



Monet painted in all seasons, some of his most memorable were done of snow scenes and I don’t think he ever painted his own garden in winter. It was Autumn that had the most surprise.



There used to be enough physical space for ideas. The crowded conditions of our cities seem to suffocate that space and a journey to a country garden is simply a quest for relief. Although we like to think of ourselves having cities vastly improved over the times of pre-revolutionary France or even the middle of the industrial revolution, the fact is we are not able to produce contemporary cities with anywhere near enough open space to support the needs written into our genetic code. When you think of the amount of time humans have lived on the planet, probably 95% of that time has been lived out-of-doors, and certainly out of cities. There is something demeaning in the thought that we have, ourselves, allowed our cities to be constructed with so little regard for our basic human needs.

Buffeted by the winds of power and greed, we have abdicated our rights to immediate connections with the natural world. It is therefore not surprising that most urban dwellers run immediately to the country when they have a vacation. The French are particularly lemming-like in their frenetic dash for the sea and sun. But most of all, they are seeking relief from cities. In the contemporary world, the vengeance of the poor is overpopulation. It may be a weapon eventually more powerful than bombs, and it happens because sex is the only pleasure really available to the poor. I am willing to postulate the vengeance of the upper class is greed and sloth masked by control. I am unsure of this postulate, what I am sure of is the vengeance of the middle class is tourism. The middle class has the liquid capital, the time and the sheer volume of people to visit and trample out of existence, everything worth seeing in the world.

On the Normandy coast sits a wonder of human faith and tenacity and any summer will see two million tourists on the famous St Michael's Mount. In the fourteenth century there were not two million people in the whole world who knew for sure where France was itself, or if it even existed. This year, on any afternoon in August, one could walk on the shoulders of the tourists all the way from the entrance causeway to the center of the chapel and only a tiny fraction of this crowded insanity has anything even remotely to do with religious pilgrimage. What it has to do with is *destination disease*, a desire to be someplace other than where one is at the moment (normally in cities) and we have to have names for the places we want to go in order to have a purpose, a reason for going, when in fact, we simply want to leave and have a difficult time saying so. Frivolity is apparently not as deeply rooted in the French soul as is guilt and the 'Age of Reason'. This summer there is a poster in the Paris Metro with the type of sign seen at the entrance of every city or town and it always indicates the name of that city. The word printed on the sign in the Metro is "*ailleurs*" it is not the name of a city; it means 'elsewhere' or, 'Anywhere, except here.'





The little bridge from the Japanese bridge. Many tourists stand in line for hours just to be able to have this view for a few minutes.
1993



Mont St. Michel. A stronghold since pre-Roman times, now, like the Eiffel Tower, a symbol of the whole country. On 16 June 2006, the French prime minister's €164 million project to build a hydraulic dam using the waters of the river Couesnon and of tides to help remove the accumulated silt deposited by the rising tides, and to make Mont Saint Michel an island again. The dam has been built and soon a pedestrian bridge will connect to the mainland instead of a causeway. We have a hard time leaving things alone.



Sometimes art manages to put its foot into the stream of anthropological mythology and in France the references are so common we are almost completely immune to their history and consequences. The national crest contains not rampant lions and knights-errant, but flowers. And not just any flowers either. They are Irises and they are three of them. They are a type of Liliaceae, showy, trumpetlike flowers with large leaves. In Greek mythology the lily was dedicated to the goddess Hera, the wife of Zeus.

The three specific 'Fleur de Lys' in the seal are intended to inform the masses that the monarchy (and the present government by extension) is the messenger of the Gods and the three of them represent the three graces: Life is one and it is you, vibrant in the center. Death is another, and is behind you. The third, re-birth, is always facing you. And here inside the 'Fleur de Lys', we begin a collusion of mythologies. The old, the new, and the now, and they all carry the implication that the cycle will continue forever. The cult of the eternal return is not so recent an invention as to be of Christian origin. It is at least as old as Venus of Willendorf, (ca. 4000 B.C.) and is probably even older, having to do with the fecundity of the earth. It has its references in the spring and it is the message of Persephone, wife of Hades and queen of the underworld. She is the Goddess in charge of all things Underground, in charge of pushing up beautiful flowers out of the cold grimy earth to indicate the end of winter and demonstrate the truth of the constant cycle of rebirth. In the Middle Ages, when women formed the greatest percentage of educated Europeans, they understood this history and mythology of Persephone and they recreated the cult of themselves. Our Lady of the Underground has become Our Lady, Notre Dame. And the touristic outing to Giverny and the gardens of a famous painter is a simple and convenient way to make a pilgrimage and to pay homage to Persephone and the basic desire in the human psyche to be constantly reborn, to never really die.



*The rose arbor on the East side with poplar plantations behind .
(See Chapter 7)
1993*



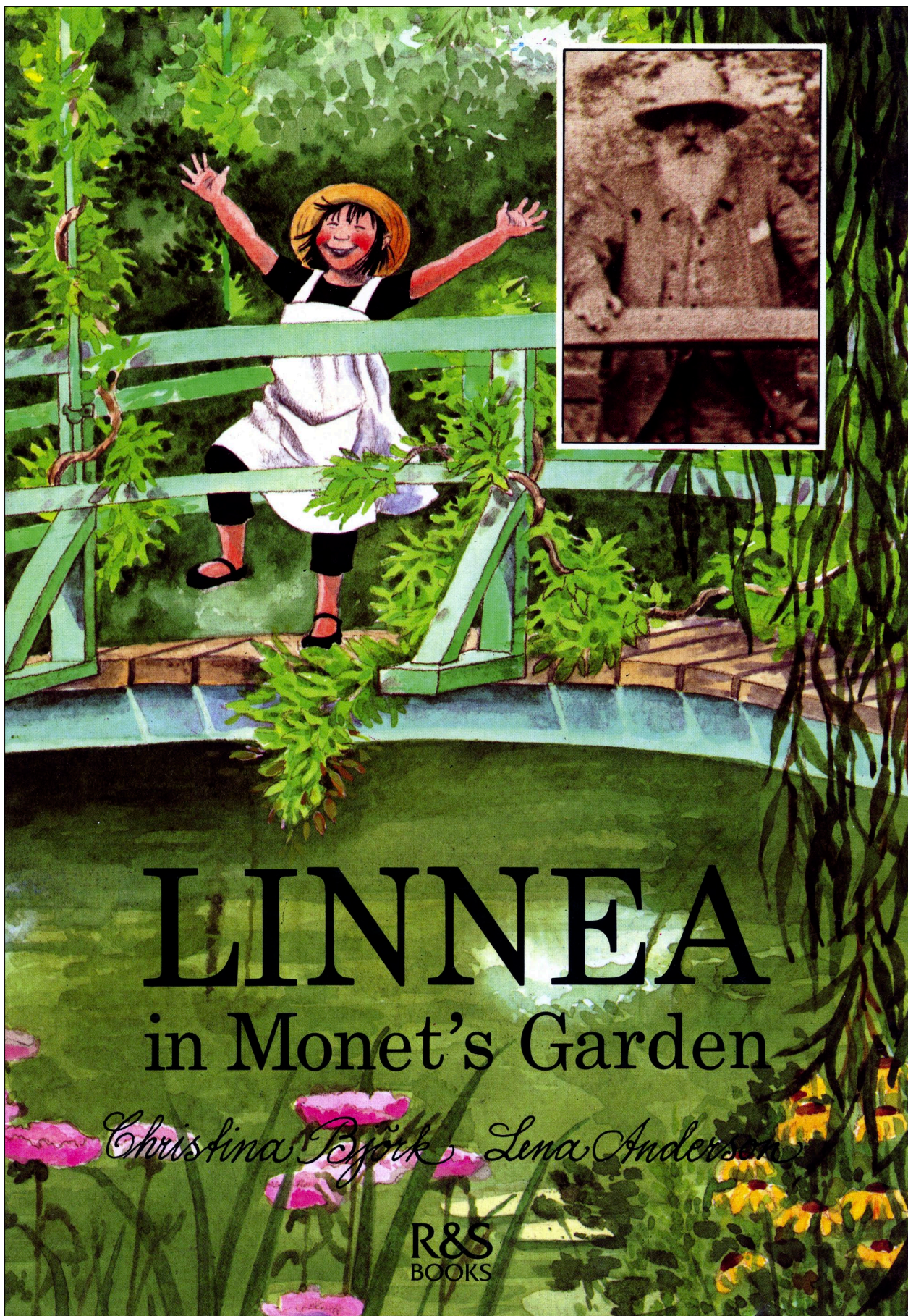
What is all this garden discussion really about anyway? If I am trying to catch something I need a net. It was Julian Barnes who said a net could be defined as “a collection of holes tied together with string.” Some of the strings used to support the arguments for the value of the natural world are terribly weak under the weight of reason. The strings fray and break and create even bigger holes. If I were truly interested in making a better net it would make sense to present a better case for nature.

When Rousseau and Voltaire used the metaphor of the child, specifically the ‘*natural child*,’ as a vehicle for discussing the place of children in society, they were attempting to attribute ‘rights’ to children. To state, without hesitation, that children have value. In the process of that assertion, what comes along with the inherent value of children is the assumption of the value of love. Now, how is it that the rationalist argument for the rights of children is based on something as illogical and unreasonable as love?

What one begins to see is that the reasonable, rationalist argument, is fueled with irrational components. Logic starts to show its illogical insides and turns back on itself. In order to subscribe to Descartes’ dictum of “I think, therefore I am”, one is not only clearly accepting a high value being placed on rational thought, but is also asked to accept the idea of inherent value in “I am.” Which is like saying there is value in being. In human beings. It would seem if we can assign inherent value to humans, by extension we could assign inherent values to nature.

The normal counter argument is to say rocks and water and plants can’t think and therefore they don’t have rights. That is to say they don’t have moral standing. If we are truly interested in changing our relationship with nature we need to re-orchestrate our legal concept of who or what has moral standing. At the moment, Christopher Stone presents the most convincing argument. He suggests we do something that sounds berserk to ordinary ears and it is to actually confer rights to trees. Not human rights, but rights in the sense that within our legal system it is necessary for something to have rights in order for it to be defended. If we (illogically) gave rights to children because we did something as irrational as love them, because we place a value on this completely indeterminate and irrational thing called love, we can certainly give rights to the natural world because we love it too.

If, in our stubbornness, we refuse to grant rights to trees and other portions of the natural world, we will be clinging to the illusion that we are separate from nature. Instead, we need to realize nature constitutes the largest part of the human unconsciousness. And the virtue in so doing is the recognition of parallel processes; nature is a process and our unconsciousness is also a process. We will never be part of the consciousness of trees because trees don’t have consciousness. What they have is process and we are part of that process. And we can’t see their unconscious process because we are part of that process. Nor can we see the consciousness of nature because we are part of that consciousness too. You can’t be in the audience and on the stage at the same time. It is time for us to realize we are on-stage with the natural world at the same time and there is no audience. This play is for us.



Was it William Wordsworth who said, “We murder to dissect.”? I don’t really know and like most, I never am quite sure of the quality of the sources of my information, but I am very insistent about the impact and importance of that same unsubstantiated information. Earlier this month, I asked an upper-middle class Englishman and woman why they had decided to visit Monet’s garden? They responded by saying they wanted to get out of Paris for a day and Monet’s Garden was in the guidebooks. He said, “One works one’s way down from the large print to the small, doesn’t one?” In other words, he was doing what he had been told, and he was having the perceptions Mr. Michelin and his green guide had told him he was supposed to have.

More recently, I asked a little girl why she had come to visit Monet’s Garden. She had come all the way from America and she was even a little surprised why I asked. She said it was because of “Linneae”. Linneae is another little girl. She is a fictional character in a book called “Linneae in Monet’s Garden.” Two Danish women who have provided a guide to the discovery and understanding of the garden wrote it.

The book is translated into several languages and circulated worldwide. While the book is certainly a delightful story of dreaming about coming to the garden and having that dream actually come true, it is also allegorical. In addition to the avowed purpose of the book, it serves three functions: First, it is intended to provide a small but comprehensible understanding of the relationship between a famous artist and a world he created in his paintings and in his garden, which one can actually visit. It performs this function beautifully, however, it also devalues your own personal experience as it is filtered through the lens of what others have already told you are supposed to perceive.

Secondly, it builds a bridge between two different fantasies. The first being Monet’s paintings about his perceptions of a place, the second being about his garden having some connection to the natural world. Both of these have to do with what John Fowles calls, “The increasingly narcissistic way... to make ourselves feel more positive, more dynamic, ...or by turning it (nature) into therapy, a free clinic for admirers of their own sensitivity.”

The third portion of the allegory carried by the book is to provide validation for our understanding of the natural world. Our sense of all places is connected to our capacity for imagining us being somewhere other than where we are at the moment. In Venice, upon

entering the Piazza San Marco for the very first time, I described to my daughters the various parts of the plaza that could not be seen from where we were standing. They asked me how I knew this place if I had never been there before and I responded by saying “I have seen so many photos of this Piazza, I feel like I have been here before.” Ginna Crandall clearly points out our understanding of a place comes not as a function of direct, visceral, primary experience, but rather, a result of the paintings and photographs we have already seen in advance of ever having seen the real place in with our own eyes. In other words, the garden confirms what we already know from having seen the photographs and illustrations in the book.

Last week a small girl came to the garden dressed as Linneaea. She was ecstatic because she was living the fantasy she had dreamed from the book, but very soon she was in tears because so many people wanted to take her picture. They wanted her to be an extension of their own fantasies which had also been established from the worldwide circulation of photographs having little or nothing to do with either Monet or his paintings, and least of all, his garden. I am not sure it is possible to have any original experience of a place whose mythology precedes it and today, that just might mean the whole world.

In the eighteenth century, Carl Linnaeus attempted to organize the whole of the natural world by nomenclature. He developed a method of classification allowing everything its place in evolutionary history. He attempted to establish a comprehensible flow of one thing to the next by the use of words. What he had difficulty with is those breaks or jumps in evolutionary history where the pieces don’t want to fit together. Having Linneaea be the name of the little girl in the garden book might be an ironic accident of nomenclature, but symbolically I saw that little girl as one of the evolutionary jumps her namesake had so much trouble with. I think of her as what Bruce Chatwin calls a ‘watershed creature’, someone whose position in the scheme of things does not fit within the established order. Linneaea was photographed so much because she is our representative in the next jump where we come to nature as pilgrims not participants. All the visitors to the garden are literally led down the primrose path. There is a ‘circuit’ in the garden, something to be walked around. Although the garden visitors may never have been to Tibet to circumambulate Mount Kailash in reverent pilgrimage, but they surely all walk around the prescribed path watching what they think is something about nature and never really understanding their new evolutionary niche as observers and fans. And they will look at whatever artifice can be constructed to remind them of what they think nature used to be.

Utility has its way with Monet's garden. It has an avowed purpose; it is to be looked at. Another child told me *the reason for the garden is to be looked at because it is pretty*. She was right, it is pretty, and it is beautiful. And in this context, even the idea of beauty has a specific utility. Gardens are constructions we use with our eyes. And as such, have an identifiable utility that has only a metaphorical connection with nature's world of unkempt wildness. Again, Fowles, "...*We shall never understand nature (or ourselves), and certainly never respect it, until we disassociate the wild from the notion of utility -- however innocent and harmless the use. For it is the general uselessness of so much of nature that lies at the root of our ancient hostility and indifference to it.*"

THE GARDEN as a CONCEPT :

Mohammed said the Day of Judgment would take place in a garden and that heaven was a green garden. Para - behind, daza - the wall. So if the Persian paradise (para-daza) was a wet, green luxuriousness behind the wall, it was because scorching desert hell of ordinary life was out on the other side. We always create out of what we lack rather than from what we have.

The garden wall is a kind of purgatory transition and exists as an allegorical image that continued with us up until the Renaissance and beyond. In the Middle Ages, the dominant garden form was the cloistered Garth and exclusive domain of the abbeys and then the monasteries. The monastery was itself the garden wall. It formed the transition from the external to the inner world of the cloister's central garden. Once the garden wall has established the boundary of the garden, an emotional order is possible, as one can comprehend the limits of our activity and our responsibility. As a global society, we are having difficulty deciding where, or even if, the garden wall exists at all.

The word garden comes to us from the Teutonic meaning 'to guard,' apparently from somewhere in the time of the crusades. Earlier, at the end of the Roman Empire, villa owners erected stone statues of threatening gods, a kind of sculptural barbed wire, to protect their gardens from damage by vandals. They thought if one statue was good then many were better and soon their gardens were cluttered with statuary. To alleviate the chaos of random statuary and orchestrate some recognizable order, niches were built to the side of the path, and particularly at the ends of the paths,

where special niches were constructed for statues of a god they thought especially adept at protecting gardens. He was always depicted carrying a large club or equipped with a giant erect phallus. His name is 'Termini', hence our word 'Terminus'. The end of the garden path.

In 1625, Francis Bacon, in his famous treatise "On Gardens", said, "Man comes to build stately sooner that to garden finely...as if the latter were the greater perfection." While this clever commentary places a wry smile on the lips of contemporary gardeners, it still fails to come to grips with why we should garden at all. Roberto Burle Marx said, "It is obvious that the concept of a garden goes beyond aesthetic compositions; it also signifies the necessity of men to live intimately with nature." His statement seems closer to identifying why we need a garden. So now we have it, a garden is not just organizing the landscape and the growing of plants, it is rather, to satisfy a *need* to live intimately with nature.

Other than copying the gardens of European and Asian royalty, we Americans have had problems with the "idea" of a garden because America was wilderness without a European cultural history. No castles, monasteries or royalty. We had only a vast and seemingly endless forest. And it was in this forest we made our first and most obvious garden mistake. We assumed, in our desire to rid ourselves of the real danger and claustrophobia of the forest, we must first remove the trees. Aside from the requisite need for building materials and fuel, we simply forgot that "organizing" the landscape could be a subtractive as well as an additive process. Carving a niche in the wilderness meant exactly that. We made one random little extractive chip at a time. It is surprising it never occurred to us harvest selectively and consequently carve meaningful gardens into the existing virgin forest rather than tearing it all out and then finally replanting it all over again in the same place.

We were, however, bright enough to recognize our westward expansion presented us with opportunities to see the land and to see the garden in ways it had not been seen before. Having harvested our way across America, we finally came to places of such awesome power and beauty they led John Muir to see, "signs of redemption in their wildness." The development of these places into national parks became the first public symbols of what we valued as a people and they are clearly the most romantic vision of untouched nature as a garden.

Another form of garden vision, and hauntingly more provocative, is that of the residential garden landscape.

Thomas Church said, "Gardens are for people." His statement is paradoxically simple and yet impossibly inclusive. Simple because it implies the occidental vision of active use like games, walking, eating, etc. It is irritatingly inclusive because it implies the landscape acceptability of the bourgeoisie ideology. Everyone should have their own miniature walled garden. A kind of Jeffersonian democracy gone berserk. This residential middle class miniaturization of royal aspirations has prevented us from adequately exploring some important alternatives in garden design and ultimately (in conjunction with the rise of modernist architecture and sub-divisions) has given rise to gardening that consists primarily of "foundation planting" appearing as an afterthought, a leafy eraser smudge at the bottom of an architect's drawing.

The real question begins to surface here: What form should the residential garden have today and for what reasons? Humphrey Repton believed that the house should contain some of the artificiality of the house and some of the naturalness of the park. The garden was to be a transition from one to the other. This promising idea was cut short by the development of modernist architectural dogma where new construction materials and their revered industrial qualities dominated over any supposed sense of place.

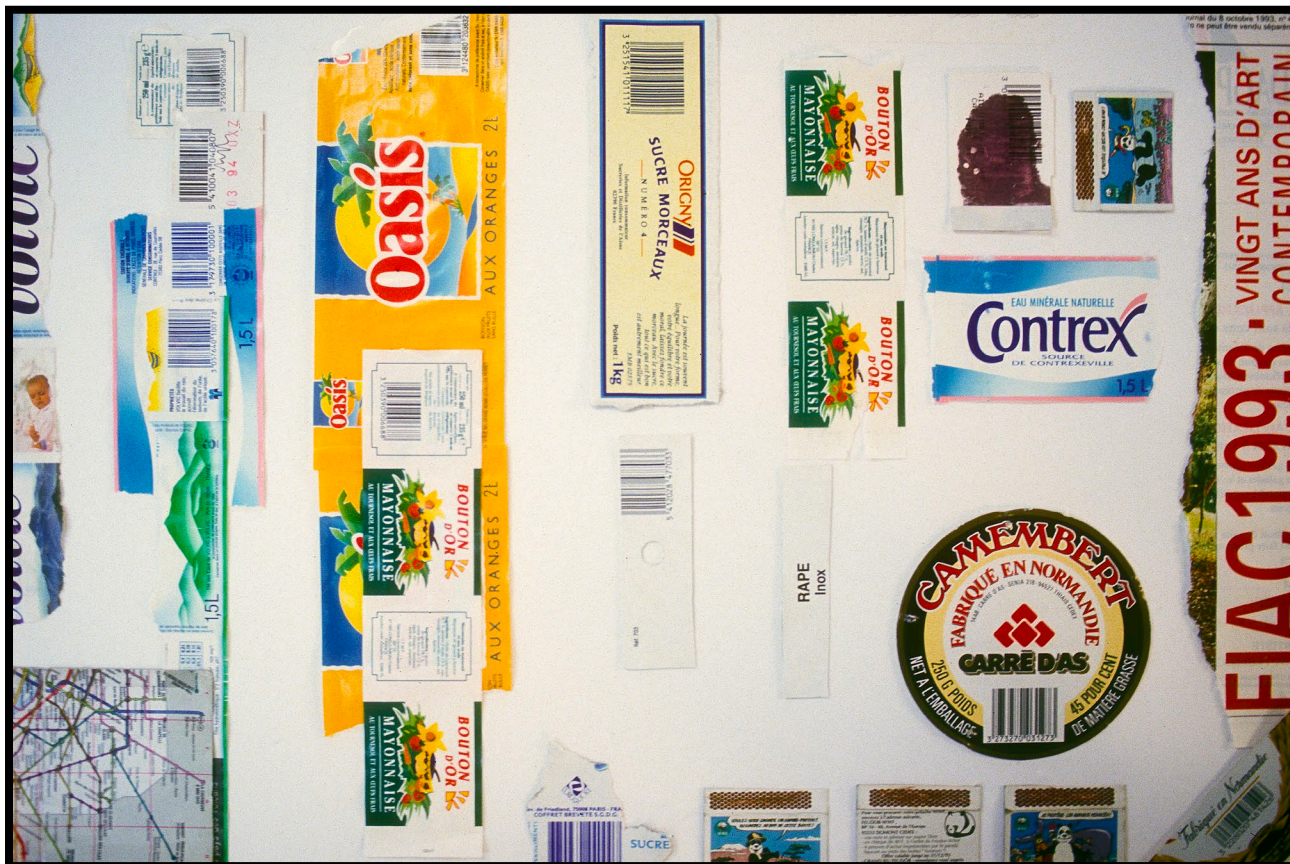
Rather than reinforced concrete, it is possible that plate glass was the material responsible for the development of modern architecture. Certainly the use of large glass areas in residential design gave rise to the idea of the garden as an outdoor room. The garden could be thought of as an extension of architecture. Actually the reverse is true because large glass allows us to see architecture as an extension of the garden. The house became a garden with a roof on it. The house is finally being recognized more appropriately as an extension of the site and not the other way around. It used to be that a garden was a literal and metaphorical extension of the owner's personality and relationship with the natural world.

When Francis Bacon wrote, "Nothing is more pleasant to the eye than green grass finely shorn," he certainly did not foresee Edwin Budding's 1830 invention of a thing called a lawnmower. When the garden again became common or some would even say part of the common purpose we began to have lawn problems. Per square foot, more herbicides and pesticides are used on the American lawn than any other single location on earth. The miniature palaces of the aspiring middle classes did not have access to the sheep that maintained the manor house lawns and our desire for "grass finely shorn" has left us with an army of two-cycle Torros

and weed-eaters droning in the haze. The idea of the lawn has been the concern of scholars like J.B. Jackson, Yi Fu Tuan and Michael Pollan and while there is no doubt about the volume of sociological meaning in the lawn their symbolic references seem to be increasingly irrelevant. Neat and tidy lawns are within nearly every homeowners grasp, but they have become devoid of value. They are superficially easy to deal with and yet consume billions of suburban weekend hours to maintain an outworn and nearly forgotten ideology. They have social meaning but they don't satisfy us.

In 1841 Andrew Jackson Downing published his best-selling treatise on the theory and practice of landscape gardening. Today he would probably have difficulty even getting such a book published. The reason for the change in our perception of the value of the garden was because the garden became someone else's concern. With the rise of the middle class, (including people like Monet), digging in the dirt became a peasant activity. Clemenceau may have come to walk with Monet in his garden and to discuss horticultural concerns, but Monet employed numerous gardeners and I don't think the President of France spent much time packing dirt around Lilly bulbs. The further you could distance yourself from dirt the more value you presented to your community and consequently to society at large. The problem was, and is, that we lost track of some of our basic needs along the way. The continuity of gardens throughout human history proves that our need for continuing and ongoing contact with nature is beyond mere fashion and it is deeply ingrained in our spirit. Our gardens exist as expressive tools of friendship, trust, homage and collective aspiration.

I am not making a case for the naive return to nature movement of the late nineteen 60's, nor am I, like Michael Pollin, suggesting we should all again become gardeners. What I am suggesting is that we should begin to act in response to the fact that we have a need to live intimately with nature. All of us. The sub-division developers, the Greenpeace activists, the industrialists, the newspaper reporters, corrupt politicians and the garbage men. All of us.

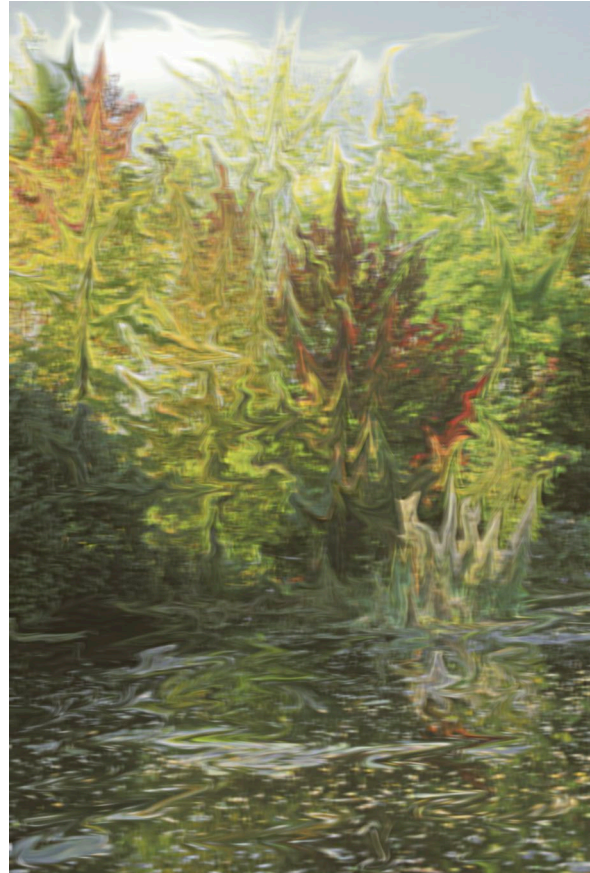


Monet's garden is always spoken of in terms of beauty but commerce is what makes the garden grow. The little picnics, the curios, the memento books and posters are all lined up just like the flowers in the garden. The taxis line up in front of the train station and the tourists line up to shovel their money into the garden and the surrounding economy. It took some real entrepreneurship to turn a dilapidated out-of-way bourgeois backyard into a tourist attraction that generates millions of Euros in profit each year.



The water garden is really glorious in late Autumn.

The bugs are dead, the tourists are gone. It is a profound and quiet end to the summer glories. Sitting next to this pond in late September is not Zen, but it comes close.



When Monet's career was in full force his cataracts began to grow. Cataracts cause blurred vision, a decreased ability to deal with glare and substantially dulled color vision.

The smeary modified image above may give us some idea of what Monet's color pallet and vision was like for many years. In the years just before he had the cataracts removed he was not painting impressionistically, he was painting what he saw.

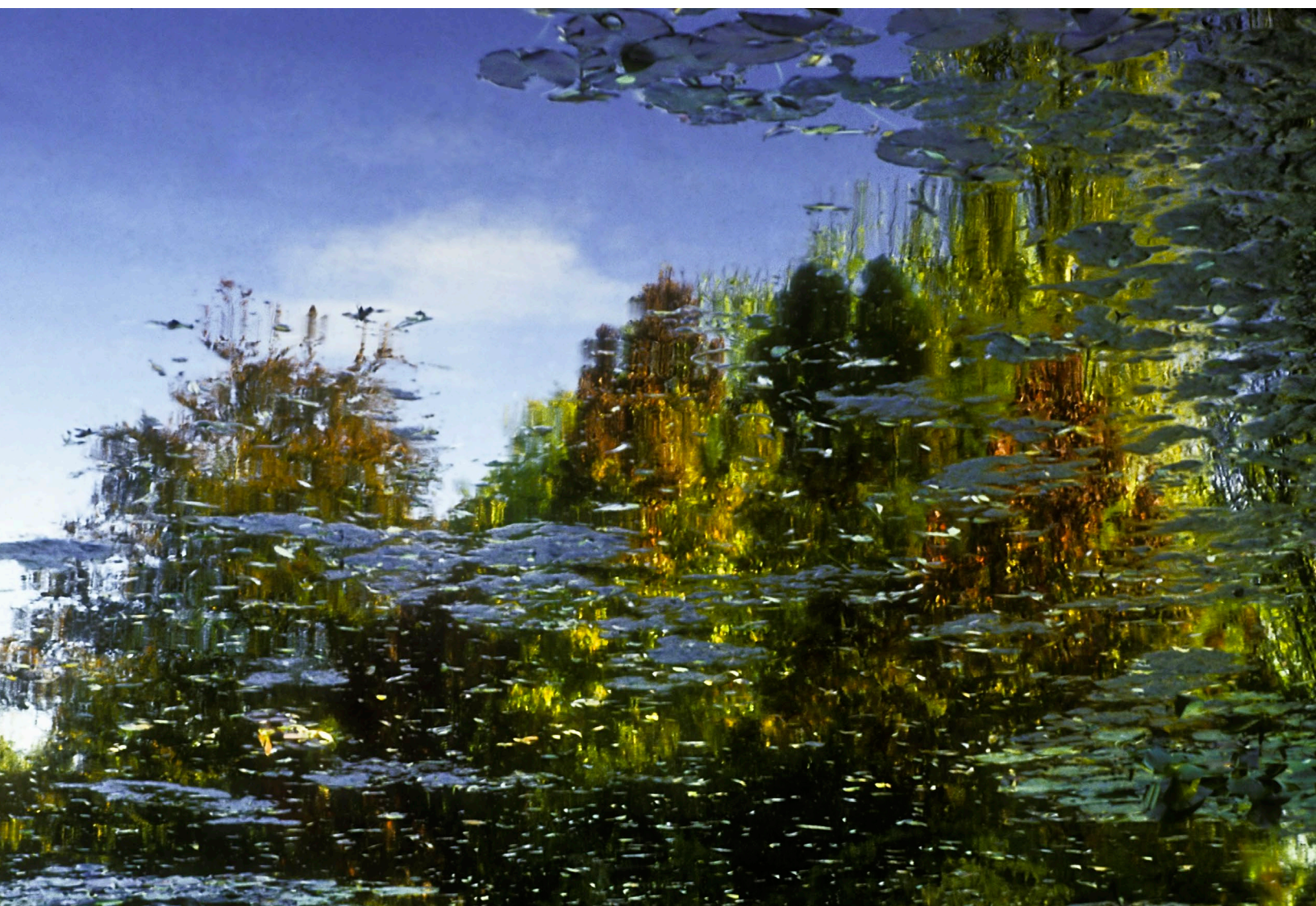
Many people have noted his comment on how much blue he saw in the world after the operation. His last paintings (in the Marmottan Monet Museum in Paris) are explosions of vibrant saturated colors and those works lead directly to abstract expressionism. They have nothing to do with the pale muted hues in his celebrated water lilies. When the cataracts came off he saw a new world. The dull and scattered colors in the image above are how Monet might have seen his water garden before the cataracts were removed.



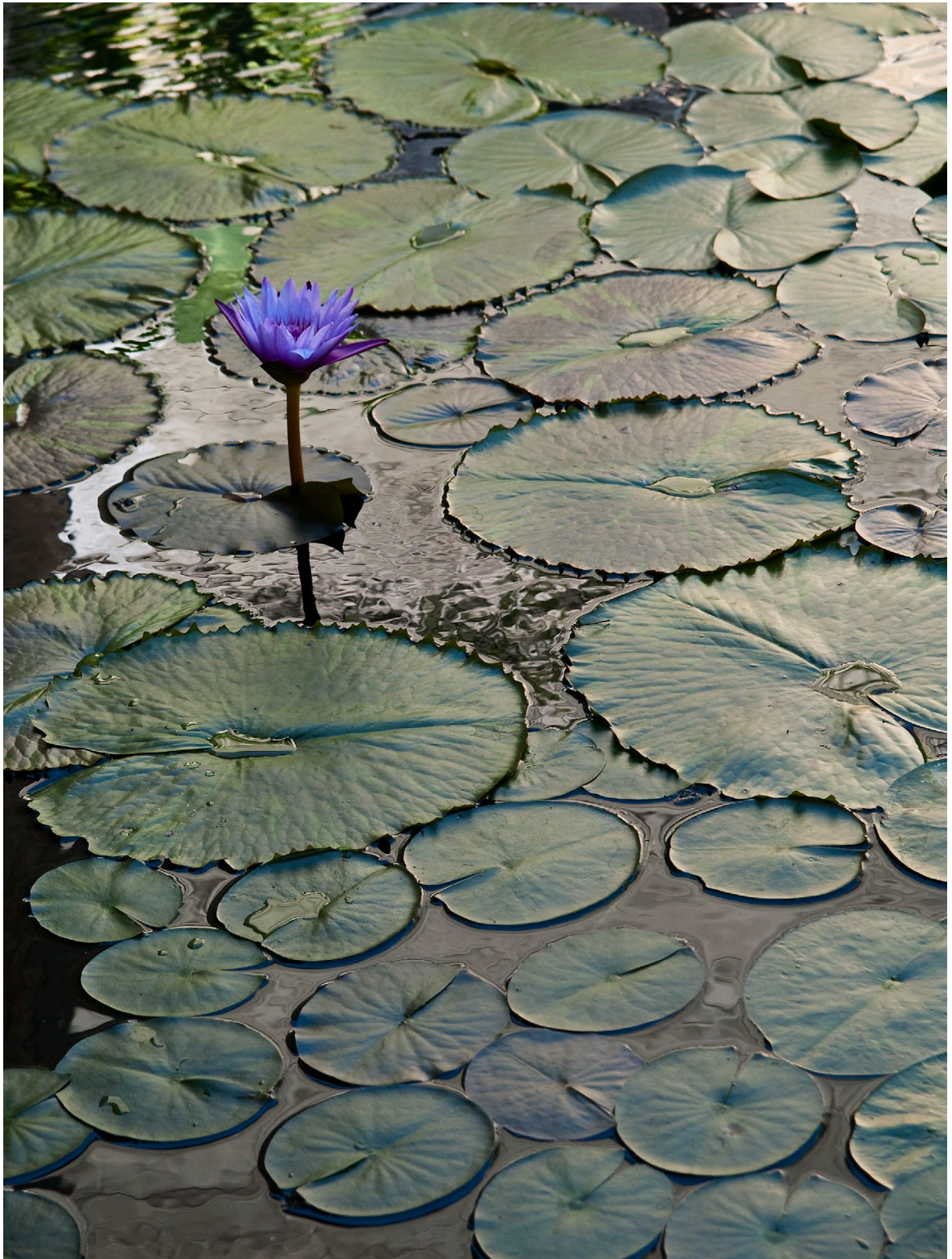
Le Pont Japonais (The Japanese Bridge) 1923-1925

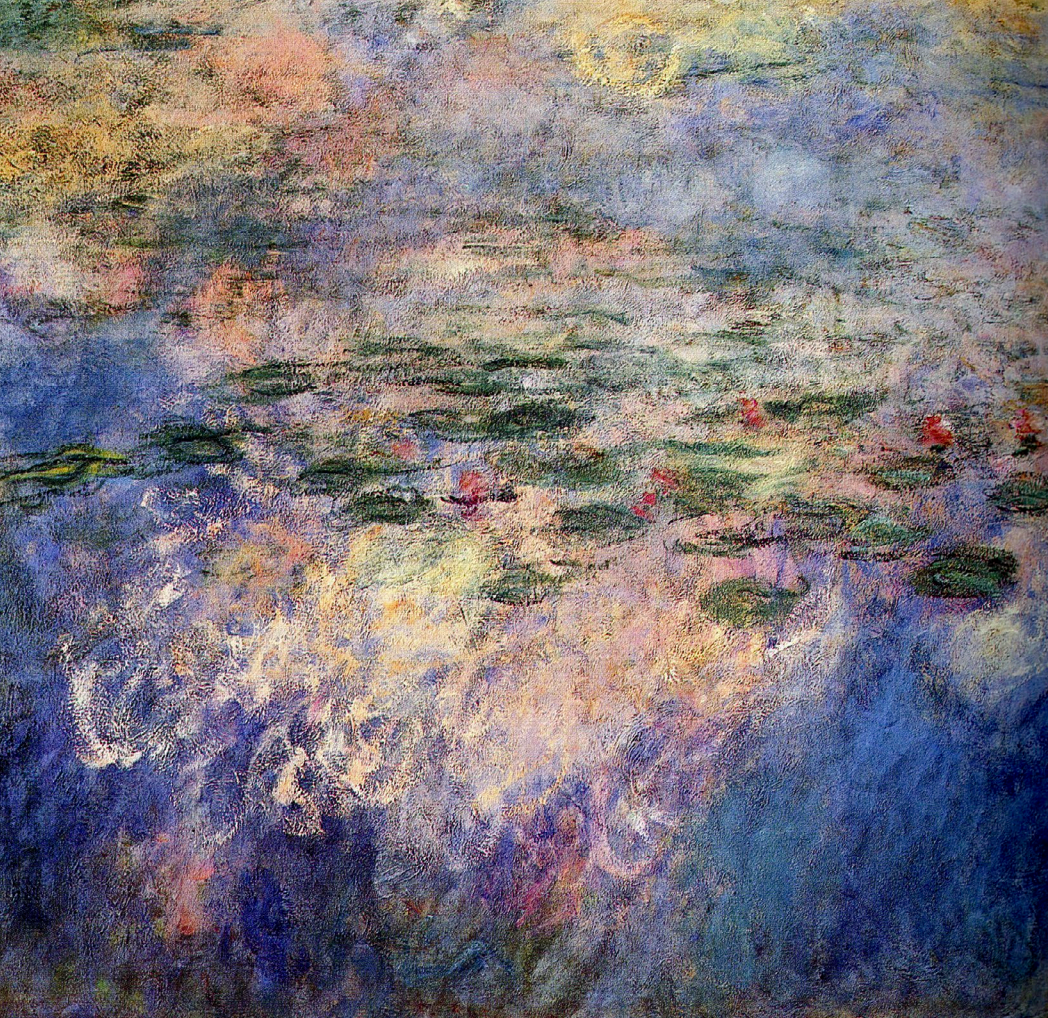
Painted after the removal of Monet's cataracts.

Minneapolis Institute of Art



Much of the allure of a garden pond comes from the fact that it is unreachable. We can't swim in it. We can't do anything with it except look at it. When we look at it the reflections it sends back they confuse and delight us. Part of our attraction to water lilies is that they are distant. You have to admire them from the water's edge. You can't get close enough to them and that makes them even more attractive.

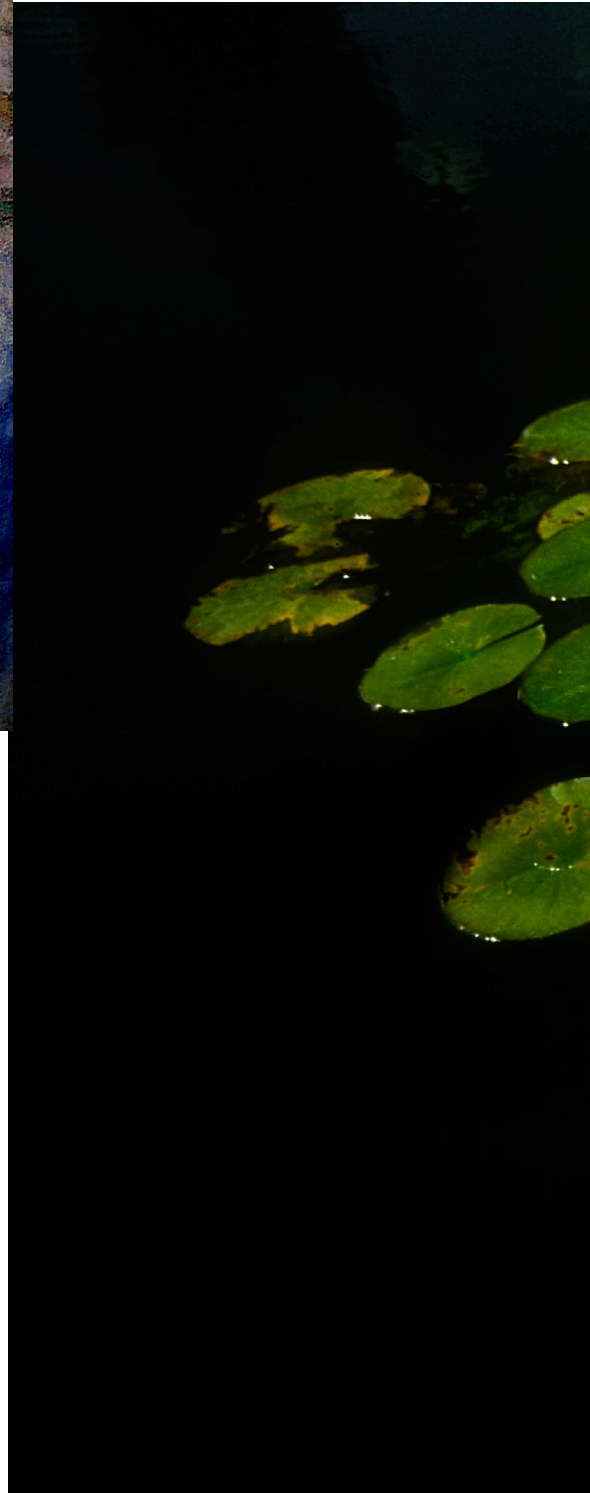


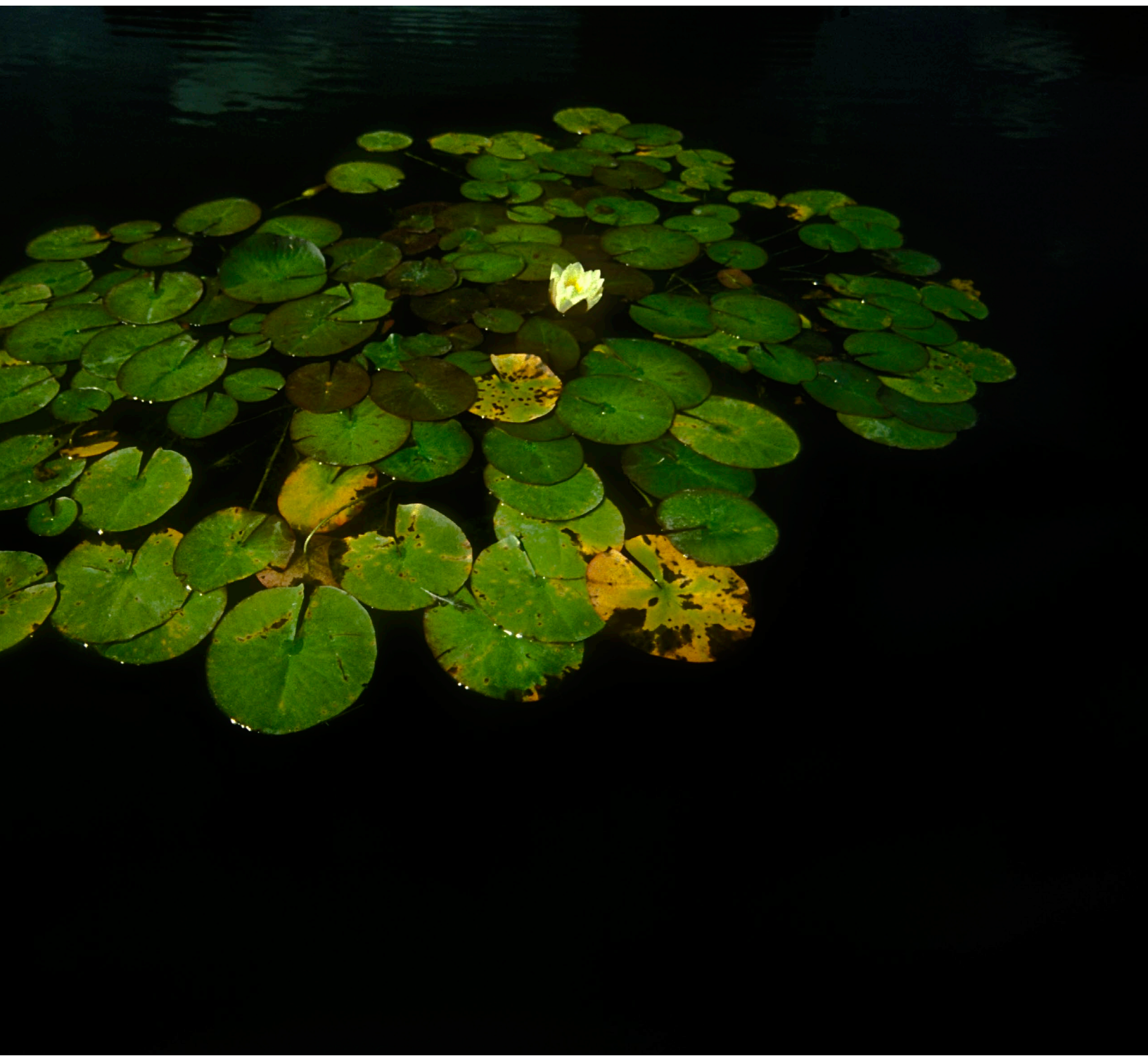


Les Nymphéas (Waterlilies) c. 1920
[A portion of the central panel]
Museum of Modern Art, New York

Like the Lotus, the Water Lily gets its strength from the muck at the bottom and draws beauty to the surface. When that surface is dark, you are looking into deep space rather than a floating plant. The often singular blossom surrounded by flat green islands only heightens the reference to gems and stars.

Note: All the water for Monet's Water Garden is recirculated. The water from the original source, a tributary of the Epte, is far too polluted to use without cleaning and filtration. The water is run through an elaborate system well out of sight of the tourist. French rivers are still sewers, no matter how scenic, they are filthy and it does not seem likely they will ever be cleaned up.





Contemporary garden designers need to re-investigate a diversity of ideas about the garden, including the value of ritual and ceremony. To understand a parade is to understand the ritual of the street. Parks and gardens too, contain their own rituals. Visual imagery in gardens has long been stuck in things botanic. The value of mere collections has not retained the value it had in the Victorian Era. The quality of a garden experience is not predicated upon botanical nomenclature or classification. We have confused our passion for pigeonholing with the value of the natural experience and our vision has suffered in the process. To name a tree is not to know it. The map is not the terrain.

Gardens are not about working with plants, they are about making decisions. The essential elements of decision making in the garden can be reduced to three:

Selection is the strangest of all, not only because it is intuitive, but also because it is irrational at many levels. How is it that we are able to decide what to include and what to leave out? A garden can be considered as a whole or it can be considered a collection of parts. It is very difficult to hold both those visions simultaneously. Even the holistic thinker must eventually make a decision about what stays and what goes. Selection also presupposes some form of a vision of the future condition of the garden and it makes little difference whether that vision is vague or severe, but a specific vision is certainly there. The French have the expression, *'Mener une vie de bâton de chaise,'* and it means to have a life of chaotic and crossed purposes. Our understanding of gardens, particularly what it is we select to be installed in the garden, often has that same life of multiple and often conflicting desires.

Nurturance is the idea where the effort and the consequences of our selection process become visible in place and in time. How is it that we decide how much effort is the right amount to put into a plant (or a whole garden for that matter) before we just give up on it completely? Before we consign the plant to the compost heap to let it rot we hope the understanding we gained from attempting to nourish that particular plant would somehow help us to better understand what to do in the future. We hope that the physical elements, the chemical reality of that dead plant will nurture other plants in the future. How is it that we decide a plant or even a whole community of plants is no longer worth our assistance? When is it we decide to attempt transplanting something to another place in the garden? As if to admit our initial selection of relationships was some how wrong? And what is it that allows us to

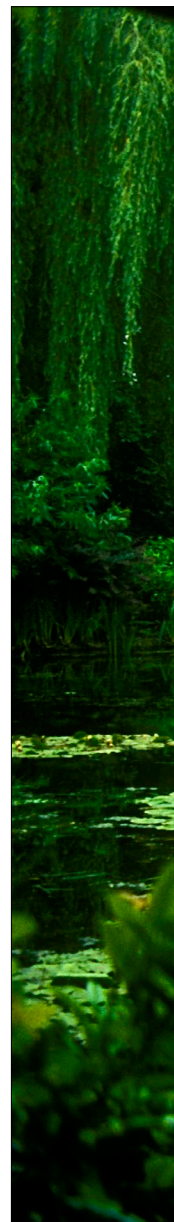
trust those decisions? In Monet's garden, since it is no longer his garden, there are a series of signs saying:

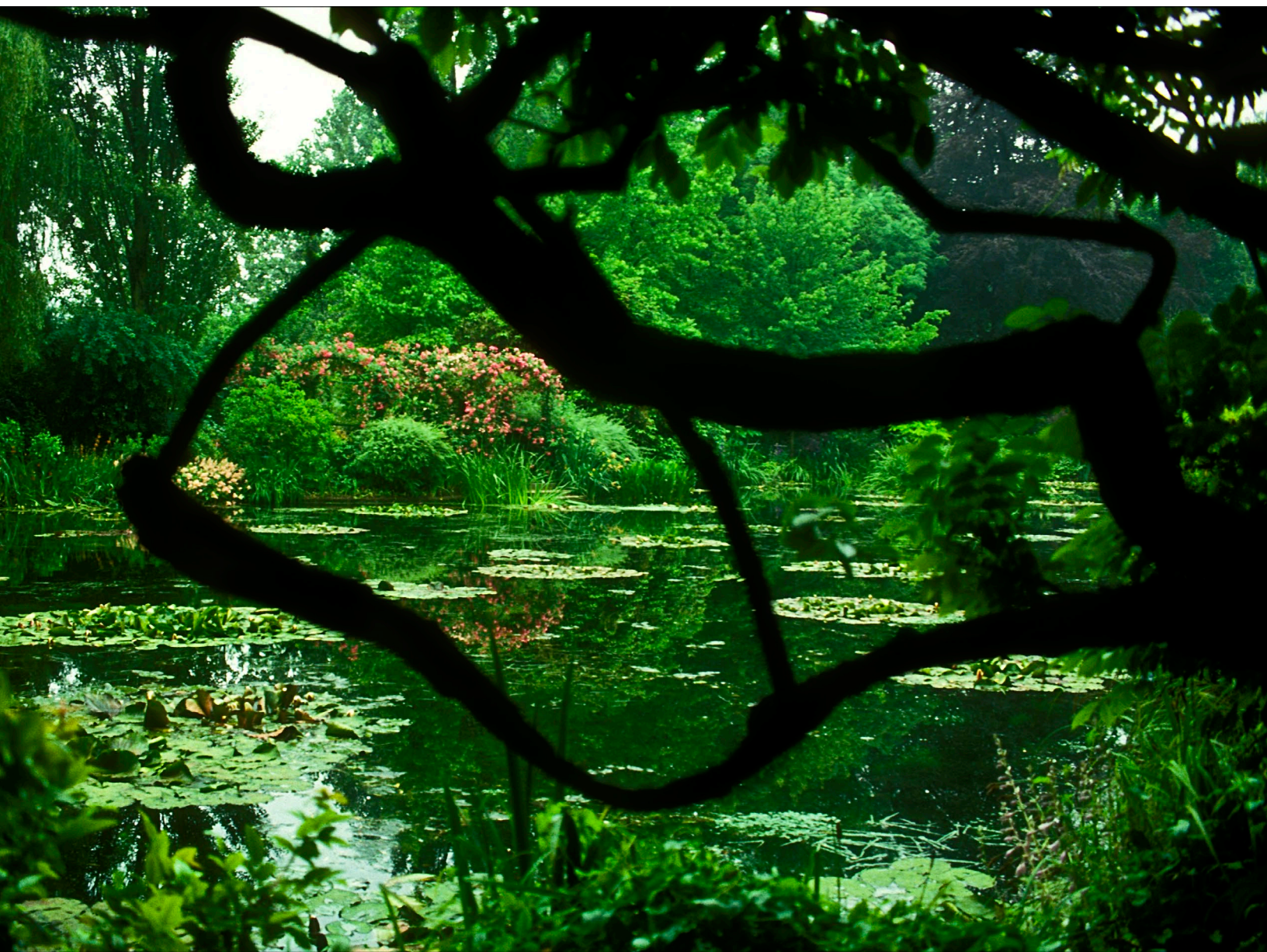
"Pour l'agrément de tous RESPECTEZ et FAITES RESPECTER Gazons et Plantations. Merci."

It means: "For the enjoyment of everyone, you must respect and see to it that others respect the lawns and plants. Thanks."

Now, just how is it that we are to "see to it that others respect the lawns and plants"? Other than not killing them or trampling them out of existence, what does it really mean to respect plants? I think it means to tend them. To fiddle with them, and to assist them in their growth, so that we can watch them flourish. Some where down at the bottom of this respect issue is our own voyeuristic self-indulgence, not any real interest in the welfare of the plant. It is our aesthetics we are satisfying.

Change is the place least attractive to those who hold a fixed picture of the way a garden should be or look. Yet change provides the strongest and most compelling reason for nurturance in the first place. Not in the sense of resisting change, but rather nurturance seems to find its roots in guiding and directing change. It carries with it a distinct whiff of resignation. (At least if one holds on to a particular "vision" or impression.) [One of the best things about Monet's understanding of his garden is that selection and nurturance contain the idea of multiple 'impressions' or changing visions.]







“The island of poplars,” with Rousseau’s inaccessible stone tomb. It was designed by marquis René Louis de Girardin.

Ermenonville, France

This October is the monthly icon for our position in the waning years of the 20th century. The time of the tenth month is only a slim edge past the middle but while walking in the morning mist, the chronology of French latitudes presses a quiver of autumn into whatever is left of my senses. It is a first level experience. The feeling is somehow primary and immediate. It is not about understanding, it is knowing. Some things we simply get and autumn is one of them.

In the days of obvious summer, things were different, but the horse-chestnut leaf margins are brown now and have given their discreet chronological message to those of us pretending to be visually anchored. It is not simply a change of the seasons. The secret is this: The hallucinogenic summer of the industrial era is on the wane. Obvious, you say. C'est evident. It is, perhaps, obvious, but precious little has been suggested about what methods we might have available to continue into the next millennium with any dignity. Obvious has the same root as oblivion and in the waning days of September, I have been a pilgrim, voyaging with map and compass for a promising route.

Thousands before me have marked the path of my pilgrimage. Historians, buses, road signs and Le Guide Michelin led me to some old French places and ideas that I wanted to think about again. The town of Ermenonville had arrived at the top of my list.

Ermenonville is perceived by most tourists (and perhaps even most French) as a small town near an amusement park. The amusement park is on the grounds of a once grand but now dilapidated chateau. They were both originally located there because of an inland dune formation in the midst of a pine forest. Mer de Sable means 'sea of sand' and it is indeed a sea. The sand may have been the initial attraction, but now the droves of tourists arrive for Ferris wheel rides, cheap candy and picnics. The sand, the first and primary reason for coming to this unusual place, has become a backdrop for the glitter and lights of the amusement park. Certainly some now consider the sand a nuisance while our former primary relationship with nature slides into the artificial, subservient, and fatigued. The status of nature at Ermenonville is an interesting anomaly, a minor irritation, something you brush from your shoes before you get back in your car.

The town of Ermenonville is like thousands of others in France. It has another chateau, which has become a hotel and a restaurant with three stars. Like most tourists and even many pilgrims, I went with eyes so intent on what I wanted to see; I had no room in my

perception for the town itself. I wanted to "know" how to get to a "specific place" Perhaps I even wanted a pre-conceived set of feelings. But when I arrived at my destination, the Parc Jean-Jacques Rousseau, I found it was closed, for lunch.

Lunch is a form of religion in France and everything not connected to food closes from noon to two o'clock. I had a hunger for vision, not food and I walked the periphery of the closed park until I found a hole in the fence. My intent was contemplative and photographic. Both of them would certainly occur with more clarity if I could wander without the crowds I imagined arriving after lunch. Coming down a small hill, I found the path around the lake and followed it until I could see the island of Rousseau's tomb.

After all this time, the tomb is still on an island. Something in my pessimism allowed me to imagine a public discontented with contemplating anything from a distance, feeling they had been cheated, as though proximity were a form of possession. I thought the island might have a bridge or causeway to allow teeming hordes of pedestrian pilgrims. When I arrived at the shore, I was thankful there was no bridge. The tomb itself is a rather simple stone affair, even looking a little makeshift, surrounded by tall, unmown grasses. I imagined a gardener in a rowboat heading toward the island with a lawn mower and a gas can hanging out the back. The gardener rowing slowly and mumbling something to himself about the fact that Rousseau's body is in the Pantheon with all the other heroes. "Why do I have to go mow the damn lawn around a tomb with nobody even in it?" By itself, the stone marker has little importance except in concert with the adjacent green sentinel poplar trees, planted on the island perimeter at regular intervals. They shimmered in the vertical light of noon.

All Poplars reside comfortably inside the genus *Salix* and while they love the land, they love it most as 'riverains' or 'residents by the stream'. Certainly they are well suited to their location on the Island. They are the particular variety of poplar known as 'Lombardy' and since these trees are not native to Ermenonville, I mused about the selection of this particular tree. I wondered if I knew so little of French history that it was possible for France to have once controlled the portion of Italy where these trees originated. Or was it simply more important to have their stylized non-native and un-natural verticality mark with exuberance and vitality, the tomb of a champion of all things natural.

I had no real solution to my musings, but was content to sit in quiet solitude at the water edge and I thought about what Rousseau meant.

The poetry of metaphor blossoms most beautifully in times of censorship and the time of Rousseau was no exception. Varying interpretations of the written word have stayed more than one gallows rope and many centuries later, those variations do not make my understanding any easier. If I understand anything about what Rousseau meant, it can be distilled to this: God resides in the natural world. And if God resides in the natural world, we then, have no need of the monarchy as being Gods' messengers, because we have access to the natural world ourselves.

The problem with perception is selectivity and our perception has certainly been selective when it comes to Rousseau. The only part we have listened to and manifested in our actions is that we don't need a monarchy. We specifically and conveniently forgot the part about God residing in the natural world. Either that or we don't believe in God anymore.

I am specifically unwilling and unable to provide any serious speculation as to whether or not we any longer believe in God. I am willing to posit we have a spiritual need, a need to believe in something outside ourselves. Our need is founded in an underlying desire to value the continuity of human existence. And while that need has more incidental and anthropocentric value, it just may be something to help us hang on.

If one were to ask, "Is there any inherent value in human existence?" I would say no. Simply for the sake of this pilgrimage, my emotional investigation into what is next for our cult of Western civilization, we might begin by realizing the efficacy of Rousseau's ideas was to develop the middle class. We finally had an excuse for something other than princes and peasants. Others have said his ideas lead to development of the Romantics and eventually to National Parks and other organizations like The Nature Conservancy. However, the sheer uncontested volume of effort dedicated to the evolution of the middle class so far outweighs any notions of respect for nature, the scale is pathetically unbalanced.

Just what is it we can do about this paucity of balance and finally begin to value our own existence in a way that will tip the scale back toward nature?

The 'Island of Poplars' is an artificial construct. The lake around it and the stone of the tomb are things we have taken from nature and modified to suit our needs. The poplars were planted. In fact, as poplars are one of the fastest growing species, since the time of Rousseau, they have been planted over and over again. They are not nature, but they are natural. They have been tended and maintained. All that attention and care over the centuries may hold some of the key.

At the moment, the problem with completely accepting the garden as a model for our interaction with nature presents some very tangled relationships. The garden is a place where nature dominates the landscape. Clearly our behavior over the last millennium indicates we humans are interested in dominating nature. The gardener lives at the edge of the garden, or even some distance away, but almost never in it. It is an issue of proportion.

If we look from the vantage point of a spacecraft, only two human endeavors have made significant enough impact to be easily seen by the unaided eye on the surface of the Earth. One is the Great Wall of China. The other is the Grid of Farms in the American Midwest. We might do well to realize the image of the garden is already extant in our relationship with nature, but the scale of that gardening is now global. Voltaire's final statement in 'Candide' is, "We must cultivate our garden." It is time we get on with that task.

If, God is in nature, and, if we respect God, or even if we respect our need for spirituality then we need to develop ways to demonstrate our respect. I suggest we begin by realizing we need to live intimately with nature and that our individual gardening efforts have had pathetically little effect on what society does as a whole. We may need to establish political systems that are held accountable for demonstrating their ability in attending to that specific need.

I am not making a case for another layer of bureaucracy. We do not need nature review boards. We have arrived at a point where what we need is a system that is specifically weighted toward nature. We need a moral code and ethical laws reflecting our needs in regard to our relationship with nature. I suggest that we might begin the process by abolishing the idea that ownership of land confers the right to do anything with it the owner sees fit. And finally, I suggest we prevent any proposed project from proceeding until it is capable of demonstrating how the project will enhance the quality of our individual and collective need to live intimately with nature. If we have the right to be happy and we know living intimately with nature contributes to that happiness, we need to promote the position that we have a right to an intimate relation with nature and that anything that prevents or impedes that relationship is a violation of our rights.

I disagree with scientists and economists who view nature as a commodity or a service or through logic and reason believe nature to be separate from us. Nature is un-reasonable and we humans are one of the most powerful and un-reasonable parts of it. It is historically naive to view the world other than a garden because we have treated it as such since the beginning of agriculture. The problem is not with the garden; rather it is with the gardeners. The value civilization places on nature is proportional to how bad non-nature is. At the moment, our cities and all our non-nature are pretty horrid. Consequently, the value of nature is increasing and it will soon be the most valuable thing of all.