

Chapter 5

Industrial Nature

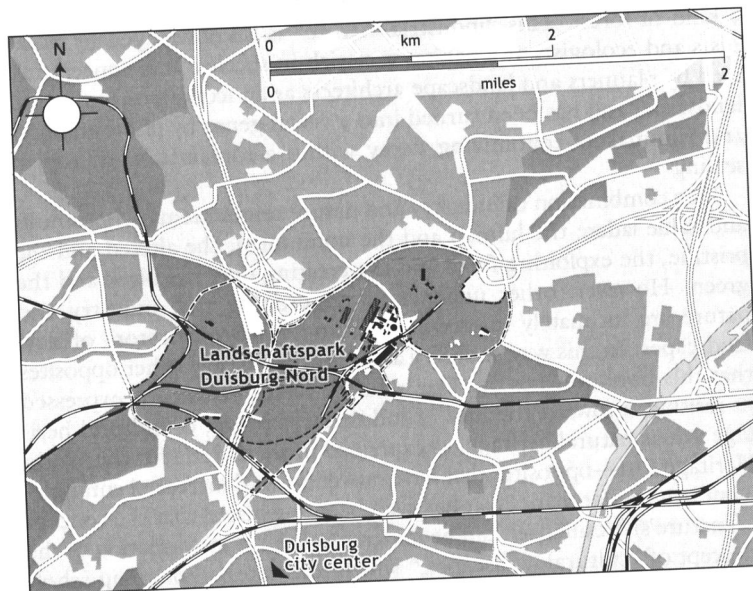
Abandonment is often followed by overgrowing. When an industrial plant is abandoned, the growing plants bear witness to remaining substances in the ground—leftovers from industrial production. Following pioneering species, the industrial site will soon become marked by shrubs and later by trees, sometimes turning the place into a kind of forest. This “industrial nature” is acknowledged by botanists and ecologists as a habitat very rich in species. It is conceptualized by planners and landscape architects as an iconic post-industrial landscape, and has been turned into a visual genre by photographers and filmmakers epitomizing decay within a romantic or dystopian setting.¹

The combination of industry and nature might seem dichotomous and value laden: the human and the nonhuman, the altered and the pristine, the exploiting force and the creating one, the black and the green. However, other understandings propose that industry and nature are intimately intertwined, acting as coconstitutors of new landscapes. In this way, industry and nature resemble other opposites that this book touches on, like industry versus culture, as expressed in resistance toward the idea of industrial heritage; or cultural heritage versus natural heritage, as expressed in the criteria for the World Heritage List—opposites that have moved toward increased entanglement in a similar manner. It has even been suggested that the concept of (nature’s) “resilience” can be understood as a transformation of the concept of “cultural landscapes,” which illustrates an ongoing scholarly effort to apply perspectives that emphasize the “hybrid and messy connections of the world”—without doubt a key feature of industrial nature—and also bring questions of responsibility to the fore.²

One post-industrial site where industrial nature plays a decisive role is the Landschaftspark Duisburg-Nord in the Ruhr district in

Germany. Here visitors encounter a former ironworks where spontaneous vegetation thrives in and around industrial structures and where strict rows of newly planted leafy trees occupy some open spaces in between. Many of the activities going on in the landscape park are transferred from a setting in “nature” as it is more commonly perceived, activities such as climbing, biking, diving, playing, and walking the dog. Yet the climbing paths follow the walls of former ore bunkers, the biking paths meander above and between the toxic ground of the former industrial area, and the diving takes place in a former gasometer. These and other happenings like concerts and art exhibitions have become so popular that the Landschaftspark Duisburg-Nord is said to be the most visited place in the seventeen-million-strong German state of North Rhine-Westphalia today, second only to the cathedral in Cologne.³

What is it that makes this post-industrial landscape so attractive? What makes it an object on the contemporary traveler’s map of



Map 5.1 The Ruhr district is heavily industrialized and densely populated. The land is mostly flat, with few obvious reference points. During the 1990s, the former ironworks of Meiderich in northern Duisburg was turned into a “Landschaftspark,” among other things offering new views over the environs. Map: Stig Söderlind, 2013.

spectacular experiences? The Western world has been grappling with redundant large-scale industrial areas for some decades now, and different strategies and outcomes can to some extent be evaluated and judged. Does the landscape park in Duisburg provide an optimistic answer to the overwhelming issue of what to do with brownfields all over the world? Is there a flipside to the shining coin—losers behind the scene whose voices are drowned out by the enthusiastic praises of brigades of visitors? The examination of this “post-industrial regime of nature” or “post-industrial urban ecologies” is still limited from a humanist scholarly perspective and, thus, the aim of this chapter is to explore the potentials of industrial nature within the framework of the landscape scar metaphor.⁴ The empirical node is the Landschaftspark Duisburg-Nord in the heavily industrialized and densely populated Ruhr district in Germany—an area with a complicated history (map 5.1). A few detours take us to places like Berlin in Germany, Detroit in the United States, and Avesta in Sweden. What remedies are offered by industrial nature?

Industrial Nature and the Ruhr District

The physical landscape of the Ruhr district consists mainly of meadows and plains, bordered by the Ruhr river to the south, the Rhine to the west, and the Lippe river to the north. Coal—the basis for the regional industry and the dense settlement since the 1830s—is typically found in tilting layers in the ground. The coal layers come to the surface in the southern part of the district and go deeper and deeper further north. Hence the oldest remains of coal mining and early industrial activities are to be found in the south, close to the Ruhr. As mining techniques developed, the industry followed the coal layers further north; at the beginning of the twenty-first century the industry was concentrated just north of the small river Emscher, a tributary of the Rhine.

Coal mining and steel production in the Ruhr district were of decisive importance for German forces during both world wars and thus also an obvious target for allied occupation and bombing. Large parts of the Ruhr industry and built environment were destroyed during World War II and rebuilding was a given postwar priority. This effort was partly financed through the Marshall Plan and was an integral part of the European Coal and Steel Community created in 1952. The region that had been so crucial for the war was to become crucial for the peace, and the Ruhr industries also boomed in the 1950s.

Toward the end of the 1950s, coal mining was hit by crisis, due partly to overproduction and rising international competition, and partly to competition from new energy sources such as gas and oil.⁵ A wave of closures followed. Just over a decade later, at the beginning of the 1970s, the oil crises occurred, severely affecting the Ruhr area. The almost 200 mines that were active at the beginning of the century dwindled to 125 in 1960 and to 29 in 1980.⁶ Between 1960 and 1980 the number of workers in the mines shrank by 50 percent and, although the service sector increased in importance, it was not enough to replace the vanishing industrial jobs.⁷ In the mid-1980s, the Ruhr had the highest unemployment rates in what was then West Germany, at over 15 percent, with large groups of immigrant workers among those most exposed to the situation.⁸ The Ruhr district was described "as a giant dying from physical space and social issues diseases, besides the negative region image due to the soil contamination, huge unemployment and little creativity on the labour market."⁹ How did industrial nature enter into this picture?

The origin of the concept of "industrial nature" is not entirely clear, but it appeared as a concept within botany in Berlin in the 1970s.¹⁰ After World War II and up to German reunification in 1990, the special situation of Berlin as a divided city decisively influenced the emergence of urban-industrial nature as a prominent feature. In West Berlin large areas that had been destroyed during the war were not built up again, but left to their own devices for decades. Spontaneous vegetation flourished on these sites in successive stages of colonization, from herbaceous plants and shrubs to wild urban woodlands.¹¹ This was also the situation in several Berlin railway yards, since East Germany had been given the rights to control the railways and decided to reduce train transport in the western part of the city to a minimum. The plan of the West Berlin authorities was to spare unbuilt spaces as reserves for future planning, but also to provide green urban spaces to the walled-in inhabitants.¹²

The work of botanists and later ecologists eventually resulted in a conceptualization of urban-industrial nature as an ecosystem of "a fourth kind," as it was labeled by ecologist Ingo Kowarik, along with pristine, agricultural, and horticultural ecosystems. The nature of the "fourth kind" included industrial sites, but also more generally vacant lots and transport corridors.¹³ Kowarik argued that these areas represented a new type of process that was important to acknowledge for many reasons, among them because the phenomenon was so widespread, because urban-industrial nature showed a special ecological configuration, and because the spatial location was within immediate

reach of the public, which implied that urban-industrial nature could serve important social and ecological functions.¹⁴

The ideas from Berlin were thus to some extent established when leading politicians and business executives in the Ruhr district realized that the negative situation needed to be dealt with. A new image had to be established and the material legacies from the past had to be transformed in a way that could bring hope for the future. On a federal level as well, there was a will to invest in the Ruhr—the area being considered as one of the weakest parts of West Germany.¹⁵

In 1989, a ten-year program, the Internationale Bauausstellung (IBA) Emscher Park, was launched, inspired by the German tradition of building exhibitions. The aim was articulated as to promote urban development from a social, cultural, and ecological perspective.¹⁶ From the beginning of the twentieth century the Emscher river, after which the IBA was named, had been an open sewer because ground conditions precluded the construction of underground sewers; to many, the stinking trench epitomized the gloomy image of the Ruhr district.¹⁷ By this time the land in the immediate proximity of the Emscher had largely served its use and was said to be the area with the largest problem density in the country.¹⁸ In addition, the regional organization of the Ruhr was a complex network of economic and political authorities, associations, and corporations, which did not really share a common vision and had difficulties cooperating.¹⁹

The program began with a call, sent out by the Ministry of Urban Development, Housing and Transport in the North Rhine-Westphalia, formulated by Social Democratic politician Christoph Zöpel and geographer Karl Ganser, soliciting project proposals from all sectors of society. A public corporation was set up to act as coordinator and to monitor the quality of the proposals, and later to facilitate realization of the ideas. The decision to let the overall program grow out of a number of individual projects had the benefit of allowing different actors to express their own ideals and emphases while at the same time contributing to a joint effort. The basis for the IBA program—which had to be integrated into all of the individual proposals—was an 80-kilometer-long landscape park that was to take shape along the Emscher river.²⁰

With German reunification in 1990, the Ruhr district was suddenly no longer the weakest part of the country. The available funds for the IBA program became more limited and a new vision of "Change without Growth" was added to the transformation work.²¹ At this time, there were more than eight thousand hectares of abandoned industrial land in the Ruhr district.²² These vast areas could not

easily be transformed into the well-known types of spaces for previous types of uses, such as new industrial production, residential areas, or well-managed parks. Along with the problems of decontamination, both actual demand and financial means were lacking. Thus, a new conceptualization of the abandoned industrial land was needed, and three central aspects of the IBA program became *industrial nature*, *industrial heritage*, and *industrial art*. Through this focus, the existing environment was turned into a material and imaginative asset that was activated in an ambition to change the future course of the district.

Abandonment, Discovery, and Spectacle

One of more than one hundred individual projects carried out within the IBA program was a transformation of the ironworks Meidericher Hütte in Duisburg into the leisure area Landschaftspark Duisburg-Nord.

When the ironworks in Duisburg, in the western part of the Ruhr district, closed down in 1985 after more than eighty years of operation, no one lost their job, as workplaces simply moved to a more modern plant nearby. In spite of the generally negative situation in the Ruhr, this meant there was no feeling of crisis directly connected with this closure. The owner, Thyssen AG, kept and maintained the Meidericher Hütte for about a year, to keep it in reserve until all production had been successfully transferred to the new plant. After this period in limbo, it was generally expected that the company would demolish the old ironworks.²³ However, instead a group of local citizens began to argue that the former ironworks should be preserved, and eventually they succeeded in their efforts.²⁴ A public company acted as trustee for the city of Duisburg and became the new owner, buying the 230-hectare ironworks area on the outskirts of the city from Thyssen for a symbolic sum.²⁵ For Thyssen, this solution was decisively cheaper than keeping and decontaminating the site.

The transformation of the Meidericher Hütte thus began before the IBA program was launched, and the planning process leading to the IBA Emscher Park was influenced by what was going on in Duisburg. According to Wolfgang Ebert, then president of the German Society for Industrial History and involved in the work with the Meidericher Hütte, the former ironworks constituted a core and "a small galaxy of the overall ideas" that later characterized the IBA Emscher Park.²⁶



Figure 5.1 When the former ironworks in Duisburg opened as a landscape park, visitors could climb one of the blast furnaces and get an extensive view, both of the post-industrial site and of the surrounding landscape. Photo: Anna Storm, 2007.

Therefore, to some extent, it became a test arena for the larger-scale program. What, then, marked the transformation of the ironworks into a landscape park?

Having secured the preservation of the ironworks, the earlier "forbidden city" was gradually opened up to the public. Special guided tours were offered, and early on it was possible to climb up a blast furnace via a prepared stairway to enjoy an extensive view over the landscape (figure 5.1). For most of the visitors it was, Wolfgang Ebert recalls, a "surprising sensation to go in there, for they had never been able to see something like that; despite the fact that they are surrounded by this landscape, they do not know what is in there."²⁷ This story of discovery has its counterparts in many post-industrial landscapes, pinpointing the fact that the transformation attracted mainly not former workers, but people without previous direct experience of the ironworks. At many sites it was newcomers rather than locals who had first emphasized the potential for new uses at the abandoned industrial sites.²⁸ In the case of the Meidericher Hütte, the astonished gazes of the first visitors were directed both toward the formerly hidden place of the ironworks and toward the overall industrial landscape of the area. Since the flat land of the Ruhr was almost completely

lacking in vantage points, the possibility to see afar from the top of a blast furnace was a great part of the attraction.

The IBA program launched a landscape architecture competition for the Meidericher Hütte. The winner was the firm Latz und Partner, and from the early 1990s they worked on the transformation process. The former industrial area—dominated by the abandoned blast furnace plant, casting machines, railway lines, overhead cranes, ore bunkers, storage facilities, and administration buildings—was also given a new name: Landschaftspark Duisburg-Nord. In comparison to other suggested names, such as “Feuerland” (“Land of fire”), the choice of “landscape park” sent clear signals of a move from industrial toward natural allusions.²⁹

Accordingly, the emerging industrial nature at the landscape park was recognized early on. At a first stage, so-called ruderal species began to colonize the empty and silent industrial structures. “Ruderal” is a term describing both a type of ground and the vegetation growing there. The word has its origin in Latin, “ruderalis” and “rudus” meaning rubble, like gravel and broken bricks, and typical locations for ruderal species are roadsides, ruins, and other leftover or in-between spaces. The word is both an adjective and a noun, used in plant science from the eighteenth century to identify habitats highly disturbed by human activity and, from the late 1970s on, also as part of an ecological classification system called the CSR triangle theory.³⁰ More generally, the concept is used to describe any wasteland, such that “ruderal species” are sometimes equated with weeds. Ruderals are usually pioneers, fast-growing plants that rapidly complete their life cycles and often produce great numbers of seeds. They typically dominate a disturbed area for a few years before gradually losing out in competition with other species.³¹

At the Landschaftspark Duisburg-Nord, this first layer of spontaneous vegetation was complemented by conscious planting. Leafy trees that blossomed with light pink flowers in the springtime were embedded in strict rows between the industrial structures. The combination of low growing ruderal species and slender trees within an industrial setting was introduced to the public in lavish photo books and through guided tours with “industrial nature” as their special focus. In these presentations the abandoned industrial structures were acknowledged for their former function, but the main emphasis was put on their dramatic sculptural qualities in relation to the growing vegetation. The industrial and the natural elements were thus not regarded as contradictory, but instead as mutually reinforcing in the landscape park.

The landscape architect Peter Latz envisaged that “in time, the greenery will dominate the technical constructions of the gateways. So bit by bit another history, another understanding of the contaminated site and of the idea of the ‘garden’ is developing.”³² In keeping with this prophecy, after some time the spectacle of contrasting industry and nature began to include a friendlier everyday experience as well, and it was asserted that “the fear of pollution and contamination has given way to a calm acknowledgement of the old structures.”³³ Moving away from an unambiguously industrial area toward the conception of a landscape park and the “idea of a ‘garden’” might seem to be a long journey upon the same piece of land, but as we will see later in this chapter, it is a journey repeated elsewhere in the Ruhr district.

However, the Landschaftspark Duisburg-Nord was characterized not only by an appreciated process of overgrowing, but also by spectacular sports and cultural activities. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, a former gasometer was turned into a diving facility, open to the public and hosted by the Park Diving Club, while former ore bunkers provided walls for a number of climbing paths, similarly open to the public and much used by the local division of the German Alpine Club (figure 5.2).³⁴ Both outdoor and indoor spaces of the

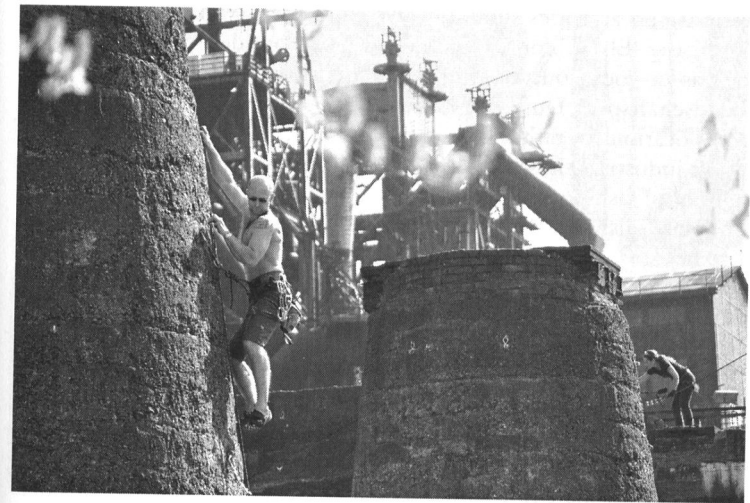


Figure 5.2 Among many new activities in the landscape park, the local division of the German Alpine Club has constructed climbing paths in the former ore bunkers. Photo: DAV Duisburg.

former ironworks were adapted to house concerts, art, history exhibitions, and marketing events. There were outdoor cinema shows and a specially designed light installation in the evenings. During the ten years of the IBA Emscher Park program the park was also the location for nearly sixty movie productions.

A similar translation of activities usually taking place in "nature" took place in Bottrop, not far from Duisburg. Here an indoor ski slope, built as a pipe, wound over six hundred meters down a slag heap, and the possibility of downhill skiing in Bottrop was much appreciated both by people living in the vicinity and by people traveling longer distances, for example, from the Netherlands.³⁵ All year round you could ride the escalator to the top of the waste heap, enter the -4°C atmosphere and go skiing, or you could sit in the Alpine chalet at the top and have a beer while listening to music from Tyrol.³⁶

Certainly it was discussed what uses of the former industrial area in Duisburg were considered appropriate in its new shape as a landscape park. This was a debate that resonated with the larger IBA program and also beyond in later transformation projects in the Ruhr. A key question seems to have been how to direct the transformation process in a way that resulted in "site specific" characteristics and "authentic" places.³⁷ Historic, aesthetic, and ecological aspects were regarded to be crucial in this respect or, expressed in another way, "that interpretations and activities should evolve from their own environment."³⁸ Wolfgang Ebert, for example, did not consider performances of operas or rock concerts with a blast furnace in the background at Landschaftspark Duisburg-Nord to be "authentic" events, but mere translocations of rather ordinary events. He argued that the trend of using industrial sites as stages was dangerous, because it could soon fall out of fashion and then suddenly nothing would be left.³⁹

Sociologist John Urry has highlighted how our experience of places has become increasingly governed by visuality, which has in turn developed into an "abstracted, disembodied quality or capacity."⁴⁰ He argues that all places therefore tend to become more and more cosmopolitan and nomadic, that is, to lose their unique meanings. The sought-after site specificity and authenticity at Landschaftspark Duisburg-Nord and within the IBA program at large can probably be understood as a response to this tendency.

The IBA program was much applauded but also criticized, among other things for being elitist and for not taking enough consideration of local populations and communities.⁴¹ It was argued that the Ruhr was "reconstructed for a not-yet-existing middle class," explaining the low involvement of the local working class population in the

process.⁴² The transformation work at the Landschaftspark Duisburg-Nord showed a typical mixture of almost no former workers involved at an initial stage and, later on, a group of retired workers and engineers voluntarily engaged in maintenance work. None of the projects in the IBA program focused primarily on new work opportunities, but instead on transforming the land along the Emscher river into places where people would feel at home. According to a study by geographers Andreas Keil and Sibylle Findel, important steps in this direction had been taken by the end of the IBA.⁴³ Here we can notice an explicit combination of the features of "land" and "landscape" as outlined in the introductory chapter, a combination of the places of "home" and the places of "visual desire."

At the beginning of the 1990s, most of the industrial remnants in the Ruhr district were generally perceived by local residents as abandoned, polluted areas and symbols of economic decline. A decade later, this image had changed so that the industrial structures were viewed more as "relics of culture," with people living close to transformed post-industrial landscapes using them actively and identifying them as something positive.⁴⁴ This was true for children and teenagers as well as adults, and industrial nature was a key ingredient of



Figure 5.3 Traces of young lovers at the top of a blast furnace in the former ironworks, indicating its transformation into a place for adventure and refuge. Photo: Anna Storm, 2007.

the positive interpretation since it provided sought-after places for unregulated play and contemplation (figure 5.3).⁴⁵

As one part of the study by Keil and Findel, people using the Landschaftspark Duisburg-Nord were asked to take photographs, and a frequent theme chosen was the contrast between "wild" vegetation and old industrial structures.⁴⁶ The photographers commented that they were "impressed especially by the power of nature and the frailness of human production" and that this motif gave them "hope for the future."⁴⁷ A resident in the vicinity of the landscape park responded to the investigators as follows:

How I see the area? Like a sort of paradise garden. Because all the time something new appears, you can observe something different growing at every time, and the colours, it is an enormous, gorgeous variety. That is the fascinating thing about it. The transitions of the seasons in spring and the autumn are pure, that is, they are totally extreme and wonderful.⁴⁸

It is not entirely easy to decide whether these visitors or users of the Landschaftspark Duisburg-Nord found the place attractive because of the entanglement of industry and nature, or if their positive response was based mostly on the growing vegetation, *in spite* of the existence of the industrial structures. In any case, to many the landscape park had become a place to experience change in a way that included the intimate conception of a paradise garden, excluded from the surrounding world but still easily accessible and attractive all year round.

When the IBA program finished in 1999, the Landschaftspark Duisburg-Nord played a central role in the festivities, among other things, housing the final exhibition that presented the whole program.⁴⁹ At the time, 65 million D-marks of public money had been spent on transforming the Meidericher Hütte into a landscape park—a transformation that was a way of dealing with the past in a perspective of the future, characterized by discovery, spectacle, and continuous change.⁵⁰ Now, let us take a step back in time and explore a more explicit heritage perspective in relation to industrial nature in the Ruhr.

Heritage and Nature in Coexistence or in Conflict?

As in many other industrialized Western countries, the 1960s brought different trends of recognizing industrial heritage in new ways to the Ruhr area, closely related to the ongoing structural changes. The

main perspectives were, on the one hand, an emphasis on architecture and aesthetics and, on the other, an articulation of social "history from below." Both approaches were to some extent headed by an intellectual elite, although individuals usually focused on one of the two approaches rather than combining them.

One industrial site that attracted interest early on, mainly from the perspective of aesthetics, was the Zeche Zollern II/IV, a coal mine from the turn of the twentieth century in Dortmund. Some of its overground buildings were built in Art Nouveau style, designed by renowned architects and thus easily put into an architectural preservation discourse. When the mine was shut down in 1966, artists and intellectuals prevented its planned demolition and contributed to its becoming the first protected industrial building in West Germany in 1968.⁵¹ During the following decades, industrial built environments became canonized as heritage in many parts of the country, with special funds set aside in North Rhine-Westphalia from 1975 and onward for the preservation of industrial monuments.⁵² Notable events confirming this domestic articulation of industrial heritage values are the UNESCO designation of the Völklingen ironworks in Saarland and the Zollverein coal mine in Essen as World Heritage Sites in 1994 and 2001, respectively.

The "history from below" or "*Geschichte von unten*" began in West Germany as a movement to preserve workers' housing that was threatened by demolition during the 1960s. In the 1970s, the groups of intellectuals were joined by people from the working class; protests like spontaneous squatting, for example, became a common way to combat the demolition of both residential and industrial buildings.⁵³ Furthermore, and again similar to many other industrial areas in Western Europe, West Germany saw a new type of museum appearing: decentralized industrial museums with a social history agenda and monuments left in situ, in combination with museum exhibitions located in former industrial buildings.⁵⁴ The number of newly established museums or exhibitions focusing industrial history and heritage continued to grow during the 1980s and 1990s, resulting in a museum landscape in North Rhine-Westphalia comprising a couple of larger museums and more than one hundred smaller museums dedicated to industrial history.⁵⁵ Somewhat contradictory to this convincing picture that the experience of industrial work was being preserved, Dagmar Kift at the LWL-Industriemuseum in Dortmund rhetorically suggests that while labor first disappeared from the mines, steel works, and factories into the museums, it now seemed to disappear as a key topic

within the museums. However, she concludes that this is not a result of labor being uninteresting to people, but because it needs to be brought into line with a broader range of relevant issues such as the perspectives of migrant and female workers.⁵⁶

So how does an appreciation of industrial architecture and an articulation of "history from below" or labor history, on the one hand, relate to industrial nature on the other? I argue that it is not one single relationship, but a range of different entanglements, as will become apparent in the following section, in which we explore a few examples from other places.

One of the aspects where labor history encounters industrial nature concerns the way nature has been used as a way to conceal social justice. In a case study of the contemporary conversion of former military arsenals and nuclear facilities in the United States into nature refuges, geographer Shiloh Krupar shows one way in which industrial territories are transformed into new landscapes. In the transformation, the experiences of former workers, including radiation exposure and the politics of secrecy, were played down and hidden behind rhetoric concerning the technical monitoring of waste and the establishment of nature protection zones. The result was that the legacies of the past were neglected or simply denied, and that political responsibility became located elsewhere, beyond the reach of those concerned.⁵⁷ Krupar asserts that spectacle and uncertainty were central power techniques in blurring the previous sacrifice zones of nuclear industry with the new protection zones connected to nature into a postmilitary nature refuge.⁵⁸

A similar perspective is proposed by geographer Nate Millington in his work on photographic depictions of declining, overgrown Detroit, Michigan, in the United States. Millington argues that a special genre or visual story has been established during the last decades, in which the growing plants are seen as either destructive or redemptive, but always as separate from the human-built city. The main motif in the photographs is the contrast between decaying buildings and growing vegetation; seldom do any people appear in these images. The strength of this visual genre contributes to hiding the actual ongoing lives of the city, and the decline is depicted as inevitable and apolitical, which, of course, it is not. Instead of justifying the present situation, he argues, the understanding of Detroit must include alternative futures.⁵⁹

Yet another facet of concealing social justice by adding nature is framed within the more generally encompassing concept of gentrification. There are numerous examples of how a former industrial

place was reused and gentrified, partly within an ecological framework, with the result that previous inhabitants were forced to move away, and previous industrial activities with a negative environmental impact were moved to other countries that could not afford to concern themselves with pollution.⁶⁰ This kind of transformation of redundant industrial sites often highlights conceptualizations of a desired urbanity, partly composed by natural elements like waterfront location and softening greenery in a "staging of urban nature."⁶¹ Geographer Chris Hagerman notes how the concept of "livability" is based on a "complex and unstable set of understandings combining ideologies of nature, society, urbanity and nostalgia," pinpointing contemporary ideals of urban environments that include both vegetation and references to the past.⁶² In his example from Portland, Oregon, in the United States, experiences of industrial production were played down in favor of a nostalgic depiction of a pre-industrial situation. Difficult pasts of a more recent industrial period were avoided, while other industrial aspects were turned into commodities. The result became new "landscapes of consumption" from which legacies of oppression and pollution and the history of workers and residents was largely omitted.⁶³

Allowed overgrowing, conscious planting, and wildlife management in industrial or urban settings as analyzed by Krupar, Millington, and Hagerman have thus become expressions of visual rhetoric, concealing difficult experiences of local residents, at the same time as they contribute to avoiding politically controversial topics concerning contemporary responsibilities.

A rather different debate is to be found in connection with a former ironworks in Avesta, Sweden, where both spontaneous and planted vegetation were linked with architectural qualities, historic authenticity, and future use of the area. In a transformation of the ironworks area into an accessible part of the town center, favoring cultural institutions and small-scale service businesses, the issue of cleaning and greenery was a topic of diverging views in the late 1990s and early 2000s. On the one hand, most local opinion thought that the area should be cleaned and the visual impression softened by new greenery. This view was also shared by municipal representatives for the business sector, eager to create an attractive spot for companies to establish their offices.

A contradicting perspective was proposed by antiquarians and representatives of cultural institutions. Their argument was that vegetation destroyed an authentic appearance of the rough and rusty industrial environment and diminished its value, both from a heritage

perspective and from a more general cultural perspective. Eventually, a compromise was reached in which the area was changed by some planting, but spontaneous vegetation in direct connection to industrial buildings was removed.⁶⁴ Nature was treated as both an asset and a threat, but overall as something that had to be controlled and given shape, perhaps more in line with the horticultural nature of the "third kind," like street trees, well-managed parks, and gardens, than corresponding to the urban-industrial nature of the "fourth kind" described above.

These examples show both similarities and differences in comparison to the understanding of industrial nature in the German Ruhr district. The Swedish and the German strategies share, for example, an overall focus on urban renewal through cultural and economic development, while the US examples are more inclined to focus on issues of public health or social justice. This difference has been interpreted by landscape architects Wolfram Höfer and Vera Vicenzotti as a general divide between Europe and North America in their approaches toward post-industrial landscapes. They argue that even though post-industrial landscapes resemble each other over the world, the way they are perceived depends on cultural context and, essentially, on different concepts of landscape. In spite of significant similarities in physical prerequisites, the discourses and the management of the post-industrial sites differ considerably between the two continents.⁶⁵

Höfer and Vicenzotti describe how "landscape" in a European setting is most commonly associated with homeland and a heritage that requires stewardship. In contrast, the US narrative of an immigrant nation includes a view on "landscape" as presumably virgin land that needs to be conquered.⁶⁶ In Germany, Höfer and Vicenzotti argue, industry is no longer interpreted as a destroyer of landscape but as a harmonious part of it, mainly because of a number of discursive traditions, among them an idealization of industry and a discovery of the nature specific to the former industrial sites.⁶⁷ Historians Thomas Lekan and Thomas Zeller further pinpoint how environmental debates in Germany have generally focused on the best way to harmonize cultural and natural landscapes, rather than asserting a sharp dichotomy between the two.⁶⁸

The debate in the United States has been less focused on the cultural meaning of these sites, and more on their potential economic uses and the engineering challenges they present.⁶⁹ So while the aim in Germany was to foster economic development through urban renewal, the US focus was to improve public health through the reduction of possible exposure to contaminants.⁷⁰ However, in

parallel to this depiction of difference in approaches, there was also mutual inspiration between individual post-industrial transformation efforts, for example, between the Sloss Furnaces in Birmingham, United States, and at the Meidericher Hütte in Duisburg.⁷¹

In sum, the encounter between heritage and nature in a post-industrial setting led to many different outcomes and interpretations. In this context nature was perceived as a way to conceal past and present social injustices, or as an element threatening the authenticity of a former industrial site or, on the contrary, as an element enhancing the experience of a former industrial site, turning it into a commodity in a gentrified "landscape of consumption."⁷² In relation to this palette of predominantly pessimistic viewpoints, the activities in the Ruhr can be regarded both as extensions of trends visible in other places, and as unique in principle. The optimistic view on resilience as a transformation of the concept of cultural landscapes, mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, is perhaps most fully expressed by the ideas marking the changes in the Ruhr, and less discernible in the other cases. Let us take a closer look at this entanglement by considering not what industrial nature might hide, but what it could make visible anew.

An Alternative Beauty of the Post-Industrial Landscape?

The examples described so far have shown industrial lands that were turned into post-industrial landscapes, in terms of appearance and through gentrification, often understood as something primarily negative and delimiting as compared to the treatment of past experiences. Is there an alternative view on the post-industrial landscapes in the Ruhr context, defined by a conscious integration of industrial nature into the cultural landscape setting? Is there another post-industrial beauty to be imagined?

The central position of visibility in the contemporary human experiences of landscape has been framed in many different ways, for example, as a choreographed "way of seeing," being more important than bodily experience.⁷³ The tourists' world, says sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, is "fully and exclusively structured by *aesthetic* criteria," such that artworks are highlighted as a means to see places with new eyes and as tools in the process of de-industrialization.⁷⁴ What if we apply these statements to the transformation work carried out at the Landschaftspark Duisburg-Nord and within the IBA program more generally?

Making landscape visible by means of artistic interpretations or commentaries was an approach much used in the IBA program in the Ruhr. The appreciated and indeed new outlook from the top of a blast furnace in the Landschaftspark Duisburg-Nord had its counterparts in numerous pieces of art placed, perhaps not on blast furnaces, but on top of slag heaps all over the Ruhr district. These aboveground storage sites for waste materials from the mining industry made up sought-after hills in the flat land, and also became nodes of orientation when turned into venues for art installations. Most of the installations in the Ruhr took their point of departure in the industrial character of the area, and the materials used were usually steel and concrete. And, I argue, even though the industrial structures of the former Meidericher Hütte in Duisburg are not artistic installations per se, a post-industrial gaze successively turned them into a kind of sculpture. Thus, the new layers of the industrial land of the Ruhr—the industrial nature in combination with pieces of art—contributed to make it visible anew, no longer as industrial land, but as a post-industrial landscape.

Another way in which the landscape has become visible is through the appreciation of ruins. Lately there have even been international debates concerning the pros and cons of “ruin porn,” that is, photographic depictions of decay. In many places industrial ruins have turned into hiding places and sites for fantasy and adventure, used by children and youngsters, criminals and addicts, lovers and scrap dealers.⁷⁵ Human geographer Tim Edensor asserts that society has become so overwhelmingly organized that people are trapped in the predictable; in this context, the ruins offer a rare place of disorder and openness for interpretation.⁷⁶ Another tempting aspect of ruins is an experience of authenticity, of time passing by or, as phrased in an early memorandum of the IBA program, the fact that some abandoned industrial sites were selected for preservation to serve as “marks of truth from the past in the form of ruins.”⁷⁷

Previously, we saw how the issue of authenticity was debated regarding which activities were deemed to be appropriate at Landschaftspark Duisburg-Nord. We also saw how growing vegetation in Avesta was considered a threat to the authentic rusty character of the former ironworks. How could the concept of authenticity be further linked to industrial nature?

In the field of heritage, “authenticity” is mainly connected to cultural heritage in its tangible sense, and the equivalence for natural heritage is “integrity.” In the valuation criteria of the World Heritage List, “authenticity” refers to places being original in form, material,

design, and location, while “integrity” refers to places being typical and with interdependent components. Both are expressions for a modern search for the untouched, the genuine, and the traditional, and, importantly, often turned into aesthetic qualities—implying that the most genuine place is also the most beautiful.⁷⁸

From the perspective of ecology, too, there is a favoring of “nature” that is regarded “original” or genuine in the sense of being most “natural.” Ingo Kowarik suggests that there are two scientific approaches to naturalness: one retrospective and one prospective perspective.⁷⁹ The retrospective perspective traditionally dominates as it favors conservation of pristine ecosystems, that is, an idealized picture of an “original” natural landscape. The prospective perspective is less widespread and focuses instead on a natural capacity for process.⁸⁰ However, when the prospective perspective is applied, one may reach the perhaps surprising conclusion that among ecosystems in a city, the industrial nature, or urban-industrial woodlands as Kowarik calls them, are the most natural ones.⁸¹

Besides distinguishing between these two scientific approaches, Kowarik also proposes four types of nature, mentioned previously, as a way to conceptualize and differentiate urban green for people not so familiar with ecology and botany. The first kind of nature is the “original,” that is, remnants of pristine ecosystems. The second is land transformed by agriculture and forestry, and the third is greenery that emerged through horticultural planting and maintenance, for example, gardens and street trees. The fourth kind of nature, finally, is the natural development that occurs spontaneously on urban-industrial sites, especially abandoned areas. Based on this conceptualization, Kowarik pinpoints how the second and third types of nature are very much culturally influenced, while the first and the fourth are defined more by the effects of natural processes, and thus the most closely associated with a wilderness character. To keep them separate, he suggests we talk about an “old wilderness” connected to the first, pristine, nature, and a “new wilderness” connected to the fourth kind of nature, the urban-industrial woodlands (figure 5.4).⁸²

Thus, post-industrial landscapes with their industrial nature can indeed be understood as natural from an ecological point of view, even as a new wilderness, and to a great extent this new wilderness has become appreciated, at least in the German context. At the same time, from a traditional standpoint, overgrown post-industrial landscapes challenge heritage views on the original, authentic, and beautiful, as well as ecological views on conservation of the pristine “old wilderness.” Let us now explore what the challenging, new

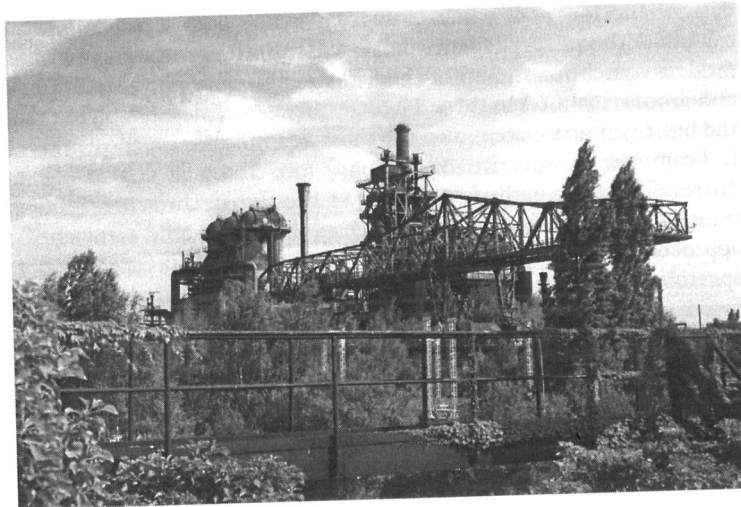


Figure 5.4 Spontaneous overgrowing as well as regular planting have become conscious strategies at many former industrial sites in the Ruhr district. One goal is to create attractive environments of a “new wilderness.” The picture is from Landschaftspark Duisburg-Nord. Photo: Ralf Schmidt, 2009.

wilderness could comprise, both in terms of symbolic labeling and actual vegetation.

The Landschaftspark Duisburg-Nord was obviously framed as a park, among other things featuring industrial nature. Other sites in Germany were also framed as parks or as forests or gardens, and we will now touch briefly on some of these sites in order to put the former ironworks in Duisburg in a regional empirical perspective.

One place where the “new wilderness” of industrial nature was both favored and tamed within the idea of a park was the Schöneberger Südgelände, a railway yard in Berlin, left abandoned after World War II and successively overgrown. In the 1980s, local citizens fought to preserve it as a natural area, and 20 years later it became one of the first official conservation areas in Germany with protected, species-rich urban-industrial nature.⁸³ The goal was to keep the former railway yard open and accessible to the public and, at the same time, protect the rich flora and fauna that had developed during the decades of abandonment. In addition, it was acknowledged that the richest habitats existed in the industrial nature of early or intermediate succession stages, with biodiversity diminishing once

vegetation reached the stage of actual woodland.⁸⁴ The solution from an ecological point of view was a mixture of free and controlled access for the public, and maintenance and nonmaintenance of the vegetation in particular zones. So, the park was managed to meet the needs of both humans and animals and plants, sometimes through separation and sometimes through combination.

Moving from the park to the idea of industrial forests, a large-scale experiment from the late 1990s called the *Industriewald Ruhrgebiet* (“Industrial Forests of the Ruhr district”) is striking. Landscape architect Jörg Dettmar describes it as a possible strategy for handling the huge areas of abandoned industrial land in a way that does not incur heavy costs, and does not require much maintenance. One element was the legal and administrative aspects. Federal and state forest regulations allow for an area to be defined as a forest, even if there are only very early stages of vegetation and no “dominant woody layer.”⁸⁵ This classification had significant advantages for the owners, since the standards for liability were lower than, for example, for a park.⁸⁶ It implied that abandoned industrial sites could be defined as “forests” with a forester taking care of them, even though there was not yet a natural environment that most people would describe as a forest.⁸⁷

Finally, some industrial nature has also been termed and understood as “gardens,” suggesting yet another set of allusions. A garden is small, intimate, and friendly, quite far from spontaneous imaginations of industrial land or forests. However, gardens in former industrial sites have emerged in the Ruhr and in several other places in Germany. The former Hansa coking plant in Dortmund, for example, is described as “a garden of abandonment,” while there are twelve thematic gardens called “the Paradise” to be found at the Völklingen ironworks, opened in the midst of the former industrial area in 2009.⁸⁸ Within the well-established narrative of the discovery of a hidden and abandoned place, it is framed as a “mysterious garden of Eden” and an “island of wilderness,” thus combining the ideas of intimacy with ideas of the wild. The change of seasons is said to drench “the paradise in vibrant colour and pleasant smells”—indeed something different for the senses if we remember the stinking open sewer of the Emscher river in the 1980s, an expression of the combination of industry and nature at that time. By alluding to the most pristine of all natures, Eden, a decisive break with the industrial past is made. The fourth nature is thus transformed—in an imaginative way—into the first, pristine nature, and the “new wilderness” in some respect has become the “old wilderness,” yet one that includes a human presence.