Critical Reviews
No. 7
July 2026
8

”Our Vast Little Garden”: A Review of Gilles Clément’s The Planetary Garden

Saman Gheidi[1*]
Mohammadreza Sartipi Isfahani[2]

1. Adjunct lecturer, Department of Architecture, University of Garmsar, Iran.
2. PhD Candidate in Landscape Architecture, University of Tehran, Iran.

Abstract

Gilles Clément’s The Planetary Garden and Other Writings, authored by the French gardener, landscape designer, and theorist, is among the influential texts that have contributed to redefining the human–nature relationship in recent decades, particularly within the discipline of landscape architecture. In connection with his theories of the “Garden in Motion” and the “Third Landscape,” Clément conceptualizes the Earth as a “planetary garden,” positioning humans not as absolute owners but as agents within a complex network of biotic relationships.

This study adopts a critical approach to provide an overview of the book and its theoretical foundations while evaluating the intellectual, operational, and cultural strengths and limitations of the “planetary garden” concept. The research is based on textual analysis of the book, considerations from its Persian translators, and a selective review of international critiques and interpretations of Clément’s thought.

The findings indicate that the book significantly contributes to expanding ecological imagination and advancing landscape discourse through its integration of theory and practice, its interdisciplinary perspective, and its use of metaphorical language to communicate complex ecological and philosophical ideas. However, generalization, operational ambiguity, a tendency toward ecological romanticism, implicit Eurocentrism, and the challenges of cultural translation into contexts such as Iran constitute notable limitations of the theory.

Keywords: Gilles Clément; Planetary garden; Landscape architecture; Ecology; Translation; Book review.

DOI: 10.22034/2.7.64
Email: Samangheidi@gmail.com

[Downloaded from jcr-sj.com on 2026-11-28]

[DOI: 10.22034/2.7.64]

Critical Reviews
No. 7
July 2026
9

To what extent does Gilles Clément's "planetary garden" theory possess the conceptual, operational, and cultural capacity to function as an applicable framework in landscape architecture, and what challenges arise in its transfer to non-European contexts-particularly the Iranian setting?

Extended Abstract

This research critically examines The Planetary Garden and Other Writings by Gilles Clément within the broader discourse on human–nature relations, particularly in the context of contemporary environmental challenges such as the Anthropocene, climate change, biodiversity loss, and rapid urbanization. Clément's framework is articulated through three key concepts "Garden in movement," "Third Landscape," and "Planetary Garden" which collectively propose a shift from static, control-oriented paradigms of modern landscape toward a dynamic, process-based understanding that emphasizes coexistence with natural systems. Adopting a critical textual analysis methodology, the study examines the English edition alongside the original French text and the Persian translation, supported by relevant secondary literature. The book is interpreted as a hybrid text that integrates experiential narrative, ecological discourse, and philosophical reflection, conveyed through a poetic and metaphorical language that enhances accessibility while complicating conceptual precision and translation.

The analysis identifies several strengths in Clément's work, including the integration of theory and practice grounded in real landscape projects, its interdisciplinary scope, and its capacity to expand ecological imagination. The reframing of the Earth as a shared garden introduces an ethical dimension that foregrounds responsibility, environmental stewardship, and global interconnectedness.

However, the critique also highlights significant limitations. Many of Clément's propositions remain at the level of general principles without clear translation into concrete design strategies or policy frameworks, resulting in operational ambiguity. Additionally, the tendency toward ecological romanticism, particularly in the valorization of marginal and abandoned landscapes, risks overlooking their socio-economic contexts. The implicit Eurocentrism of Clément's ideas further complicates their application in non-European settings such as Iran, where cultural, historical, and institutional conditions differ substantially.

The study also underscores challenges in linguistic and cultural translation, noting that extensive explanatory footnotes, while necessary, may disrupt narrative coherence and reveal conceptual gaps. Ultimately, the article concludes that Clément's work functions less as a practical manual and more as a conceptual catalyst, offering a foundation for critical localization and the development of context-sensitive ecological theories.

In *The Planetary Garden*, many propositions remain at the level of general recommendations such as respecting biodiversity or aligning with natural dynamics without being translated into concrete strategies for design, planning, or urban and territorial policymaking. From the perspective of an applied discipline such as landscape architecture, this creates a critical gap: how can these principles be operationalized within design processes, management frameworks, and policy instruments? Clément provides limited elaboration in this regard; consequently, there is a risk that the "planetary garden" remains an inspiring manifesto lacking clear and actionable guidelines.

COPYRIGHTS
Copyright for this article is retained bye the authors with publication rights granted to Journal of Critical Reviews (JCR); The Iranian Journal of Critical Studies in Place. This is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution License (https://creativecommons.org/version4/)

[Downloaded from jcr-sj.com on 2026-11-28]

[DOI: 10.22034/2.7.64]