



CSISP Working Paper Nr. 2

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Who is afraid of the green cloud?
On the environmental rendering of controversy

London, April 2013

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Abstract

This chapter presents a controversy analysis based on documents collected by the artist collective HeHe during and about their project Nuage Vert. I treat this new media art installation as an empirical occasion for the study of science, society, nature and politics, showing how it enables the analysis of environmental controversy. Nuage Vert involved the projection of a green visual blob on the emission cloud of a powerplant, and during its execution first in Helsinki and then in Paris, this event occasioned the articulation of various issues having to do with energy, environmental change, and the place of the factory in public life. I discuss how in each case, Nuage Vert explicated a particular set of controversial entanglements: In Helsinki, the project brought into focus the problematic distinction between energy consumption and energy supply, and the practical difficulty of locating energy use on the community level. In Paris, the installation explicated tensions between two alternative framings of ‘environmentalism’. Here, Nuage Vert projected onto a waste incinerator, and this brought into view certain tensions between a ‘post- industrial’ eco-town planned for this site and the ‘industrial’ issues of health and pollution associated with waste incineration. My analysis pays special attention to the affordances of the artistic device for the enactment of controversy by environmental means. Nuage Vert enabled the deployment of the setting in the articulation of specific political and environmental concerns. I propose that this capacity of Nuage Vert, in particular, can account for the controversiality of the project itself.



Figure 1: Nuage Vert, Helsinki, February 2008

The smoke was like a slowed down explosion, silent, billowing, being absorbed at its edges into the deeper darkness of the sky.

Teju Cole, Open City, p. 215

Introduction

Nuage Vert can be described as a new media art experiment, but it is equally important to note that, from the very beginning of the project, Nuage Vert has generated a multitude of accounts as to what it is and what makes it special. These include the communications between the project's instigators, the artist collective HeHe, and potential project partners; the documentation produced by these partners and other actors involved; news reports in the local, national and international press; publicity materials relating to the project; and not least articles in the art media. In each of these channels or registers of communication, Nuage Vert has elicited a broad range of accounts and characterizations of it, and one way to measure the

success of the project is surely through the number and types of accounts it has provoked. Partly as a consequence, it can easily seem that there is really no need for any commentator, theorist or researcher to try and answer the question, once again, what Nuage Vert *is*. Many excellent accounts are already available (my favourite account, for reasons that I hope will become clear in what follows, is that Nuage Vert provides a way of situating us ‘inside energy’).

However, precisely because Nuage Vert has been so successful at generating accounts of its workings, its capacities and its effects, it offers an exceedingly rich source of materials *for* analysis. Nuage Vert’s makers, HeHe, have documented and assembled some of the communications listed above, including letters, emails, articles and blog posts elicited by Nuage Vert, and this archive holds great attractions for a researcher. This is especially so insofar as Nuage Vert has given rise to various public controversies, or at the very least has become embroiled in them. As the record makes abundantly clear, HeHe’s proposal to realize Nuage Vert has led many of the contacted individuals and organisations, as well as other implicated actors, to call attention to a range of issues and problems relating to energy, environmental change, the place of the factory in public life, and about the role of art in shedding light on these various things. Adopting the admittedly distorted perspective of a researcher on Nuage Vert, the project and its attendant archive may strike one as first and foremost an empirical instrument (Lury and Wakeford, 2012), a fabulous ruse for bringing about the situation and materials that render legible and knowable public controversies about energy, technology and the environment.

In this article, then, I would like to adopt a highly partial perspective on Nuage Vert, and approach it as an apparatus for the articulation of environmental issues. To adopt such an approach is to assume a very particular relation between artistic work and its interpretation. Of course, we are well beyond the day and age in which one could imagine that artistic objects somehow *need* analysis or interpretation for their meaning to become ‘apparent’.¹ If anything, it is the other way around: understanding and knowledge are dependent on the deployment of objects and devices, as work in the social studies of science and technology and cognate fields has endeavoured to demonstrate over the last decades. In what follows, I would like to explore some of the consequences of this for how we appreciate the analytic affordances of a new media art experiment: I will discuss the artistic apparatus of Nuage Vert as an opportunity for creative and critical analysis - or more precisely, as a ‘deliberate occasion’ - which must be credited with generating the very circumstances, materials and data that make analysis and interpretation of the environment and environmental issues possible in the first place.

There is a way to explain, then, why a social researcher cum theorist can feel so very lucky upon encountering the Nuage Vert blog and archive (and how come an artist can say today, that there is this special breed of sociologists, who love carrying cables and who busy themselves trying to make

¹Where you want to locate the transition moment precisely is up to you. For instance: in Jackson Pollock’s silence during interviews; in Wittgenstein’s definitive argument for the under-determinacy of all knowledge – no rule can determine its application (and, we add, nor can technologies, nor can objects); or somewhere else yet.

themselves useful to artistic practice in all sorts of ways). However, it should of course be clear that it is not *just* analysis that Nuage Vert enables. At the very least, the project facilitates multiple operations besides research upon environments and their issues: as Nuage Vert provokes and seduces actors into producing accounts and interpretations - of Nuage Vert itself, and the situations in which it operates – Nuage Vert also makes possible an enhanced expression of issues; it enables the explication of concerns and controversies beyond what is already observable in relevant settings. And perhaps above all Nuage Vert facilitates participation and intervention. It enables all at once research on, the amplification of, and intervention in environments and their attendant issues. Here I want to clarify these special capacities of Nuage Vert through a discussion of the aforementioned archive. But before doing so, we need to return to the question of *what* Nuage Vert is.

What is Nuage Vert?

While there are plenty of descriptions of Nuage Vert out there, one feature stands out especially from the standpoint of social analysis: in some ways Nuage Vert is quite simply ‘an energy monitoring device.’ In several respects, Nuage Vert is not so very different from other devices of this sort. This is one of the introductory project descriptions of Nuage Vert the artists provided to the press:

« By illuminating it, we think it might be possible to alert the public to the related questions of pollution and waste, acting as a sign that calls for decreased consumption » say Helen Evans and Heiko Hansen. (Marie Lechner, *Le rayon vert* divise Saint-Ouen *Liberation*, 2 June, 2009)

This sounds not so very different from the descriptions of other energy awareness projects, and other energy monitoring events undertaken outside of the art context strictly speaking. There are for instance the ‘Energy Days’ organised in recent years by various organisations in Britain and the United States and elsewhere, on which people are invited to ‘switch off’ their devices en masse, so as to provide a graspable effect on energy demand, which is then visualized in various ways, mostly online.² Indeed, as HeHe proposed to implement a Nuage Vert, first in Helsinki and then Paris, it quickly became clear that similar projects were already on-going *in these very locations*. In Helsinki, the power plant with which HeHe would eventually collaborate to implement the apparatus, Helsinki Energy, was already running an energy monitoring and visualisation project. As the manager of the power station notes :

« I have respoken to Mr. Itkonen, manager of the power station, about your project. We will put first our own project the 'energy totem' without 'green cloud' or any other colours. »
(Martti Hyvönen to Helen Evans, Subject: nuage vert..., August 11, 2005)

At the outset of the project, then, the place of Nuage Verts can seem to be already occupied. Which is also to say: there already is a place for this type of project. Helsinki Energy was itself experimenting with the

² See for example: <http://energydayfestival.org/> , <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/sci/tech/7270218.stm> , <http://www.londonmet.ac.uk/lmbs/research/cibs/energyday.cfm>

visualisation of energy. The company developed so-called 'Christmas lights' and the blue pylon, both projects that shine light on energy infrastructure.³ It appears that in Paris, too, the very cloud on which Nuage Vert is seeking to project, the emission cloud of the Waste Burning Plant in St Ouen, is already being illuminated by lights:

“the cloud is illuminated every night with powerful white spotlights, a political decision taken some fifteen years ago to celebrate the industrial past of la ville.” (HeHe, A Diary of Nuage Vert, Archiving the development of a public process in Grand Paris, 2009)

This ability of Nuage Vert to blend in with existing projects in the area of energy awareness can be understood practically, as something that enables its implementation. The ostensible similarities between it and existing projects make it possible for the actors involved - like the employees of the power plant and local government representatives - to imagine that Nuage Vert is possible, and to relate to it in some way. This is of course critical if these actors are going to assist in the realization of Nuage Vert (see on the notion of enrollment, Callon, 1986 and Latour, 1988).

The initial familiarity of Nuage Vert – at least from the standpoint of its formal description - also helps to locate Nuage Vert as a highly particular type of artistic intervention. The project of Nuage Vert does not begin with the establishment of the difference of art from its contexts. The distinctiveness of Nuage Vert does not derive from its initial framing: instead, Nuage Vert acquires its distinctive capacities over the course of the device's deployment (Dewey, 2005 (1934)). As soon as we consider the process of the implementation of Nuage Vert, it proves to be exceptional in a seemingly limitless number of ways. It equally means that Nuage Vert can only be properly apprehended if we consider *its workings*. Difference is produced in deployment. And it is to say that the seeming similarities between Nuage Verts and other projects and devices of energy awareness - those already supported by energy companies and governmental organizations - might serve an artistic as much as a practical purpose. Because of these similarities, the extreme responses that Nuage Vert will eventually manage to provoke among the actors implicated in the project are all the more astounding and effective.

An environmental technology

This, one could say, is what defines Nuage Vert as site-specific art: to appreciate this work, we must see it in operation in situ, in relevant social settings. However, Nuage Vert is also something more than this, Nuage Vert is itself an instrument of specification. It is a device for *site specification*: in implementing Nuage Vert in a particular environment, the features of this environment are made visible and legible. The evolving nature of the Nuage Vert project itself is then only one face of a coin. Yes, the features of Nuage Vert become clear when the process of its implementation in a particular setting is already underway. But the same applies to the features of the environment in question. For this reason I like to think of Nuage

³ http://www.helsinginenergia.fi/images/aa_pylvas.jpg

Vert as an ‘environmental technology’ in the precise sense of this much abused word.

Certainly, some features of Nuage Vert can be described without considering the sites of its implementation, such as its technical features. We can ask, for instance, what determines the size and shape of the green cloud projected on the emission cloud of the power plant? However, the answer here too is that Nuage Vert has different possible settings. In Helsinki, the size of the green blob projected on the emission cloud was informed by energy measurements provided by the power plant, or more precisely by a regional sub-station managed by the powerplant. In St Ouen (Paris), the set-up seems to have been more simple, with the green laser following the contours of the cloud:

« The installation developed by HeHe has two ways of functioning : the laser, coupled with a thermal camera follows the changing shape of the vapour, but it can also be connected to data about the production of the power plant. This was the case in Helsinki when, on the 29 february 2008 between 7pm and 8pm, the artists invited the local residents to disconnect their household appliances in order to reduce their energy consumption and to see the green cloud grow. » (Marie Lechner, *Le rayon vert divise Saint-Ouen Liberation*, 2 June, 2009)

Even if flexible, this account of Nuage Vert’s technical features certainly tells us something about what kind of device for energy awareness it promises to be. Nuage Vert does not offer a transparent representation of energy use, as so many other devices try to do. It does not provide a ‘straight’ translation from energy consumption or production into the size and shape of the cloud. Indeed, HeHe has characterized the green cloud as a ‘canvas’, a *surface* for the projection of images and imagination:

"Nuage Vert conveys multiple ideas: could this green cloud be a toxic cloud or an emblem for the collective effort of the local community? The meaning is left open for each and all to decide, and will depend upon the level of engagement."

Helen Evans, NUAGE VERT, Cluster Magasine 07 Transmitting Architecture, Turin, May 2008

As such, Nuage Vert seems clearly at odds with prevalent definitions of energy monitoring and awareness: this is usually defined as the project to *inform* consumers of energy about their energy use patterns and to render these patterns transparent for users ‘in real-time’, thereby enabling the modification of energy behaviours in view of this information (Darby, 2008). In such approaches to energy monitoring, the efficacy of energy awareness devices depends on the ‘accuracy’ of measurement and its direct communication to consumers (Klopfert and Wallenborn, 2011). Not so in the case of Nuage Vert.

Interestingly, moreover, even if we are only trying to understand Nuage Verts ‘technical features’, it makes little sense to consider the apparatus in isolation from the settings in which it is implemented. Please forgive me a bad but I think helpful pun: the settings of Nuage Vert varied depending on the setting. In Helsinki, the conversations with Martti Hyvönen from Helsinki Energy seem to have directly

informed the configuration of Nuage Vert. The Nuage Vert archive reports a number of conversations that the artists had with Mr Hyvönen, and these conversations seem to have helped to clarify the different possible ways in which energy data can and cannot be used for the real-time visualisation of energy use. Thus, Mr Hyvönen suggested that it is not really possible for Nuage Vert to rely on information about the energy produced by the Helsinki plant:

« If the fundamental idea is to visualise consumption, then for electricity, this is not determined by the production at a power plant or a single company because all consumption is offset, second by second, by the supply of electricity from a common 'pool' so that the entire network is interconnected. In this country it is the Nordic pool, and soon pan-european. The factors that control the switching on or off of our power plants are complex and linked only in part to what the inhabitants of Salmisaari or Helsinki consume. »

(Martti Hyvönen to Helen Evans, VS: nuage vert..., 29 September 2005)

One of the propositions of Nuage Vert is to provide a *collective* measure of energy use, in contrast to the household-level readings provided by domestic electricity meters. Interestingly, however, in attempting to 'scale up' the visualisation of energy use, it turned out that it's far from self-evident on which measures to rely. As far as the plant is concerned - or at least initially – one *either* measures consumption on the household level or one measures production; any measures that pertain to other than the household level pertain to the plant, and hence to supply not demand, to production not consumption. One could say that Nuage Vert, in attempting to locate energy use on something other than the household level, opened up for questioning these seemingly stable distinctions. Perhaps more straightforwardly, Nuage showed that for energy use to be rendered visible, on any level, let alone in real-time, specific arrangements need to be in place, which can certainly not be taken for granted.

Eventually a solution was found, and Nuage Vert used data provided by a regional sub-station as an indicator of energy use, in more or less real-time.⁴ It appears to have been in Helsinki, then, that the relatively *opacity* of energy use, the difficulties of rendering it measureable in ways that are pertinent to the project at hand, became apparent. This insight may also have informed subsequent definitions of the project: At some point during the project, Nuage Vert came to be defined as a device not of “*consumer* awareness,” but one that “that locates us inside energy use.” (Evans to Hyvonen, August 11, 2005).⁵ The very apparatus or ‘dispositif’ of Nuage Vert, by highlighting energy use but not necessarily visualising it in a transparent way, calls attention to the relative obscurity of energy production, use and measurement. This is part of what renders Nuage Vert distinctive as a device of energy awareness. But as mentioned, it also means that even when we consider its technical features, the device turns out to bear the traces of the environment in which it was deployed: those of the particular organisation of energy generation, supply

4 HeHE, Informing a Public, 8 April 2008, Nuage Vert Blog, Pixelache http://www.pixelache.ac/nuage-blog/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=30:in-forming-a-public&catid=1:latest

⁵ The full quote reads: “Nuage Vert seeks to sensitize consumers to their responsibilities, showing that *we are all situated in the production of energy*” Helen Evans to Martti Hyvönen, Subject: nuage vert..., August 11, 2005.

and use, and their measurement, in Helsinki.

Interlude: Nuage Vert as capable of multiple interpretations

Sociologists of science and technology have long insisted - from roughly the 1980s onwards - on the 'under-determinacy' of technology: the fact that the features and capacities of technological devices are not fully determined by these technologies themselves. It is only in, and as part of, specific practices and arrangements that technologies acquire their specific form and abilities (Bijker and Law, 1992; Suchman, 2007). One could say that Nuage Vert exemplifies these kinds of ideas: Nuage Vert, too, turns out to be a very different kind of apparatus, depending on the settings and practices in which it operates. The instalments of Nuage Vert in Helsinki and in Paris were completely different. In Helsinki, Nuage Vert was executed in close collaboration with the Helsinki Energy Plant and a variety of local organisations. In this context, moreover, the project occasioned a dense set of social connections in which art organisations, the council and local communities conspired to enact a moment of "switch off", in order to witness as dramatic as possible an enlargement of the green cloud. By contrast, on St Ouen in Paris, Nuage Vert eventually acquired the status of an underground art project: Here, HeHe encountered significant opposition from the local Council in its attempt to realize a Green Cloud, and after many months of formal communications back and forth with the mayor's office, power plant, Prefecture (police) and local associations, HeHe ended up performing the green cloud semi-clandestinely, projecting from a derelict site, for one night only, and unannounced (more about this below).

Note, furthermore, that the two projects were developed in parallel: we should be wary of treating the different instalments of Nuage Vert as two 'different' projects; they rather present varied instances of the same installation, and offer demonstrations of its variable capacities and features. However, Nuage Vert also does more than show that the same technology can acquire widely different powers depending on the setting,⁶ and we could say that Nuage Vert goes further than the idea of the 'under-determinacy' of technology. Nuage Vert does not only demonstrate that *technologies* are configured differently in different settings, it equally managed to unsettle assumed definitions and understandings of *the environments* in which it was inserted, that of the power plant and its surroundings. Nuage Vert then radicalizes the notion of the under-determinacy of technology, or as I like to call it, its 'multi-valence, which highlights that technology is "susceptible to a multitude of applications, interpretations, meanings or values." (Oxford English Dictionary; Marres, 2012b). It is not just that Nuage Vert operates in variable ways in different environments: the device explicates these environments - it articulates and accentuates their features and the issues traversing these settings- in variable ways. This becomes clear when we consider in more detail the public record of the two interventions in Helsinki and Paris.

Nuage Vert as a trial of explicitness

⁶ As such, Nuage Vert reminds us that to know the capacities of any device, we must inquire into the *range* of applications it may find; rather than seeking to identify - ie fixate - 'the' normative capacities of a given device, we must consider the *spectrum* of effects that a device is capable of producing, if we are to appreciate the moral, political and aesthetic qualities of technology. We have to resist freeze-framing any single application of it, as somehow representing the 'true' Nuage Vert.

To understand how Nuage Vert manages to elucidate its environments, we can say it operates as a “trial of explicitness.” This term has been proposed by Dominique Lindhardt and Fabian Muniesa (2011), and is inspired by the wider field of the ‘sociology of demonstrations,’ which goes back some decades, and states that we must intervene experimentally if social (dis-)order is to become legible and apparent (Garfinkel, 1986 (1967)). These sociologists have proposed that we must undertake precisely targeted *modifications of the setting*, which will disrupt engrained ways of (not) doing things, and thereby provoke actors into showing us which entities populate the setting and which rules of behaviour organise action within them. This sociological method has some strong affinities with the history of performance art and the role of provocation as an aesthetic method, as I have discussed elsewhere (Marres, 2012a). But the sociological literature usefully highlights some of the special effects deriving from the ‘modification of the setting’.

Nuage Vert, too, can be defined as undertaking a modification of the setting, and this in at least two senses of the word. First, by projecting the green cloud onto the Helsinki Energy plant in Salmisaari, and onto the SYCTOM plant in St Ouen, Nuage Vert makes a minimal though visible intervention, which disturbs these environments: the emission cloud now colours brightly green where previously it was simply grey or barely any colour at all (barely visible).⁷ In doing so, one could say – somewhat grandly – that Nuage Vert helps to clarify some of the rules, habits and behaviours that organise these everyday environments. To produce a Nuage Vert, a whole range of actors and regulations had to be brought into alignment, something to which the endless emails and letters in the archive testify: in both Paris and Helsinki, it’s not just the plant that is requested to actively participate, but also the aviation authorities must give their approval, the Major’s office, and civic associations take position on the project. (In Helsinki, once the project was well underway, a host of social agents became involved, including schools and the chapel (see below)). In this way, Nuage Vert reveals how very over-determined our habitats are: even a relatively minimal modification of the setting, the introduction of a visual apparatus – a mirage, a virtuality – encounters and reveals a whole battery of constraints on intervention, and in so doing, it demonstrates what our environments are made up of, what holds them in place.⁸

There is then another feature of Nuage Vert that characterizes it as a device for the expression or explication of the environment. Sociologists have insisted that to modify a setting is a good way of getting to *know* it, and this formulae seems applicable to Nuage Vert too: in introducing a disturbance, Nuage Vert provokes the actors involved to give an account of the wider environment in which the device

7 By attempting to introduce a visual apparatus into the setting, Nuage Vert touches upon - or activates – a whole range of routines, expectations, ways of doing things, assumptions and considerations, and thereby renders these explicit: the cloud that is *not* to attract attention; the air traffic regulations that prevent anyone from projecting or doing anything in the sky without prior consultation.

8 The difficulty of ‘fixing’ Nuage Vert, of explaining once and for all what kind of device this is and what it does, is crucial to its ability to render the social environment legible. Precisely because it is impossible to stabilize the definition of the device itself, because it proves resistant to easy, fixed interpretations, Nuage Vert is able to seduce and force actors to explicate the wider context in which Nuage Vert is put forward. Differently put: the under-determinacy of Nuage Vert, and its ability to explicate environments and their attendant issues are connected.

is to operate, and of the type of relations and practices that organise and enable it. In Helsinki, for instance, the responses from the various official bodies triggered by Nuage Vert reveal how much this setting relies on informal practices of ‘consensussing’ (Horst and Irwin, 2010). From the archive:

“she says that there is no landscape department in helsinki city.... but there is a 'kaupunkikuvaneuvottelukunnassa' (what a word!) which is 'city image commission' or something... she is part of this commission and she says that since this is a temporary installation it will not require their permission... (Juha Huuskonen to HeHe, more info from helsinki city...,” 14 february 2007)⁹

Finally, the sociology of demonstrations calls attention to the importance of the production of *accounts* to this process of elucidating social environments. In order for experimental modifications of the setting to have their desired illuminating effect, it is crucial that the intervention provokes social actors to provide characterizations of the setting. Actors must somehow be triggered into producing written, oral or visual descriptions of the environment, if it is to be rendered explicit through modification and/or disturbance. This too seems relevant to understanding Nuage Vert’s mode of operation: this experimental intervention too provoked actors into producing accounts of the environment – the power plant and its surroundings – which helped to clarify their features, and indeed, their issues. As mentioned, each edition of Nuage Vert elicited a steady stream of official documents, letters, records, publicity materials, recordings, photo’s and so on: Letters from the Energy Companies managing the plants on which HeHe had set its sights, local governmental organisations, arts and activist organisations, the police, and aviation authorities, et cetera .

One of the remarkable effects of Nuage Vert is to bring into view the great and endless effort by institutions to produce accounts, their determination to establish, define and circumscribe conclusively the disturbance they are certain is and will be caused by this new media art device. These institutional accounts take various forms, but in the documents in the archive, the authorities and organisations implicated in the project express in writing both their reasoning, support and objections vis-à-vis the prospect of the Green Cloud being projected into an environment they consider their ‘own’. The archive in which HeHe have assembled these formal emissions generated by Nuage Vert takes a particular form: their records almost exclusively record the *responses* of actors to Nuage Vert, and not the initial elicitations by HeHe. I am tempted to interpret this approach pragmatically: William James and other pragmatists have famously argued that the best way to get to know an entity is by considering the effects that it produces in others.

The documents assembled in the archive do much to illuminate the contexts in which Nuage Vert was

⁹ See also this quote: About the permissions; we as a Cityplanning Department don't need to write you any permission. I talked to the City Building Regulation Department and there to architect Marjatta Uusitalo. She is a member of the so called "Cityscape Advisory Board". What you should do is to send her information about your project. Normally they would ask you to show them a test installation on site, but because your project is temporary and it might be too complicated for you, they can discuss your project with help of a printed/digital presentation (Kirsti Rantama to Helen Evans, Nuage Vert in Ruoholahti, 8 February 2006).

inserted, as well as the apparatus itself. Indeed, it is through these documents that Nuage Vert comes into its own as a device of environmental explication. These documents render explicit a range of concerns latently present in these settings, and because of this they provide a means for us to trace the ways in which the environment has become an issue (Marres, 2012b). But before getting into these issues, we should note that the process of explication has a different rhythm in the different instalments of Nuage Vert. In Helsinki, this rhythm can be characterized as a steady shifting from indifference into the deployment of social and institutional connections and the weaving of a cloud community. It begins with reticence and relative silence on the part of the future key partner Helsinki Energy:

Dear Helen Edwards, Our West harbour-project has been in contact with Helsingin Energia in Salmisaari (Ruoholahti) about your interesting project. We are really sorry to have to inform you about their negative response. To hear about their arguments you could contact with Martti Hyvönen MD, Environmental Director, Helsinki Energy (Kirsti Rantama to Helen Evans, Nuage Vert in Ruoholahti, 11 Augustus, 2005)

But after various exchanges via third parties and various meetings a noticeable shift in the position of Helsinki Energy occurs:

Bonjour Helen et Heiko, la suite en anglais:

Your idea is little by little getting support at Helen as a communication process. Of course somebody would see a "green toxic cloud" in the sky, but the underlying idea should emphasize that it is the consumption which commands production, not the other way round.

We are trying to think what technical solutions might be needed (Hyvönen Martti to HeHe, VL: résumé de Nuage Vert en anglais, Email, October 26 2007)

And finally the communication shifts into a register of affirmative and vocal engagement, in which a multitude of connections among organisations and places and actors is brought into play:

Also let's not forget the schools and Music conservatory and also the chapel there. Have you contacted local associations like <http://www.kaupunginosat.net/ruoholahti/> Amicalement Martti [...] (Hyvönen Martti to Helen Evans, *** SPAM ***sticker distribution, 5 February, 2008).

The process is reminiscent of a story about entry into a Zen buddhist monastery: here, anyone who knocks on the door is sent away seven times, but the eighth time they are let in, welcomed and given a broom to help sweep the floors.

In St Ouen, by contrast, the events build up like a crescendo, with organisational responses building up steadily from reasoned objection into loud and emotive rejection. At the outset the power plant Sycotom offers a carefully argued collection of pretty justifiable concerns. The first response from the Sycotom

2005:

“It was very interesting to hear about your proposal. However, I can’t give you a favourable response as this project does not fit into SYCTOMs communication strategy.” (Syctom to Helen Evans, letter, November 21, 2005)

But later on the institutions involved respond in what can only be called a hysterical register, in which the main vocabulary becomes that of panic, fear and worry. For example:

“I call your attention to the **worry**, or even **panic**, that this laser beam could provoke amongst the local population or road users, in the absence of any clear information about the purpose of the project.” (Préfecture de Seine-St Denis to Troisième Oeil (cultural organisation), letter, 28 mai 2009)

The archive covering the St Ouen installment concludes (provisionally) with some messy eruptions. In the Spring of 2010, SYCTOM gives the green light to the project, but then retracts, probably as a consequence of pressure from the Mairie. One of the merits of the HeHe archive, indeed, is that it permits this kind of reconstruction of trajectories, allowing us to apprehend the intervention of Nuage Vert as process. The archive puts on display the slow motion of environmental politics, which occurs creepingly but is therefore no less revealing of interests, values and conflicts.

Nuage Vert as a Device of Issue Formation

Nuage Vert, then, does not just help to explicate the features of the environment and render these legible, it equally helps to explicate *the issues and controversies* that traverse the settings of Helsinki and St Ouen.¹⁰ As the insertion of Nuage Vert into these surroundings provokes actors to produce accounts of the setting, to account for it, a whole range of concerns, potentialities and issues latent in these contexts become apparent. Another way of putting this is that Nuage Vert seduces actors to stage environmental controversies, rendering them recordable and documentable in a public way. Interestingly, however, this understanding of Nuage Vert as a device of issue formation (Marres, 2012b), i.e. a device for amplifying issues and controversies that are *already on-going*, is not what receives much recognition in accounts of the apparatus. Tellingly, the French press describes Nuage Vert as itself the object of controversy: « The green ray that divides Saint-Ouen.. a project that arouses controversy with ecologists, councillors and private companies » (Marie Lechner, *Le rayon vert divise Saint-Ouen* *Liberation*, 2 June, 2009). However, it seems to me that Nuage Vert attracts controversy only insofar as it *operates upon* issues and controversies that already traverse the setting. Nuage Vert is as much a device as an object of controversy, and it could become an object of controversy partly because it proved a powerful mediator of controversies that were already going on. As we should by now expect, in Paris and Helsinki these issues

¹⁰ As such, Nuage Vert offers as an occasion for controversy analysis. For more about this method, see <http://www.mappingcontroversies.net> and <http://www.issuemapping.net>

were of a rather different nature. In Helsinki, the matters of concern demonstrated in the record mainly pertained to technical and social intricacies of energy generation, supply, demand, and awareness, and this of course makes good sense in view of the collaborative engagement of Helsinki Energy with Nuage Vert as well as perhaps the Finnish cultural context (ICT, media art, democracy, margin-to-centre).

As we've already seen, out of the documented interactions between Helsinki Energy and HeHe, there arise a number of insights in the energy system. It became clear that Helsinki Energy cannot really be defined as 'the local plant,' as it is part of a European network of energy production. It initially seemed impossible to rely on the plant's energy production as an indicator of consumer demand in Helsinki, as the plant's production is regulated by the state of the European network as much as by anything else. Nuage Vert, here, helps to explicate the globalization of energy production, and also, the infrastructure that would need to be put in place, before a thing like 'community demand,' let alone awareness of it, can even become measurable. As such, the project complicates several of the assumptions on which the ideal of consumer energy awareness relies. What seemed a straightforward category turns out to be surreal, at least in the Helsinki context: the idea of measuring energy-use at a community level. Something similar occurs in relation to the notion of 'real-time' information about energy demand, which is often presented as a 'standard' features of smart electricity metering and tends to be highlighted in popular accounts of it (see Marres, 2012b).

This type of information, if it existed at all, could not be made publicly available by Helsinki Energy: « Aussi le niveau de production momentanée tombe sous le secret commercial » « also, real-time production level is considered a commercial secret » (Hyvönen Martti to Helen Evans, VS: nuage vert..., 29 September, 2005). Of course, a sceptic could feel justified to interpret these 'clarifications' on the part of Helsinki Energy as a sign that HeHe went into the project with under-examined assumptions (or as Martti put it, « je crains que l'idée même de tout le système énergétique vous est resté un peu floue » « your ideas are a little vague » Hyvönen Martti to Helen Evans, nuage vert... September 29, 2005).¹¹ However, one could equally argue that Nuage Vert demonstrated the relative fluidity of the definitions of energy use (versus demand) and of 'production vs consumption', as enacted through the measurement apparatus in place at the plant (or as the case may be: not in place). Nuage Vert managed to generate accounts that put on record a set of socio-technical constraints on the measurement of energy use; constraints that problematize the ideal of energy awareness on the community level, which is rather unquestioningly bandied about in so many places.

Moving on to the Paris record, the tone instantly changes, as it quickly becomes clear that in St Ouen, the power plant, a waste incinerator, was already an object and device of a set of much more strained and straining issues than in Helsinki, well before Nuage Vert got underway. In St Ouen, there is a set of rather inflammatory concerns, which Nuage Vert cannot but touch on by directing its beams onto the emission

¹¹ Hyvonen continues: "Mais cela n'est pas si simple même pour un expert!"

cloud. The issues are various, but have to do with the plan of the Municipality of St Ouen to realize an eco-town on the site of the incinerator plant. Accounts of the public debate about this project provides a useful enumeration of the issues raised (health, pollution, housing development). See the invitation to one of these debates:

February 3 2009 Public debate, Salle Barbara, Place Jean-Jaurès a St Ouen (derrière la Marie)

« Incinérateurs, les risques sanitaires pour les populations »
avec la participation du professeur Belpomme,
cancérologue au Centre universitaire Necker-Enfants malades, président de l'ARTAC (Association pour la recherche thérapeutique anticancéreuse), spécialiste de la recherche fondamentale concernant l'origine environnementale des cancers.

A later report in the local press states:

St Ouen: Debat houleux autour du incinerateur

L'opération communication s'annonçait à haut risque et les échanges ont été nourris vendredi soir lors de la réunion sur l'usine d'incinération des déchets organisée par la mairie de Saint-Ouen. C'est à l'ombre de la cheminée de cet incinérateur que la ville prévoit en effet la construction d'ici à 2025 de 4 000 logements dans le futur écoquartier des Docks. Un projet qui suscite la polémique : vendredi, la salle était comble et le public hostile et très réactif. *Le Parisien*, 27 April 2009

St Ouen: Heated debate around the incinerator

The communications exercise promised to be high risk and the discussion was intense during the Friday evening meeting about waste incineration, organized by the municipality of Saint-Ouen. It is in the shadow of the incinerator chimney that the council proposes to build 4,000 housing units, between now and 2025, in the future eco-town called the Docks. A project which is stirring controversy: Friday, the room was packed and the audience hostile and very reactive. *Le Parisien*, 27 April, 2009

At the time of the project, the waste incinerator in St Ouen was being configured, quite independently of Nuage Vert, into a site of contestation over an environmental future, a contest that pitched two alternative framings of 'environmentalism' over against one another: the proposition of the eco-town versus the health and pollution issues associated with waste incineration. Some of the visual material in the eco-towns supporting materials can help to clarify this debate: [here include the images of the eco-town (including gardening): <http://www.sequano.com/spip.php?article178>] These visuals are suggestive of the mutual exclusivity of the two environmental futures in play: to problematize waste incineration, to turn it into an issue, is to engage with the environment *as an industrial problematic* (on the level of the factory),

while the eco-town precisely points away from the industrial modality of environmental engagement, towards the post-industrial garden of sustainability as lifestyle. This controversy, moreover, is an overtly political one, as the lines between camps are clearly drawn, as is apparent from this note in the St Ouen archive (cum diary):

January 26, 2009 Meet with local Green party activists about waste/incineration issues. The political opposition in Saint-Ouen is using the presence of the incinerator to create a polemic around the Mairie urban development project that aims to transform the industrial zone surrounding the incinerator into an eco-town. (HeHe, A Diary of Nuage Vert, Archiving the development of a public process in Grand Paris, 2009)

Crucially, it proved impossible for Nuage Vert not to be implicated in this controversy. It was impossible for Nuage Vert to remain neutral.¹² As we have seen, Nuage Vert was designed to accommodate people's projections, that is, to offer a space for any feelings, convictions or fantasies that people might care to project onto its canvas. One could say that this laudable intention now comes back to haunt the project: in the climate of contestation around the St Ouen incinerator, most of the actors involved readily assign Nuage Vert a place on the 'other side' of the dividing line, in the opposing camp:

« Generally, this project (Nuage Vert) if it is accepted and supported by the current political majority would be viewed as a provocation by the political opposition and because of this the Mayor does not want to put oil on the fire... for the moment Saint-Ouen will not take the risk of supporting it... according to my source who has discussed it directly with the Mayor, the feasibility of this project is very compromised. »

(Regional government civil servant to BESSIS Daniel, Futur en Seine St-Ouen, March 6, 2009)

Remarkably indeed, from the very beginning the relevant authorities seem to agree that on-going environmental and political controversies make Nuage Vert as impossible proposition. They do not seem to consider it a possible means to intervene and to shift these conflicts and tensions into another register of engagement. However, interestingly and fortunately, many if not most of these nay-saying institutions feel compelled to justify their objections and ultimate rejection, and in the process they offer important elucidations of the setting, its issues and its politics. A significant component of the St Ouen Nuage Vert record consists of official communication in which the institutions involved attempt to justify how and why Nuage Vert cannot happen, in the process generating plenty of insight into this political environment.

Will the green cloud cause panic or help to express concern?

¹¹ Here is another indication of Nuage Vert not being neutral. HeHe says: "Le Nuage vert n'est pas qu'un geste spectaculaire et événementiel dans l'espace public. C'est un long processus, une réflexion dans et sur l'environnement. Il aurait pu être un vecteur pour pacifier les discussions. Si on veut régler la question des incinérateurs, il faut s'attaquer aux *vrais* problèmes : celui de nos déchets." (Marie Lechner, *Le rayon vert divise Saint-Ouen Liberation*, 2 June, 2009)

Especially of interest in this regard is the response of the Mairie of St Ouen. Of all the actors, it appears to be the most seriously worried about Nuage Vert, more so than SYCTOM, the Company managing the plant itself (and who at one point comes back to HeHe to say Nuage Vert may happen after all). At the outset the Mairie itself cites the issues that have already arisen in relation to the waste incinerator, as its principal cause for concern with regard to the project:

“[efforts of] the mairie to create dialogue with local citizens has brought to light **serious worries** and **questioning** about the environmental and health effects of the incinerator. Therefore, you understand that it is difficult for us to work dispassionately on this project, and all the more so since the allotted time is short.” (Maire de Saint Ouen to Mains d’Ouevres, letter, 26 January 2009)

It appears that Nuage Vert can’t happen because it risks amplifying the concerns already present in the setting:

« Following a first letter from Mainsd'oeuvres last November, the response of the council warned of a local context that made it difficult to carry out the outreach and engagement proposed around this project. » (Coraline KNOFF [CKNOFF@mairie-saint-ouen.fr] to Heiko Hansen et al, Demande de rendez vous, 12 March 2009). Italics mine.

The concerns of the Mairie are also invoked by other actors, such as the incinerator owner Syctom, who writes:

“...a laser projection onto the vapour cloud of the incineration plant would **risk** eliciting misunderstandings, or even **worry** from members of the public, if they are not fully informed beforehand as to the meaning of this event. [...] These reasons have already led to the city of Saint-Ouen, who is one of our main partners, to inform you of their disagreement with the realisation of this project, and leads us to do the same today.” (Syctom to Association HeHe, Letter, 25 mars 2009).

Indeed, the Mairie’s suspicion may not be unfounded, given the proven capacity of Nuage Vert to take on the colours of the setting, and to become - in a way - the device that the setting deserves. However, what starts out as an insight into the problematics that context and its politicization may pose for the public expression and articulation of issues, soon turns into another set of far more troubling chains of reasoning.



Figure 2: HeHe “Nuage Vert aura-t-il lieu”, Affiche, 66 x 46 cm, september 2009

Firstly, the Mairie of St Ouen soon undoes the question mark that is Nuage Vert (according to its makers, see Figure 2): for the Mairie, something that was a *question* to begin with – the question of what kinds of interpretations Nuage Vert might generate in the troubled context of the St Ouen environmental controversy - soon turn into the *certain knowledge* that these will be bad interpretations: Ce contexte n'a pas changé et rend tout aussi périlleux la bonne réception de cette oeuvre par les audoniens (Coraline KNOFF [CKNOFF@mairie-saint-ouen.fr] to Heiko Hansen et al, Demande de rendez vous, 12 March 2009). « the context has not changed and indangers the correct reception of this artwork by the inhabitants of Saint-Ouen. » And elsewhere it cites as a reason why Nuage Vert can't happen: “le contexte nationale et internationale est particulièrement difficile et incertain.”(Mairie de St Ouen à Sycotom, Letter, 25 mai

2009) « the national and international context is particularly difficult and uncertain. »

For the Mairie, the controversy over the waste incinerator/ eco-town is not, or is no longer, a problematic situation. Rather, the context gets defined negatively in and of itself: the issues of the setting are presented by the Mairie as a kind of pollutant, as what will cloud and scramble ‘the good reception of the work of art.’ (This in contrast to its earlier concerns, when the Mairie quite rightly proposed to understand Nuage Vert as an environmental device, an apparatus that will end up explicating and perhaps amplifying the issues of the setting). Strangely and disturbingly, the Mairie now wishes to disavow the troubled context in which different visions of the environmental future are articulated and their mutual exclusivity becomes clear. This context is *not* perceived by the Mairie as what is at issue, and from which therefore an issue must be found, but rather as a disturbance or pollutant itself which prevents (hampers) ‘la bonne reception’.

In a third and last movement, finally, the institutional critique comes to focus on Nuage Vert itself, as it comes to hold the apparatus itself responsible for the disturbances that, in its initial response, the critique had attributed to the setting: As we have already seen, the Prefecture stated:

“However, I call your attention to the **worry**, or even **panic**, that this laser beam could provoke amongst the local population or road users, in the absence of any clear information about the purpose of the project.” (Préfecture de Seine-St Denis to Trosieme Oeil (cultural organisation), letter, 28 mai 2009)

It is a quite remarkable chain of displacements, in which problems that were initially attributed to the political environment (“Je vous rapelle ce contexte difficile”// « i bring to your attention the difficult context ») end up being ascribed to the artistic apparatus itself (l'enquiétude...que pourrait provoquer ce faisceau” // “the worry that this laser beam would provoke”).¹³

The question is: If Nuage Vert is a canvas on which various imaginations are projected, where does this negative image of the public come from and how does it come about? It must either derive from the institutional account of the public as ‘anxious’ and ‘paranoid’, or from the conviction that the setting in question is compromised, it only latently so, and would explicitly become so through the insertion of the screen. This is where Nuage Vert is so clever: in producing only the canvas, it compels the actors

13 The institutional rejection of Nuage Vert also points towards a more fraught political dynamic. Dynamics of displacement, in which the problem gets moved from issues onto actors (and becomes blame) or doctrines (and becomes ideology) are key political dynamics (for a discussion see Marres 2005). In the particular displacement under discussion here, potentially political issues are somehow redefined as the other of politics: issues, public concerns and controversy are *not* perceived as what must be addressed politically, that is, as the very occurrences that we need political institutions for, but instead come to be framed as that which prevents and hampers ‘la bonne negotiation.’ A moral image is conjured up in which politics is a matter of civilized exchange among well-mannered subjects willing to learn (see on this point also Bonnie Honig (1993) on the displacement of politics). Especially noteworthy in this regard is the support that the Marie is willing to extend to *public debates* about the issue of the waste incinerator, but not to the environmental device of Nuage Vert (see below).

involved to explicate the setting, and thus to publicly articulate its and their issues.

What we can learn from the resistance met

On a more theoretical level, the institutional chain of reasoning shows how in a controversial context like that of St Ouen, the features of the device and of the setting become utterly confused. More precisely, the question of what Nuage Vert is capable of and the problems that the setting may or may not harbour become progressively more mixed up. The controversy over Nuage Vert – the art project - and the controversy over the setting – the politics of the place - cannot be kept separate. While this adds another difficulty for us who want to understand and tell the story of Nuage Vert, this confusion is also one of the conditions of felicity (Austin, 1975) for the project. That it is possible to confuse the features of the technological apparatus and the features of the setting is precisely the reason why Nuage Vert is so effective in clarifying environmental issues: while most of the actors involved would resist accounting for the politics of the situation directly and in public, they are all too readily prepared to discuss what effects the apparatus of *Nuage Vert* might cause out there. And while they would not easily discuss their own fears, they readily discuss the fears that might be present ‘out there’, among the people of St Ouen. Which is also to say, the institutional accounts of Nuage Vert and its setting clearly overflow what is directly observable in it. ‘The environment’ in this case is not just one of the plant and the highway close by, it is not even limited to the environmental issues, of health, pollution and environmental living as an economic proposition. The setting is also animated by concerns, hypotheses and issues which only become accessible through the accounts and responses provoked by Nuage Vert.

To generalize from this: the intense and frequent references to fear, worry, panic and concern warn us against two theoretical interpretations of Nuage Vert’s style of rendering controversy that would be equally wrong: one too objectivist and one too subjectivist. First, the insistence on fear, panic and worry should remind us that the ‘issues’ of controversy are *not* limited to what is directly traceable in the setting: the planning of the eco-town, the possible adverse health effects of the incinerator. At the same time however, it would be equally wrong to interpret Nuage Vert in a purely psychological register, as some therapeutic trick to externalize into the environment issues that live in people’s minds. As the municipality deploys an emotional discourse which is all about worries, fear, panic, anxiety and risk, we should be careful not to define these as mental images projected *onto* the cloud of Nuage Vert. This would prevent us from appreciating the extent to which we are dealing with issues that belong to the setting.

The chain of reasoning of the Mairie, Syctom and the Prefecture, finally, results in a familiar manoeuvre: the framing of the public as the problem. Each institution in different ways defines the public as emotionally unstable: worried, anxious, panicked. If their accounts of the project were the only one we had to go by, we would think the people of St Ouen a bunch of shivering hysterics: Nuage Vert is imagined by the institutions involved as a toxic cloud, which cannot be apprehended without the general public succumbing to fits of fearfulness. Again: this rendering of the state of affairs raises the inevitable

question of *who* exactly is overcome by fear and anxiety here? Is it really the public, or rather the institutional climate in which a governmental institution can only envision the public as panic-stricken and anxious? Whose sentiments are reflected here? An NGO finally states the obvious to the Mairie: “Vous avez par rapport a cette nuage une reflexe de peur.” // « with respect to this cloud you have a reflex of fear, this fear is not supported by the evidence (research on the environment). Please publish the information on which your fear is based (Denise Bourdier, Comite de Propositions pour la Reduction et le Traitement de nos Dechets, Juilett 2010). But whatever the distribution of fear and loathing is, it is clear that the institution will leave no possible argument unused to justify why it can't allow Nuage Vert to happen. It ends up making the classic rhetorical move of the *reductio ad absurdum*, in which social actors keep reaching for new, ever crazier reasons to account for the disturbance of social order, in order to avoid having to consider the disturbance or inadequacy of an imagined order itself. The Mairie says, for instance: we cannot have Nuage Vert because to do a public event would require preparing the general public and the general public is too large an audience for us to reach: “Or il parait particulierement difficile d’organiser une diffusion de l’information large et efficace dans les delais imparties et a une echelle aussi importante que celle du public concerne.” (Syctom to Association HeHe, Letter, 25 mars 2009) « however it seems particularly difficult to organise a widespread and efficient information campaign in the remaining time and on such a scale able to reach the public that will be affected. »

Finally, we should consider one more serious possible reason for the institutions’ rejection of Nuage Vert, besides its investment in the eco-town, the local political alignment, and fear. The Mairie, it appears, cannot quite handle the experimental mode of issue articulation, the open-ended rendering of environmental controversy enabled by Nuage Vert.

The uncontrollable image

Adding a further set of reasons why Nuage Vert could not possibly take place, Syctom, the manager of the waste incineration plant, refined the Prefecture’s justifications discussed above: according to the plant’s management, Nuage Vert could not take place because it’s message was too uncertain. “une projection laser sur le panache du centre d’incineration... risquerait de susciter des incompréhensions, voire des inquiétudes de la part du public, si celui-ci n’était pas pleinement informé au préalable du sens de cette démarche.” (Syctom to Association HeHe, Letter, 25 mars 2009). // “...a laser projection onto the vapour cloud of the incineration plant would **risk** eliciting misunderstandings, or even **worry** from members of the public, if they are not fully informed beforehand as to the meaning of this event...” (Syctom to Association HeHe, Letter, 25 mars 2009).

The Prefecture soon added a similar account: that its refusal of the event was:

“ mainly due to the risk of this event being wrongly interpreted and contribute to propagating, in the collective mind, a strongly negative image of the incinerator and the terms by which it is operated.” (Préfecture de Seine-St Denis to Le Troisième Pole (cultural organisation), letter, 28

mai 2009)

Two things should be noted. Firstly, this open-endedness of Nuage Vert is not an accident, it is how the apparatus has been designed. HeHe is very clear and explicit about the open-endedness of the cloud: “Le Nuage vert est ambigu, il n’offre pas un message moralisateur simpliste, mais confronte le citoyen avec un spectacle esthétique ouvert à l’interprétation», explique ses promoteurs.” (Marie Lechner, *Le rayon vert divise Saint-Ouen Liberation*, 2 June, 2009) « The Green Cloud is ambiguous, it doesn't offer a simple moralising message but confronts the citizen with an aesthetic spectacle which is open to interpretation. » (Marie Lechner, *Le rayon vert divise Saint-Ouen Liberation*, 2 June, 2009). Secondly, these remarks as to the ‘real’ problem of Nuage Vert suggest that the problem is not, or not necessarily, the *negative* interpretations that the project might generate, the problem is the very unpredictability of these interpretations. As the newspaper *Liberation* puts it: :

« The Sycotom fears that this cloud will make people scared by symbolising the toxicity of the incinerator emissions and the National Center for Independent Information about Waste (CNIID) is also not in favour (of the project) because they think, on the contrary, it will shine a positive light on the incineration plant »

And here is yet another one:

« Since you will not master the interpretation people will make. In different viewers of the light animation it could, for example, generate feelings of anxiety, aesthetic satisfaction even no particular feeling at all. » (*Coordinateur Déchets, ADEME, Délégation régionale Ile de France to HeHe, Letter, January 28, 2009*)

How to make sense of these byzantine argumentations? One way is to say that the relevant authorities pursue a politics of distraction, subsumption or sublimation, possibly in spite of themselves.

Problematizing the multi-interpretability of Nuage Vert, we then say, makes it possible for these institutions *not* to engage with the substantive concerns that equally animate this setting – including the crucial issue of how an industrial and a post-industrial society can somehow be made to ‘co-exist’.

Another possible interpretation is to take the institutions’ protestations at face value, and to conclude that the implicated authorities are really incapable of imagining a mode of communication in which messages are not fixed, and one that might actually want to give free play to interpretation. From this angle, Nuage Vert can also be understood as a useful clarification of contemporary controversies around intellectual property regimes and freedom of expression. The ideal of image control – the ideal of securing the interpretation of an image before and alongside its communication - may seem foolish from a philosophical and media-logic point of view (see footnote 1). All communication is under-determined. But the *ideal* of message control nevertheless has significant political consequences. In St Ouen, Nuage Vert n’aurait pas lieu // Nuage Vert will not take place.

How a politics of articulation is rendered ‘inadmissible’ in St Ouen

Before concluding, I want to offer a third and last possible interpretation of Nuage Vert’s not-quite-happening in St Ouen. The official accounts demonstrate a failure of the imagination: the inability to imagine a situation in which artistic instruments would enable the articulation of environmental and political issues and the enactment of public controversy. This particular problematic does not receive much explicit mention in the accounts elicited by Nuage Vert, although early on in the project the artists are asked: “est-il réellement opportun que les animations destinées à cette prise de conscience soient esthétiques ?” // “is it really expedient for events that intend to raise awareness to be aesthetic?”

(Coordinateur Déchets, ADEME, Délégation régionale Ile de France to HeHe, Letter, January 28, 2009)

However, the Mairie manages to make its rejection of the artistic register of engagement forcefully clear in an indirect way. While it is still involved in the negotiation with, or rather, communication towards, Nuage Vert, the Mairie organises another public debate on the issue of the planned eco-town: ‘24 April 2012: “Incineration: Au Coeur du debat” //Incineration: at the heart of the debate’.’ The debate, judging from the video fragments online,¹⁴ did not skirt the issues of waste, pollution, health, industry: it featured a doctor discussing cancer risk and a plant representative discussing waste incineration. This event therefore raises the question: why can the Mairie accept - and even initiate - *a debate* and not a Nuage Vert? If the ‘debate’ is assumed to be a ‘safe platform’ for these issues, why not Nuage Vert? *What does the debate forum have that the emission cloud lacks as a political platform?*

It is not, then, exactly, the substantive issues that the Mairie and other authorities are disavowing in rejecting Nuage Vert. It is *not* the case that the Mairie cannot bear the public expression of environmental problems in general: the public rendering of the controversy over our environmental and energy futures, the controversy of which the SYCTOM incinerator has become the object and lightning rod. Rather, it cannot accept the rendering of these issues by the artistic apparatus of Nuage Vert. Qui a peur de Nuage Vert? Who is afraid of the Green Cloud? What seems crucial is that Nuage Vert enables other registers of expression besides the formal and intellectual discourses with which institutions are familiar (i.e. debate). Furthermore, Nuage Vert disrupts some long-held conventions of public dialogue: it dispenses with the age-old political and intellectual trick according to which we must disentangle ourselves from the environment, in order to be able to engage politically with ‘environmental issues’. Nuage Vert situates the articulation of issues inside the very environments that animate them. It enables processes of interpretation, speculation, and documentation to unfold in/as an environmental event. Nuage Vert then proposes a distinctive register of expression: it physically places with the environment the process of issue articulation, turning the settings of social, material, political and economic life into a theatre of definable concerns. Perhaps most ‘unforgivable’ of all, it does this by deploying techno-artistic means that seem strange and alien to institutions used to setting the terms and framing the sites of ‘political debate.’ Nuage Vert enables an open space – in the sky - for issue articulation by visual and sensory

14 See for a recording of the debate: <http://hehe.org2.free.fr/?p=513&language=fr>

means.

6. Conclusion

Nuage Vert, then, is an in situ artistic apparatus operating upon an industrial site, but it displays some very specific and special capacities for the performance of environmental controversy. In this text, I have focussed on the institutional communications elicited by Nuage Vert, as these accounts, which the apparatus provoked these institutions into providing, offer rare and useful insights into the severe constraints that continue to limit the enactment of environmental controversy in public, and which prevented Nuage Vert from happening in St Ouen. However, we should not leave unmentioned, that, at another level, Nuage Vert managed perfectly well to do what it was supposed to do, to perform and dramatize what it set out to dramatize, and it is with this point that I'd like to conclude. To return to the original project statement by HeHe: Nuage Vert seeks to alert consumers to their responsibilities, showing that *we are all situated in the production of energy.*' Italics mine (Helen Evans to Martti Hyvönen, Subject: nuage vert..., August 11, 2005). Nuage Vert, in directing its lights onto emission clouds of power plants, addresses a highly specific invisibility. It does not just address the invisibility of pollution, waste, or 'externalities'; it operates upon the invisibility or negativity of industrial production itself. By projecting a green cloud on emission clouds, it brings into the focus of environmental engagement the industrial machines running at the heart of our supposedly post-industrial societies.

This is what I consider possibly the most unforgivable omission by the Mairie of St Ouen: the dogged stubbornness with which it refused to explicitly acknowledge the tension between the environmental visions implied by eco-town and waste incineration, as what constituted the politics of the situation. Instead, one could say, the Mairie smothers the cloud of industrialism in a host of happy initiatives: We have offered, they say, "de nombreuses proposition, pour le compostage domestique, la reduction des prospectus diffuses dans les boites de lettres, la sensibilisations des scolaire, et ainsi de suite..) (Marie de Saint-Ouen to the President of Sycotom, Lettre, 25 may 2010). "numerous initiatives, such as composting, reducing the junk mail in household letterboxes, outreach in schools" Especially important about Nuage Vert's contribution, in this regard, is that, in directing attention to the factory, it does *not* re-instate the separation between the space of consumption and that of production, and that between the space of environmentalism and that of industrialism, which are each distinctions that have hampered attempts to imagine an environmental politics and democracy of energy (Mitchell, 2012). Nuage Vert operates across the distinction between demand and supply, and indeed it helps to dismantle this separation, showing that *we are all situated in the production of energy.*' If I was to identify one lasting contribution of Nuage Vert to environmental debates it would be its way of undoing the definition of industrial production as the negative space of pollution. Time and again HeHe and Nuage Vert insist on the beauty of the cloud: « l'enjeu est de changer la perception de la plume, par la création d'une belle image dans le ciel. » (Helen Evans to Nathalie Aubret, Re: Motiva, 19 June 2007) « it is a gamble, what is at stake is to change the perception of the emission, by creating a beautiful image in the sky. » (Helen Evans to Nathalie Aubret, Re: Motiva, 19 June 2007). Nuage Vert dismantles the notion of the operating factory as a space that

cannot bear the light of day, art and public life.

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