

MAKING SPACE FOR FOOD:  
EVERYDAY COMMUNITY FOOD  
GARDENING AND ITS  
CONTRIBUTION TO  
URBAN AGRICULTURE

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## **Abstract**

This thesis presents research on community food gardens as an example of urban agriculture. It aims to provide evidence on the factors that influence their ability to produce food. Drawing on participant observation methods, and interviews with community food gardeners, on six London housing estates in 2010, this thesis explores the everyday community food garden practices of residents. It explores the factors that influence food growing, from discourse, everyday practice, and spatial interactions of those who garden. Key results show that the process of transforming, constructing, and inhabiting material space occupies residents' time, leading to a reduced emphasis on food production. The research concludes that food harvests as an edible outcome are only sought in quantities relative to confirming the embodied situation of social practices, a key aspect of which is the need to gain spatial sovereignty over the estates' landscape.

This thesis, therefore, concludes that these community food gardens play a minor role within urban agriculture, where an agricultural accent seeks a consolidated harvest in order to feed cities. However, they do contribute to residents' sense of dwelling through cultivation, creativity, and community, arguably a major contribution in our understanding of urban agriculture where accessing space is a precursor and barrier to growing food in cities.

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# **DEDICATION**

For Julia, Cassia, and Fabian.

## **Declaration**

I declare that the research contained in this thesis, unless otherwise formally indicated within the text, is the original work of the author. The thesis has not been previously submitted to this or any other university for a degree, and does not incorporate any material already submitted for a degree.

Signed

Dated

# **Chapter one**

## **Introduction**

### **1.1 Introduction to research concepts and written approach**

This short introductory section aims to prepare the reader for the overall conceptual approach of the thesis as well as provide a positioning statement regarding its written style. Firstly, this thesis uses a conceptual framework of the everyday, broadly approached from the work of Highmore (2011), de Certeau (1984), and Ingold (2000). The use of the everyday, in terms of data collection, means that there was a focus on researching community gardening practices as participation through and alongside residents as gardeners. This means that my understanding of these gardens emanates from the lived experience of residents who have chosen to create them, rather than abstract concepts of design discourses. Following on from this participatory approach, I have made the decision to write in the first person because it continually positions me within the process of gardening, through to analysis and writing. It provides data and results that do not seek to bracket out my own involvement in these processes.

### **1.2 Introduction**

Urban Agriculture and Peri-Urban Agriculture<sup>1</sup> are terms that describe the practice of growing food (vegetables, fruit, livestock and other products) within cities, to be consumed by local residents (Mougeot, 2006). It directly engages the urban situation as a food producing space to help alleviate the increasing unease regarding sustainable and reliable food supplies to rapidly growing global urban centres, whose population are increasingly reliant on commercial food systems (Redwood, 2009).

Within the UK context, urban agriculture is increasingly being viewed as a necessary step towards increasing urban sustainability, where a plurality urban agriculture of practices might provide increased food resilience and security internal to a city. Currently, our understanding of urban agriculture is dominated by planning and

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<sup>1</sup> While literature can refer to both urban agriculture and urban and peri-urban agriculture, this thesis will only

prediction which explores urban agriculture quantitatively, so that resources such as urban space, combined with growing techniques can be used to validate urban agriculture as essential infrastructure against other urban landscape uses (Viljoen et al., 2005). This is little surprising in a country that has a highly developed and prescriptive planning system. However, the qualitative aspect of urban agriculture practice that involves producing landscape, devising practice collectively, and gaining sovereignty over resources is little researched. These are the often messy complexities that constitute the lived experience, the contradictory aspects of how people feel, digressing into imagination or day dreams, or spending time creatively entwined in making, talking, and walking. These elusive yet essential companions to food growing are particularly relevant for subsistence growing, in this case community food gardening; commercial urban agriculture has clearer economic parameters for valuing practice and harvest.

Towards increasing knowledge regarding social growing, I use the concept of the everyday (Highmore, 2012) to explore six community food gardens on London social housing estates as one example of subsistence urban agriculture. This thesis explores the experience of those that garden, examining factors that influence their variable responses to food production and outputs (harvest and yield). The community food gardens in this research represent a specific form of the more generic term, the 'community garden'. While community food gardens state a specific aim of producing food, community gardens have the choice to do so, but it is not a defining purpose<sup>2</sup>. Moreover, much community garden literature omits direct connection to the specific debates over urban agriculture and how it relates to food, cities, and industrial agriculture in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In acknowledging this disparity, this research is sensitive to the statement from Mougeot, who asks: "There seem to be different urban contexts for UA [urban agriculture]... there will be those where urban agriculture has become an important source of food ... and others where this will be less true: why the differences?" (Mougeot, 2005, p.267).

This thesis will contribute directly to knowledge, by enabling a better understanding of community food gardens and their contribution to urban agriculture, as it is

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<sup>2</sup> The two terms in this thesis are sometimes used interchangeably where I refer to case studies as communal gardens or simply community gardens but this is not meant to de-emphasise the all important aspect of food.

currently being explored in the Britain. The need for such research is acknowledged in calls for community garden research to give an account of the lived experience of gardeners (Firth et al., 2011) and to ascertain the importance of the growing space and its harvest beyond the boundary of the garden (Turner, 2011). Consequently, this research, through an examination of the situation of practice as something that makes space for food, will also provide a better understanding of how architecture and design needs to concede the potential for a more inclusive production of built space developed on the imaginings and lived experience of those that inhabit the space.

My concerns therefore, are not to record and describe the detail of gardening practices in terms of their techniques, or weights and measures of harvest. In fact, while this research focuses on food, discussions on actual food production do not arrive until mid-chapter five. I argue that this wide view of growing – which situates it within the urban landscape, the transformative narrative of making space, and the everyday lives of those that garden – is required to understand community growing as a subjective practice, where the objects of harvest are not simply reducible to a market logic (Zaviska, 2003). In other words, this thesis is neither an urban gardening manual aimed at gardeners, a strategic view of urban environments for planners, nor a design manual for architects.

Instead, I explore the conflict, frisson and creativity in the process of changing the urban landscape into a component of a urban agriculture landscape. I seek to show that the spatial creativity of residents, as well as sensory interactions, and their everyday garden practices are fundamental to understanding how this expanding form of urban agriculture contributes to discussions on local food provision as a spatial productive practice. Importantly, I use this research to explore the journeying of gardeners in the space between the initial statements to grow food, through multiple influential moments, towards the harvest of practice. In this in between space, I emphasise the influence that built space, spatial transformation, and the bodily involvement of residents, has on the dynamic of food, concluding that food production and the quotidian meal as a core phenomena, does not serve alone as a basis for understanding community food gardens as a form of urban agriculture.

All of these actions happen within the landscape of the estate and one of the reasons for examining social housing was precisely because of the potential for its landscape

to be changed. UK social housing is often rich in open land, frequently exceeding its housing footprint, but this land mass is little recorded or codified in the same way as park or public squares (Tomkins, 2006). In many ways it is a lost landscape, unrecorded, named, or unused; yet it is *the* vital resource for urban growing. As Ravetz writes, the spaces around estates “were left unnamed and, unless nicknamed by residents, remained anonymous – a barrier to their recognition and hence utilization as part of the estate environment” (Ravetz, 2001, p.179).

This thesis focuses on exploring six community food gardens in east London, all of which are on social housing estates. Such gardens have emerged in the hundreds across London in recent years (Sustain, 2013a), yet little or no academic research has taken them seriously as a form of urban agriculture. Through participation as a gardener, I explore the long term process from which gardens emerge, showing that their main response is not to that of a food crisis but more a spatial crisis, whereby residents need to appropriate and modify urban space in order to grow. I argue that this process of acknowledging, appropriating, and creating gardens should be linked to the concept of food sovereignty through a need of residents to gain ‘spatial sovereignty’, which I argue is a precondition to food security in the urban setting.

The title of this thesis, “Making space for food” can be read literally as producing a material space in which to grow food; a small garden space bounded yet nested within a larger space of the built environment. ‘Making space’ therefore also refers to an interrelationship between differing ontological views of how space is produced; in and through everyday use, in this case the garden, and abstract and conceived through architecture and planning (Till, 2009, Amin, 2002). To triangulate these modes of making space, which this thesis does through an approach via Lefebvre (1991b), there is also the more lyrical, drawing attention to the way that space and food in this instance produces an emotional, creative, and everyday experience of space (Highmore, 2011, Gardiner, 2000).

It is also about how the harvest of practice, namely vegetables and fruit, attempts to produce meaning beyond the boundary of the estate garden; potentially making a space, or rather a new relationship between self grown food and established patterns of consumption within the abstract space of food, namely industrial agriculture and commercial food systems. Importantly, as Merrifield (2006) states, the abstract



approach of architectural design and the abstract space of food consumption merge and reinforce each other. I argue in this thesis that, in order to understand community food gardens, all these understandings of making space for food are required to understand how its variable output emerges from the garden, its embodied meaning for residents, and its relationship to the broader food systems. Consequently, the phrase in the title ‘contribution to urban agriculture’ does not refer to research that asks *how* much food do community food gardens produce in terms of weights or volume. Rather, I want to explore the qualitative factors that produce a dynamic effect on food production, examining why residents are drawn to the concept and why, despite a statement to grow food, community food gardens are understood to be variable in terms of actual harvest from negligible (Holland, 2004) to productive (Baker, 2004).

This chapter seeks to orientate the reader with regard to the academic area of urban agriculture as it is defined internationally and how this thesis, which studies community food gardens across three London boroughs, engages with and challenges these definitions. Having discussed food, the rise of the global city, and urban agriculture as a response to concerns regarding food supplies, I discuss the emergence in the Global North of the community garden as an example of urban agriculture. I contextualise this research decision by discussing how the research evolved during a two year scoping phase, from a theoretical quantitative study of urban agriculture in central London, to one of participation with community food gardens in east London. This chapter offers a series of stepping stones from broader discussions of global food security to an intimate portrait of the lives of residents on six London housing estates who have decided to grow food through communal gardening.

### **1.3 Urban agriculture and global food**

This research project acknowledges the growing unease surrounding the perceived lack of sustainability inherent in food production and consumption from a rapidly urbanising global population, where “concerns are being raised about the potential environmental, health, and security of global food commodity chains” (Kortright and Wakefield, 2011, p.1). In 2008, Defra wrote:

“The current global food security situation is a cause for deep concern. High energy prices, poor harvests, rising demand from a growing population ... have all pushed up prices, and coupled with problems of availability, have sparked riots and instability in a number of countries around the world” (Defra, 2008, p.1).

Addressing food concerns in the 21st century means supporting the majority of the world's population, which, since 2005, has become urbanised (UN, 2005). Such urbanisation means that the majority of the global population are reliant on externalised and commercial food systems, a trend which looks set to increase (Traill, 2006). Therefore, rapid changes in the urban/rural balance precipitate an urgency to provide daily food and livelihoods in such urban situations. Drescher et al. write that:

“Globally induced economic crisis, rapid population growth and rural to urban migration, deteriorating national economies or persisting economic difficulties are pre-conditions for urban food production in many developing countries and countries of transition”(Drescher et al., 2000, p.2).

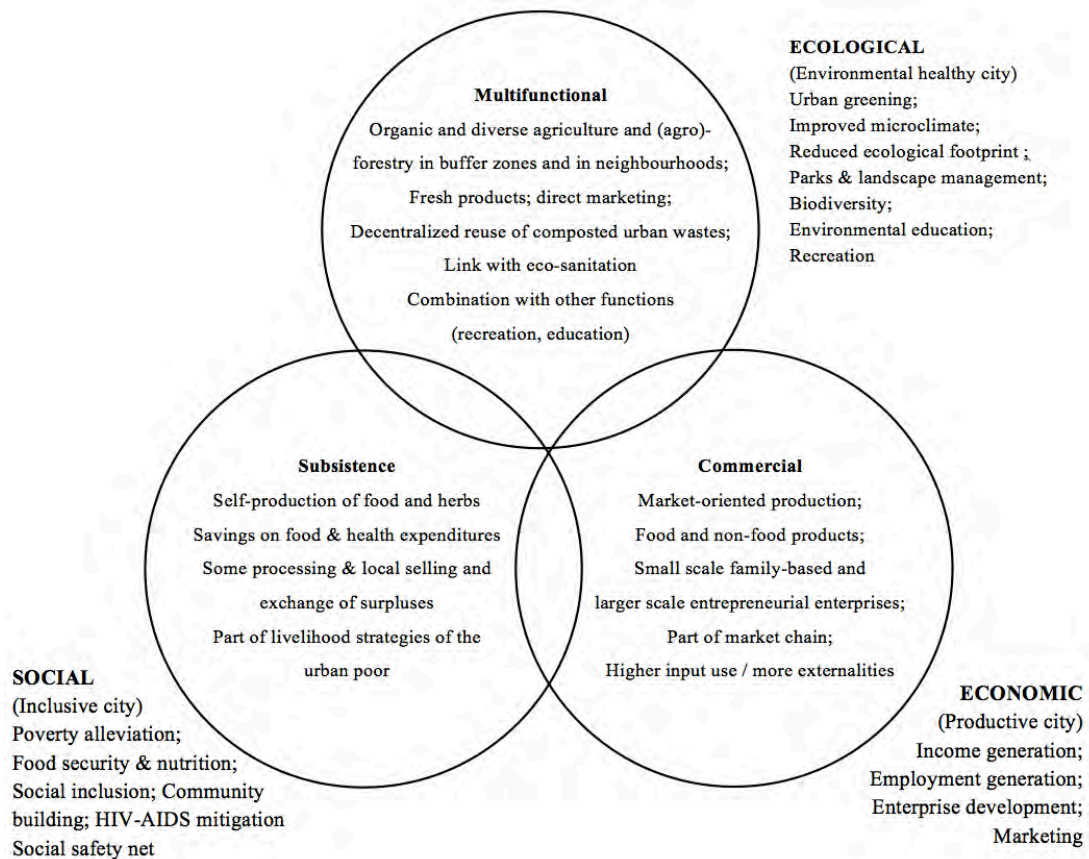
In the global south, urban agriculture has emerged as one solution for alleviating the “persistent poverty, food shortages, rising food prices and hunger” that residents are exposed to in the newly emerging global cities (Burger et al., 2009, p.1). Defined broadly as the production of vegetables, fruit, fish, livestock, and non-foods, within, and supplied back to, local districts and cities (Mougeot 2000), its harvests are aimed at a spectrum spanning subsistence and commerce, including peri-urban farms (Thornton, 2006), allotments (Perez-Vazquez, 2002), home gardens (Taylor and Lovell, 2012), and communal gardens (Guitart et al., 2012), including single events (Gorgolewski et al., 2011), with technologies ranging from traditional gardening to hydroponics (Lufa, 2014).

Our definition and understanding of urban agriculture mainly emanates from studies in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean conducted since the 1980s (Eberhard, 1989, Sanyal, 1985, Rakodi, 1987, Yue-man, 1987, Bakker et al., 2000). urban agriculture in these countries is described as “the bottom line” practice, since “food is rapidly turning into a ‘basic luxury’” (Mougeot et al., 1994, p.11). Across its

breadth of practice, urban food production research has long stressed “the critical importance of self-grown food for the poorest urban dwellers, particularly those living in households headed by women” (Mougeot et al., 1994, p.6). However, it is clear that urban agriculture does not offer complete food self-sufficiency for cities; rather, it forms one part of a sustainable food security response.

There are, however, substantial regional variations regarding the rate and degree of urbanisation and consequent food demands – for example, “cities in Sub-Saharan Africa are growing at an exceptional rate of five per cent or more annually and by the year 2020 half of the population in this region will be urban”. In Latin America “It is estimated that by 2020 the urban population ... will approach 539 million, or 81%, of it projected total population of 665 million” (Van Veenhuizen and Danso, 2007, p.12). The UK, by comparison, has a relatively stable urban to rural population growth, at under one per cent per annum (ONS, 2014). In stating these differences, I acknowledge that a conceptualisation of urban agriculture will have dissimilar meaning and impacts across regions relative to specific social, spatial, and economic situations.

Veenhuizen and Danso (2007) write that urban agriculture has multiple functions, which produce things of value to households or to the general public. These functions overlap across social, economic, and ecological spheres (figure 1). The social function provides little in the way of profit, but has significant impact, mainly focused on “home gardening, community gardening, institutional gardens” (Van Veenhuizen and Danso, 2007, p.22). From this perspective, the economic function is market orientated, while the ecological dimension brings environmental health to a city within a multifunction of land and resource use. Veenhuizen and Danso (2007, p.20) draw these functions out from a critique of authors who have developed topologies of urban agriculture systems, while also noting the need for “establishing locally relevant criteria for characterising locally relevant farming systems”. This accounts for the dynamic nature of urban agriculture as its functions and forms change considerably over time.



**Figure 1: A topology of urban agriculture types**

Key: UPA: Urban and peri-urban agriculture; After: Veenhuizen and Danso, 2007, p.24

#### 1.4 The Global North

In commenting on figure 1, I would state that the community food gardens in this research sit within multifunctional urban and peri-urban agriculture regarding combined other functions such as recreation and education and that the UK has little in the way of commercial urban agriculture. It also includes some of the social functions such as inclusion and community building. This is because the Global North tends to solve issues of food access via social and market mechanisms such as social security, food banks, and market forces that keep pricing low (Defra, 2009b). This means that while interest has increased with regard to health, economy, social, and environmental issues of industrial agriculture, research and practice tend to focus on thickening residents' relationship to food within a production-consumption paradigm, such as food security, rather than encourage subsistence practices in their own right (Evers and Hodgson, 2011, DeLind, 2002).

The UK has a highly developed market system for food consumption, dominated by four main supermarkets, with little evidence that own grown food impacts upon this market (Defra, 2008). Defra, (2008) despite noting concerns over global food situations, reports that the UK is resilient in terms of national food supply due to the robust supermarket system. Yet, it is reported elsewhere that the UK does have significant and rising food poverty (Trussell Trust, 2013). For example, in 2012-13 the UK's largest food bank, the Trussell Trust (2013, n.p) gave "emergency food to 346,992 people nationwide, compared to 128,697 in 2011-12" a substantial increase on the figure of 2,814 in 2005-06.

Furthermore, in 2013 a report on child hunger in London writes "over half (55 per cent) of parents ... reported that their ability to afford food has got worse" where "74,000 children across London ... sometimes or often go to bed hungry" (GLA, 2013, p.18). Thus, social welfare becomes the primary response to food access issues within a developed economic situation. Here a "consumerist emphasis" pervades (Lang and Caraher, 1998, p.207) where "the supermarket provides the mainstay of ... food shopping" and interventions to ease poverty are focused in this area (GLA, 2013, p.41). Families are given better access to commercial food systems – through free food vouchers, free school meal vouchers and food banks – rather than access to land for the means of primary food production.

Research shows that the role of urban agriculture, across subsistence and commercial, is diminished when social security systems provide the main safety net for household food security (Thornton, 2006). The link between food crisis and food growing practices is sidestepped by increasing citizen dependency on markets. That fact that self-grown food still persists in the North demonstrates that urban agriculture, in these contexts, represents more than food productions and harvest, bridging multiple benefits as described in figure 1. These may re-link people to social and urban environmental factors with little or no focus on the critical issue of daily food consumption (Mbiba, 2003, Kortright and Wakefield, 2011, Taylor and Lovell, 2012).

Within the North there are signs that this may be changing, however, with notable examples of commercial and agricultural-focused urban agriculture emerging, for instance, in Brooklyn, New York (Gotham Greens, 2014) and on Canadian Lufa

farms (Lufa, 2014). Both feature large rooftop greenhouses, promoted as urban agriculture. The Brooklyn site harvests 120 tons of leaf vegetables from a 15,000 square feet greenhouse – 20 times more than field-based Californian lettuce farming (TBI, 2014). Also in NY are two rooftop vegetable farms run by Brooklyn Grange; totalling 2.5 acres, they produce over 22,680kg of organically grown produce annually (Brooklyn Grange, 2014). In London, Growing Underground is a company that uses hydroponic and LED technology in disused tunnels to grow pesticide free, water efficient salad crops (Gotham Greens, 2014). While these may provide ‘local’ food, they are technologically advanced and run by companies on private land; in practice, addressing neither local access to food, nor livelihoods. These examples emerged recently and were not available when I began this study in 2007, further exemplifying urban agriculture as a dynamic and shifting area of study.

Another urban agriculture form that has seen a rapid increase in attention in the North, in the same period, largely encouraged by policy and funding, is the community garden or community food garden. Several authors note that it is the most common form of urban agriculture in the North and rapidly becoming a preferred method by which residents engage with urban food sustainability discourse (Kaethler, 2006, Vitiello and Nairn, 2009b, Firth et al., 2011).

Food outputs of community gardens vary enormously and are sometimes negligible (Holland, 2004, Vitiello and Nairn, 2009a), at other times, they provide considerable food security (Evers and Hodgson, 2011, Baker, 2004). Compared with the commercial systems cited above, the community food garden is a much more contingent practice. With reference to figure 1, it is straightforward to grasp the motivation of the commercial grower, who is maximising output; the motivation for the community grower, however, is more paradoxical and less well understood, as is how different factors create pathways or barriers to food production variables documented in existing research.

### **1.5 Urban agriculture example: Communal food growing**

Using community food gardens as one example of urban agriculture, this thesis examines this paradoxical growing space from the ground up, working directly with food gardeners, exploring the factors that influence their variable motivation to food production. This research therefore explores the gap between the stated intention to

grow encapsulated within the form of a community food garden and the harvest of that practice. It examines how differing factors such as spatial transformation and appropriation, creative practices and everyday performance create a dynamic influencing harvest.

I argue that urban agriculture practice in the UK is poorly understood and under-researched despite its expanding position as a cultural and social response to food issues (Guitart et al., 2012). It remains largely undocumented because we lack the breadth of examples seen in the South, leading to Iles (2005, p.83) asking in 2005, “Do we have a form of Urban Agriculture in the UK? If compared to the examples from Cuba or some African countries the answer must be no”. While this might still be the case, I have seen a focus of interest in community gardening and public food projects develop since 2007. For example: Capital Growth project in London (Capital Growth, 2011), Food4Families in Reading (RISC, 2009), Harvest Brighton and Hove Food Partnership (Brighton and Hove Food Partnership, 2013), Dott07 in Middlesbrough (Thackara, 2007), or Incredible Edible Todmorden (Incredible Edible Todmorden, 2012, Clarke, 2010).

As Milbourne (2012, p.947) qualifies, “there is little doubt that it has become much more significant in urban places during the last few years”, yet there is a dearth of “research evidence on community gardening in the UK”. Guitart et al. (2012) confirm that research is largely confined to east or west coast US cities; as of 2011, out of 89 peer review papers on community gardening, eight projects were described as UK-based with, only three dealing with food and community gardens. The UK understanding of urban agriculture, and its recent expression in community food gardens, is therefore poorly represented in international research. I have contributed to this debate by publishing several papers on aspects of urban agriculture, including participatory edible mapping (Tomkins, 2012b), community food gardens (Tomkins, 2012a), London beekeeping as urban livestock (Tomkins, 2014), historical context for urban agriculture in London (Tomkins, 2009b), and theoretical examinations of quantitative potentials within inner London (Tomkins, 2009a), as will be discussed in the literature review.

The Greater London Authority and the social enterprise Growing Communities also offer further steps in this direction. The Greater London Authority report entitled

Cultivating the Capital (GLA, 2010) looks at the potential for commercial growing, stating that “currently, fifteen per cent (24,000 hectares) of London’s land mass is farmland, yet most of this is not actively farmed” (GLA, 2010, p.13). Growing Communities is a social enterprise practice based on collectivising three market gardens and a series of patchwork smaller sites to create a virtual urban market garden (Growing Communities, 2014). Their website offers reflection on how this social enterprise model might contribute to urban agriculture.

Responses from professional design disciplines have begun to contribute conceptual design strategies, and collect some empirical data (Lim and Liu, 2010, Viljoen et al., 2005, Steel, 2008). I would argue that the value in examining nascent examples of urban agriculture in the UK stems precisely from the need to balance emerging understanding through experiential data on embodied experience against a discourse on spatial planning which tends to ignore the “obscure background of social activity” through the lived experience (Certeau, 1984, pp. xi-xii).

I aim to provide evidence of how this ‘obscure background’ drives practice and determines harvest, through participatory research in community food gardens within the boundary of social housing estates. While the case studies are of social housing, it is more precisely the space around the housing that this thesis explores. Community food gardens need to appropriate land as a prequel to practice; this is reflected in the discourse of spatial transformation that pervades the literature, remaining little acknowledged as a vital component of practice. Community food gardens provide a particularly noteworthy investigation into urban agriculture, representing an example of predicted socio-cultural inhabitation through the creation of a designed urban space (Hillier, 1988). They also combine community, landscape, and housing together with practice. Against the backdrop of spatial authority, I trace the routes travelled by residents through discourse, practice and the everyday, adding a compelling narrative of the lived experience of community food gardens, something absent in current research (Turner, 2011).

## **1.6 Making a space for food**

This thesis aims to provide a qualitative and embodied understanding of how individuals and communities create space for food, requiring access to land, social networks, and each other. I specifically seek to explore how elusive, ephemeral, and



undocumented everyday practices influence food growing. There is a need to move beyond the notion that the objective or objects of harvest alone can represent practice. I argue that we require a more sensitive, less emphatic understanding of the connectedness that practice precipitates, exploring how spatial and everyday engagements with key resources, such as landscape and construction, influence food harvests. This will facilitate a broader consideration of the factors that affect harvest, enabling a better understanding of why engagement with existing food systems, and the direct food component of urban agriculture, may also vary.

The research focuses on a particular type of space: the London housing estate. Viewed through the concept of the everyday (Certeau et al., 1998, Certeau, 1984, Highmore, 2012, Highmore, 2011, Highmore, 2006), where conflict emerges between residents appropriating space and a highly developed modernist planning discourse that assumed “communities were not so much to be ‘planned for’ as produced by physical means” of design (Ravetz, 2001, p.138). Such housing represents a decisive moment in post-war planning that elevated conceived space, *a priori* to the lived experience of space. Open space around housing was also conceived as part of the overall planned space, but also lacks identity, being neither a private space of a home nor the public space of pavement. The grounds therefore encircle and dominate estates yet do not offer a distinction in terms of form and therefore use.

Hillier (1988, p.63) argues such public housing design tends to work against the transitory, presenting a form of fixed enclosure through an insistence of “identifiable and distinct external spaces” linking predictable social use with spatial grouping and design. Lefebvre, (1991b) whose theory on spatial production is utilised in this thesis, describes this paradoxical collision of lived space and planned spaces that exhibit extreme separation yet are dynamically linked. Lefebvre comments on social housing, “‘Modern’ spatial practice might thus be defined - to take an extreme but significant case — by the daily life of a tenant in a government-subsidized high-rise housing project ... a spatial practice must have a certain cohesiveness, but this does not imply that it is coherent” (Lefebvre, 1991b, p.38).

Any intervention in such space, such as community food gardens, becomes a radical tactic, since it cuts across the very implied coherence of the “narratives of

modernity” that link physical design with expectations of social action as part of “post-war cultural hegemony” (Darling, 2007, p.3). As Hill writes, architectural discourse largely promotes the ability to “predict use ... promote models of experience that suggest a manageable and passive user, unable to transform use, space and meaning” (Hill, 2003, p.9). This research inverts this narrative by exploring the story of space through those that use it, respecting them as cultural generators of housing through daily use. I would argue that the development of post-war housing mirrors the journey of post-war industrial agriculture. The “narrative of modernity”, with increasing emphasis on industry and mechanisation, has produced a similarly abstracted and passive urban food experience. As Merrifield (2006, p.138) comments, urban space and commercial food are both part of “anonymous globalization” whereby “abstract food ... helps produce and reproduce abstract space”.

Within literature, much of the key urban agriculture or community garden research does not deal with spatial creativity as a precursor to food-growing and therefore does not interpret practice as something that produces space as well as food through the everyday. Therefore, Bethaney Turner’s assertion that we need to explore the central role that bodies play in community gardening is useful in orientating research towards the action of people, landscape and food, emphasising the role of the body in practice as part of the everyday (Turner, 2011, p. 510). John F.C. Turner also points out, we should be careful of positioning people as end consumers of food production, rather than actively involved with food and landscape production. Such production and any necessary construction does not negate the role of architecture, planner, or builder but is inclusive of all stages of building as an ongoing process – a verb rather than a noun (Turner, 1972), that recognises the professional construction process as a small part of an overall narrative of continuous spatial creation.

The following section details my previous involvement with urban agriculture prior to commencing primary research where I developed a sensitivity to the idea of continuous spatial creation together with congruent methodological approaches.

## 1.7 Research evolution: scoping to primary

My primary research emerges from two years of scoping work from 2007-2009, preceded by a 2005 Masters thesis that explored urban agriculture as a retrofit in a London test site (Tomkins, 2006, Tomkins, 2009a). I did not conceive this period as scoping at the time, assuming that one or more of the projects would resolve themselves as principle research. During this scoping period, I was involved in three projects that informed my decision to research community gardens on social housing estates. These projects were, firstly, a temporary food garden on the roof of a multi-storey car park; secondly the documentation of street growing in east London, thirdly volunteer work on Food4Families, a community food project for Reading International Solidarity Centre, UK. These experiences inspired the theoretical position of the research – that space is a co-produced plurality rather than a dualistic composite of background buildings and foreground inhabitants. This also applies to myself as researcher where I would need to reflect and position on my own role within research.

The first of these involved quantitatively mapping a 25 hectare site in central Croydon<sup>3</sup> as a theoretical study of urban agriculture to record potential space for growing. As already noted, examples of urban agriculture in the UK were not as prevalent during this early part of the 21st century as they have now become. What emerged from this research through mutual discussion with the urban design department of Croydon Council, was a project entitled “Garden in the Sky” (croydonecoexpo, 2008).

The project involved the creation of a temporary (18 - 27th October 2008) food garden on the roof of a multi-storey car park in the Surrey Street, Croydon, backed by £4,000 of funding (figure 2). In figure 2 the garden is circled in red. The aim of the Garden in the Sky was to test physical transformation of space as well as a social interaction via responses from local residents. While I had kept records regarding my involvement in the garden project, I had not captured accurately the process of negotiation between landowners and the council that had led to the creation of the garden as a transformative act. I had mistaken the final spatial object (the garden and

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<sup>3</sup> This site was conceived as a walkable district into which urban agriculture could be retro fitted.

event) as the subject of the research alone, failing to see that the recursive and reflective discussions that happened between researcher and institution as equally, if not essentially, the research subject itself (Reason and Bradbury, 2001).



**Figure 2: Surrey Street Croydon showing the Garden in the Sky circled in red, 2010.**

Image: Courtesy Croydon Council

As a reaction to this I also conceived of and developed the concept of an “edible map” of the 25 hectare site representing a graphic depiction of potential urban agriculture in Surrey Street (see appendix 7.3). The important decision here was to take the initial quantitative data I had collected and overlay it with ‘stories’ where I began to imagine the everyday life of urban agriculture within this area of Croydon. However, despite the developed nature of the edible map as a document, it still remained a theoretical examination, lacking direct community involvement and therefore participation<sup>4</sup>.

Once I had realised the importance of participatory research methods in tracing the multiple influences on spatial transformation, I decided to move away from quantitative research methods. This decision was confirmed by the literature where urban agriculture fieldwork in Southern Countries stressed the need for “recognition

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<sup>4</sup> This was to remain the case with the edible map until September 2010 when I accepted a residency at space studio and developed a second edible map of Hackney TOMKINS, M. 2011. *You are Hungry: an Edible Map of Central Hackney*. London: SPACE Gallery, SPACE STUDIO. 2010. *PERMACULTURES #07: Mikey Tomkins Edible Map* [Online]. London: Space Studio. Available: <http://www.spacestudios.org.uk/whats-on/permacultures/permacultures-07-mikey-tomkins-edible-map> [Accessed November 2011]. This was developed further with the help of the Royal Geographical Society as part of Discovering Britain series of walks RGS. 2012. *Discovering Britain: The stories of Britain's Landscapes Discovered through Walks* [Online]. Royal Geographical Society. Available: <http://www.discoveringbritain.org/walks/region/greater-london/london-hackney.html> 1 may 2012]. During this period I undertook 32 walks with 150 local residents and walkers using the edible map, recording interviews and producing a digital version of the map to encapsulate walkers' reflections of the edible walk.

of context-specificity and distinct standpoints” of those that garden rather than seeing space as an empty vessel (Hovorka, 2001, p.7).

During this time I pursued another project that involved documenting interstitial self-grown food practices that existed in small often forgotten public spaces in and around my home in Tower Hamlets, and Hackney, east London. Gardened mostly by Bengali women, exclusively for food production, who constructed material spaces in order to grow food using found materials or recycling everyday objects (figure 3).



**Figure 3: Food gardening in public place, Pedley Street, Tower Hamlets, E2 2007**

Due to language and gender barriers, I was unable to approach Bengali women gardeners to talk about their experiences<sup>5</sup>. I spent two years documenting the well-developed micro-food gardens. What seemed evident was that this practice would not feed the cultivators, not in the (urban) agricultural sense of the word, yet could not be dismissed as a type of ornamental gardening. What differentiated these from a private backyard or allotment was the need to repurpose disused spaces that are scattered about the otherwise prescribed and planned urban built environment; it was a transformative practice that utilised food gardening towards ends other than daily feeding. Despite or maybe because of the language barrier, it brought to the fore the need to engage directly with a community of gardeners and their practice.

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<sup>5</sup> I worked for several months with the local Bengali women’s outreach officer for the Tower Hamlets area (Sabeha Miah), based at St Hilda’s Community Centre, Club Row, and despite several attempts at interviews none of the women gardeners turned up. However, the outreach officer (herself Bengali) did provide lengthy explanations of why the women gardened. She stated that this was mainly related to the nature of gender divisions in Bangladesh, where gardening was seen as women’s work and gardening was one of the few ways these women were allowed to be in public. The gardens themselves were not vandalised, despite being in an exposed public space because the close family and community ties of the Bengali community in Tower Hamlets meant local Bengali children respected the garden spaces.

A clearer understanding was emerging of the asymmetry between the intention of institutional planning (to provide public spaces), and the subsequent intervention by residents (as practice of their everyday life), where food growing required a person to occupy and transform space. This interest in space led to an interest in Lefebvre, which extended the initial duality of planned space and material space to include that of the lived experience (Lefebvre, 2004, Lefebvre, 1991a, Lefebvre, 1991b). In the search for examples of practice and community, from October 2009 – March 2010, I became a volunteer at Reading International Solidarity Centre in order to research the above-mentioned growing project Food4Families (RISC, 2009). Food4Families aimed to get people growing by setting up five food-growing projects in schools, community centres and allotments around Reading, Berkshire. However, the Food4Families projects were either slow to start, or stalled due to lack of take up despite the almost evangelical recruiting attempts by staff. I was also held back from researching this fully because of the two-hour journey to Reading from my home in London, which distanced me from the research and cast me as an outsider, reinforced by my position within Reading International Solidarity Centre.

These scoping stages confirmed the idea that food-growing was a situated practice, in which the relationship to the built environment and residents needed to be investigated. The work of Lefebvre and the production of space (Lefebvre, 1991b), provided a conceptual framework, as did the work of de Certeau (Certeau, 1984), Highmore (Highmore, 2011), and Ingold (Ingold, 2000) with regard to the everyday. As will be discussed in the literature review, after 2010, urban agriculture and community garden literature began to embrace such theory, notably Turner (2011), Milbourne (2010), Shillington (2013), Premat (2012), and Eizenberg (2013).

A clear methodology emerged from this experience (consolidated through training courses at the University of Brighton) based on participant observation. Therefore the various aspects of the journey taken through these scoping stages had enriched the PhD experience, as well as personal, creative, and practical aspects of research such as needing to research close to home in order to increase participation. I identified community gardens as a current form of urban agriculture that responds to various outcomes of the scoping period. Within the broader debate, community growing signposts research towards food sustainability as a collective problem; everyone needs to eat daily, and production itself requires collective access to

environmental resources (atmosphere, water, land for example) locally, nationally, and globally. They utilise shared or borrowed land adjacent to gardeners' homes, and they do not consider other sites outside of these estate spaces for reasons set out in the following chapters. Using participant observation, I aimed to understand community food gardening from the viewpoint of the gardener, examining factors that influence food-growing as an everyday practice. In chapter three (3.1.6) I present a detailed description of the primary case studies, which I identify here as De Beauvoir estate, St John's estate, and Haberdasher estate, all in the borough of Hackney. Brownfield estate, and Lansbury estate are in Tower Hamlets, and Brooks Estate is in Newham.

While drawing a distinction between the general term communal garden and the community 'food' garden, I often use community garden when referring to the case studies. However, it should be noted that food is always implicit. Where appropriate I use the phrase community food gardening in full. Residents themselves are referred to as gardeners, sometimes as growers, and overall I have used the phrase 'food gardening', or simply 'gardening', rather than urban agriculture. As far as harvests are concerned, I am mainly referring to vegetables such as tomatoes, salads, beetroots, beans, potatoes, or cucumbers. This is not an exhaustive list; for example some Bengali gardeners grew 'dodi', a type of squash with edible leaves. The word harvest therefore refers to the produce of the garden, its exemplar vegetables and fruits, whereas I also use the word yield in a more specific sense as in agricultural yields for example.

## **1.8 Thesis overview**

This opening chapter has discussed the deep concern regarding food supplies and rapidly expanding cities where urban agriculture forms part of a response to this concern by arguing urban dwellers can turn to primary food production, either subsistence or commercial. Current urban agriculture research largely emanates from the Global South, stressing the direct benefit from self-grown food to venerable households. In this chapter, I draw out distinctions that research in the Global North needs to address, presenting the justification for research, its context, evolution, and primary research case studies.

Chapter two provides a literature review that provides more detailed justification for the research along with aims and questions of research. This discussion of literature presents the main academic argument regarding the areas research needs to respond to. These are, the interrelationship between urban agriculture and community food gardens, a need to drawing out the spatial aspect of discourse and practice, the need for participatory research, which is approached through, and the everyday and dwelling.

The thesis pursues three main aims in response to the above literature. These are firstly, to gain an understanding of the everyday of communal growing, examining the variable role food production plays within the garden. Secondly, to better understanding of how community food gardens relate to urban agriculture with regard to the broader narrative of food supply systems. Thirdly, to better understand the transformative narrative of community food garden and the recursive relationship of everyday practice to the built environment. These aims run through the thesis exploring food growing situated with the boundary of the garden, the creative actions of residents, and its external relationships.

Chapter three presents the methodology approach using participant observation, alongside sensitivity to hermeneutic phenomenology and constructivist grounded theory. I stress the need to approach research ‘agnostically’ and not impose knowledge too early within participation in order to effect a transition from academic to gardener. This chapter also provides a timeline for the primary research and gives details on the methods of engagement, data collection, analysis, and reflexivity.

Chapters four, five, and six are the main empirical chapters of the thesis. They are organised as a narrative from the contesting of space (four), to the material space of gardens (five), to an exploration on the everyday ephemeral and sensory features of food growing (six). In this sense they all deal with differing aspects of space beyond the material showing the role social relation plays in constructing a new embodied space of community. The narrative of these three chapters mirrors the journey I took during research beginning with the debates and aspirations to create a garden (chapter four), to those that were beginning to physically make spaces (chapter five) and further into the everyday of practice (chapter six). Splitting the chapters in this



way brings a focus on the importance of the formation and creational stages of space emphasising the temporal aspect of gardening rather than the garden as a spatial object.

Chapter four explores the back story of garden formation accounting for the interrelationships within existing material space, the influence of those who conceive of a planned and (pre)designed space, and residents who use their imaginations to narrate their own spatial desires. For example, it considers how the conceived space of the estate dominates the potential emergence of gardens yet also provides transformative moments and engagements, showing that space is not fixed but mutable. Such transitional discourse grounds the residents' desire to grow food often inspired by existing food growing projects in the neighbourhood and their own imaginations. This chapter reveals the spatial crisis in cities, and particularly housing estates where the vital resource of available land becomes invisible.

Chapter five examines the creation of material garden spaces, how it can only emerge once the community has formed and how its main focus become spatial change due to it being spatial entrapped within the estate. Here residents go head to head with existing space, producing through construction and cultivation, a new space of everyday use and community. A discussion on food growing and harvest begins to surface here, showing that the formation of community and its concomitant gardens space is asymmetrical to harvest; producing food takes months while construction and camaraderie are more instance and tangible.

Chapter six looks at the everyday interaction of residents, how community, performance, and spatial interaction influence food harvest. It explores the sensory and ephemeral interactions of gardeners emphasising that food-gardening is an embodied practice. Bodily engagements with space, food, and others rarely leave traces yet, and have been little researched. As the results show, these factors exert a primary effect on the reason why gardeners vary their attention on food production, producing a harvest relative to everyday social and cultural engagements.

Finally, chapter seven presents the main conclusions of the thesis with regard to the influence of discourse and practice on food harvests.

## **Chapter two**

### **Literature review and conceptual approach**

#### **2.1 Section one: Definitions and literature.**

##### **2.1.1 Introduction**

As discussed in chapter one, feeding cities is rapidly emerging as a concern within global, (Smit et al., 1996) national, (Wrigley et al., 2004) and local debates (Holland, 2004). Chapter one explored the unevenness within our understanding of urban agriculture between the Global North and South, which will be further discussed here in the key issues (2.1.6). Chapter one established that urban agriculture practices within the North are under-developed, with an over-emphasis on promoting communal growing unmatched by academic investigation. This means there is a lack of analytical insight into why some urban agriculture systems like community food gardens have an inconstant response to food production in terms of harvest. Understanding variability will contribute directly to urban agriculture knowledge, enabling a better positioning of community food gardens as a component of urban agriculture in the UK context. In furthering this discussion, this chapter will explore urban agriculture literature and definitions, and their spatial, historical and methodological implication.

##### **2.1.2 Definitions**

Urban agriculture has emerged as a practice that directly engages food concerns; either daily food requirements or, more long-term, environmental and economic urban resilience by growing food close to residents (Redwood, 2009). The urban food question is relevant globally because cities, especially in the 21st century, concentrate food (and other) supply demands, becoming centres of powerful consumption. In 2000, Mougeot gave us the classic definition of urban agriculture:

“An industry located within (intra-urban) or on the fringe (peri-urban) of a town, a city or a metropolis, which grows and raises, processes and distributes a diversity of food and non-food products, (re-) using largely human and material resources, products and services found in and around that urban area, and in

turn supplying human and material resources, products and services largely to that urban area” (Mougeot 2000, p.10).

While this thesis acknowledges this broad definition, in research I explore the specifics of growing vegetables and fruit for non-commercial use only.

Definitions of urban agriculture emerged as early as 1957, when Thompson (1957, p.224) wrote of the expansion of Japanese cities causing the “development of a distinctive type of extremely intensive agriculture ... because of its close economic and geographic tie with cities ... as urban agriculture”, yet the term urban agriculture was used minimally prior to the 1980s (Niñez, 1985, Ruthenberg, 1976). The founding in 1992 of the Urban Agriculture Network (TUAN) focused attention on agriculture “economic development and environmental enhancement in towns, cities and urban regions, areas previously neglected by both the urban and agricultural development agencies” (City Farmer, 2009).

In 1996, the UNDP formally adopted the term, publishing “Urban Agriculture: Food Jobs and Sustainable Cities” (Smit et al., 1996, Charles, 2009). This publication concentrated on Africa, Asia and Latin America, reporting on practice via a consensus of literature as part of a survival strategy, or crisis response, to rapid urban growth and rural displacement. The issues and concepts have recently passed over into countries in the Global North as Canada, North America (Levenston, Kaufman, 2000, Toulan, 2005, Kaethler, 2006, McClintock, 2008) and the UK (Garnett, 1999, Howe and Wheeler, 1999, Petts, 2001, Viljoen et al., 2005, Cullen, 2008, GLA, 2010).

Within the context of the North and as a counterpoint to Mougeot’s definition above, urban agriculture also takes on divergent and more nuanced definitions. For example, Perez-Vazquez notes urban agriculture should include not just material benefits but take account of health, recreation, and relaxation (Perez-Vazquez, 2002), emphasising the non-productive aspects of urban horticulture outside of commerce. Lovell (Lovell, 2010 pp.2500) breaks urban agriculture into differing but interconnected functions of which the (commercial) ‘production functions’ is just one. She writes that: “ecological functions (e.g. biodiversity, nutrient cycling, and micro-climate control) and cultural functions (e.g. recreation, cultural heritage, and visual quality) need to be taken into account”. This echoes Viljoen and Bohn, who

propose a urban agriculture concept termed the Continuous Productive Urban Landscapes, “productive in economical *and* sociological *and* environmental terms” (Viljoen et al., 2005 pp.11 original emphasis). Mbiba (2003, p.20) extends this further, writing that urban agriculture in the context of the Global North expands beyond “mere concerns for food production and livestock rearing to any use of urban space” that has, social, environmental, or cultural benefits. These discussions tie in with figure 1 used in chapter one which outlines the multifunction of urban agriculture outside the strictures of commerce.

Within this thesis, I accept the various definitions of urban agriculture above without recourse to reconciling the potential contradiction between examples of practices where harvest is consistent and those that are negligible, between earnest labour and leisure. This means exploring the process of food and cities, rather than the static disembodied objects of a landscape absent of people. This was discussed previously in chapter one (figure 1) as examining the social purpose and multifunctionality of urban agriculture. Any critique of urban agriculture within this thesis arises, not from a need to devalue urban agriculture as a concept, but from a need to look at what escapes our understanding if we assume urban agriculture exists purely as a food solution – viewing urban agriculture as a subset industrial agriculture, rather than an emotional or social response of people within a spatial context that connects across other spaces, needs, and situations.

### 2.1.3 Urban agriculture, community gardens, and community food gardens

As stated in chapter one, I have led this thesis as an investigation of community food gardens through urban agriculture because residents are emphatic that food-growing is intrinsic to practice. In this section I want to explore the crossover between urban agriculture and community garden literature with regard to food harvest, and examine in more detail the specific discourse of community food gardens. In discussing the interactions between urban agriculture, community garden (and by extension the community food garden), I want to share understanding and create overlap, rather than draw hard lines between areas, accepting that there is an energetic and necessary flow between them. I would argue that community garden literature lacks a consistent conceptual framework due to the diffused nature of its engagement, in comparison to urban agriculture which can accept contradiction and

variation yet largely strives to understand consistent modes of engagement, particularly food, economies, and poverty.

While there are clearly overlaps, a distinction can be drawn because urban agriculture practices (of which the community food garden is an example) seek to conclude with some account on the relevance of food, while community garden practice retains a “definitional fuzziness” (Firth et al., 2011, p.556). This flexibility has led to community gardens being researched towards multiple ends, such as social capital (Alaimo et al., 2010, Glover, 2004, Kingsley and Townsend, 2006), health (Turner et al., 2011, Wakefield et al., 2007), sustainability (Beilin and Hunter, 2011, Seana Irvine, 1999, Holland, 2004), or places of creativity (Crouch, 2010, Edensor et al., 2010, Warner and Durlach, 1987).

Firth et al. (2011, p.555) write, the community garden as a form of urban agriculture has seen resurgence “in popularity in many developed market economies in recent years [2011], including in the UK, the USA and Australia”. This is echoed by Vitiello and Nairn (2009b, p.np) who state, “the reality is that most urban agriculture in the United States, Canada, and Europe takes the form of community gardening”. Urban agriculture and community garden literature sometimes diverge, but other times converge, with regard to the central issue of food. For example, Firth et al. write of convergence and the central importance of food-growing where “food, in particular, has a unifying role in these community contexts” (Firth et al., 2011, p.565).

Yet the unifying role that food enables brings incongruity between intent to grow and outcomes, exemplified by Holland, who writes urban agriculture “can be defined in the context of the community garden [as not] exclusively concerned, nor indeed be concerned at all, with growing food or animal husbandry” (Holland, 2004, p.290). Vitiello and Nairn’s report on community gardening in Philadelphia explores this contradictory space, writing that urban agriculture “in Philadelphia and most other US cities today constitutes a diverse set of activities that often blend together” (Vitiello and Nairn, 2009a, p.47). They write that gardens simultaneously distribute “food more directly to hungry people – than any other form of urban agriculture in the United States today”, yet also recognise that “not all community

gardeners ... grow food, and food is not the main reason many people garden”(Vitiello and Nairn, 2009a, pp.7-49).

The ability to easily and consistently tie urban agriculture and community gardens together is further complicated where community gardens becomes an elusive term, being dependent on definitions of community and what constitutes a garden. For example, Baker (2004) is emphatic that they contribute to food security, while Pudup (2008) ties practice to that of neoliberalism. Pudup makes clear connections between the emergence of community gardens, and the ‘emergency’ food industry, with its food banks and church basement food pantries. McClintock (2013) offers caution and a way forward, writing that urban agriculture practices generally are inherently contradictory, reflecting earlier writing by Page (2002) and DeLind (2006).

Firth et al. (2011, p.556) comment on the lack of clarity, writing that community gardens have developed historically without clear definitions where “multiple meanings are often ascribed to them by organisers and participants ... denoting everything from individual plot cultivation to collective gardening in public spaces, schools and prisons”. Ferris et al. state that there may be an advantage in ambiguity – “It is not very useful to offer a precise definition of community gardens as this would impose arbitrary limits on creative communal responses to local need” (Ferris et al., 2001, p560).

I would argue that a simple duality or congruence between urban agriculture or community food gardens is not needed and not being aimed for by this research because of the inherent diversity within practice. My approach through participant observation is to allow the voices of residents to define practice (which I assume to be multiple and inconsistent). Top-down urban agriculture is largely approached as a planning and policy initiative, with little currency in communities, who prefer much more prosaic terms. This is not to say that the prosaic and planned do not overlap – they clearly do – but that there is a tension in literature and practice between how these discourses interact and how the expectations of each approach influences food-growing and yields. As Premat (2005) states, there is a perspectival gap between the plan and the ground. This attention to local story is reflected in ethnographic literature where instances of food-growing have been called dooryard

gardening, (Wilhelm, 1975), home vegetable, kitchen, or food gardens (Niñez, 1984), mini-agriculture (Teuteberg, 1975), or simply food gardening (Vasey, 1982).

We should therefore view community gardens as sites in which people create multiple and ongoing narratives that are “ever-changing, non-rigid and user-led ... to be multifunctional” (Clavin, 2011, pp.956-957). While I argue the need to explore community food gardens as part of urban agriculture, I do so with sensitivity and flexibility rather than with a need to achieve a fixed association between them. As Beilin and Hunter (2011, p.525) note, the ability to see community gardens as having individual stories “reaffirms the possibility of qualitative research, utilising a participatory approach ... can contribute to defining, understanding, and informing ‘meaning’”.

Local food discourse promises much in the way of expected contribution of practice to consumption, with a recent report commenting that “there is now a growing awareness of the benefits of local food and increasing demand for it amongst Londoners” (GLA, 2010, p.13). Yet, as discussed, literature also tells us that harvests from community gardens vary dramatically from relatively high to negligible. The tectonics of this imbrication means understanding how and why gardens materialise from within the discourse of others, and how subsequent counter-discourse and practice conflicts or endorses these aims. In literature therefore, while I wish to define these as examples of urban agriculture, I shall weave in and out between urban agriculture literature and that of the community (food) garden. Ultimately, while I seek to contribute to urban agriculture concepts, there will inevitably be a *de facto* contribution to community garden literature. This means also accepting that the urban agriculture literature may refer to community gardens, and that community garden literature sometimes explores food, but that these two are not in fact identical.

In the UK Capital, London Capital Growth<sup>6</sup> is one example where an organisation aims to support specifically Capital Growth and four of the gardens researched in this thesis are funded by this charity. Run by Sustain, Capital Growth will only support community food gardening and had a target of 2012 food gardens by 2012

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<sup>6</sup> Capital Growth is a London based project, launched in 2008, as a partnership project between London Food Link<sup>6</sup>, the Mayor of London (Boris Johnson), and the Big Lottery’s Local Food Fund. I worked for Capital Growth from March 2011-December 2012.

(which it exceeded) contributing arguably, the largest visual change in UK cities with regard to community food gardening (Capital Growth, 2011). Capital Growth is circuitously promoted as a urban agriculture initiative, having taken inspiration from a 2010 Canadian urban agriculture initiative in the city of Vancouver<sup>7</sup>. In 2006, the city set out a motion to create 2010 garden plots stating that:

“Community gardens and other forms of urban agriculture are recognized as important neighborhood gathering places that promote sustainability, neighborhood livability, urban greening, community building, inter-generational activity, social interaction, crime reduction, and exercise and food production. The 2010 initiative will allow Vancouver to use urban agriculture as a powerful tool to achieve multiple social, environmental and economic benefits” (Kaethler, 2006, p.89).

Furthermore, Capital Growth is an initiative of London Food link, which organised a symposium in London, in June 2008, entitled Growing Food for London, which brought together “international experts on urban agriculture [to] discuss their work” (London Food Link, 2008). Yet Capital Growth as a continuing food-growing project focuses little on urban agriculture discourse other than a brief mention in a joint publication with City and Guilds, grouping together “Community food-growing projects ... city farms and other urban agriculture initiatives in London” (Varley-Winter, 2011, p.6). Despite the success of the Capital Growth project in supporting over 2012 gardens over a five-year period, academic research on the project has not surfaced. Well-respected literature such as the International Journal of Agricultural Sustainability from 2010 ignores Capital Growth, writing that “there are 77 community gardens in London which are located on housing estates” using data from 1999 (van Leeuwen et al., 2010, p.22).

#### 2.1.4 Spatial and temporal aspects of urban agriculture and communal growing

In discussing the spatial aspect of community food gardens, I seek to draw attention to the basic requirement of access to land and transform urban space, often against prescribed planning. As Redwood comments, urban agriculture:

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<sup>7</sup> [http://vancouver.ca/files/cov/Great-beginnings-OSSFfinal\\_Report.pdf](http://vancouver.ca/files/cov/Great-beginnings-OSSFfinal_Report.pdf)



“is found in every city, where it is sometimes hidden, sometimes obvious. If one looks carefully, few spaces in a major city are unused. Valuable vacant land rarely sits idle and is often taken over – either formally, or informally – and made productive. Urban agriculture is a long-established livelihood activity that occurs at all scales” (Redwood, 2009, p.1).

Redwood’s description adds necessary spatial detail to this research, echoed by Shillington (2013, p.103), who writes of the urban poor in Managua (Nicaragua), where growers “simultaneously challenge their exclusion from urban spatial practices and address the increasing insecurity of access to food”. The question for this research is the nature of this interaction as a detour within everyday practice between challenging urban spatial practices and accessing food. The desire to create a space of food production therefore might compete directly “with the aspirations of urban planners, international development organisations and governments” (Shillington, 2013, p.103). Domene and Saurí write that informal growing challenges existing space, exploring “vegetable gardening as a subculture or an unpleasant secondary activity unfit to the logic of capitalist urban development”, (Domene and Saurí, 2007, p.289). They bring together the essential aspects of research, namely that the logic and history of urban development which demands consumption, both of material space and the space of food. This is analogous to the scoping work discussed in chapter one, where a multi-storey car park was transformed into a temporary food garden (figure 2), or how street gardens are transforming disused flowerbeds (figure 3).

Urban agriculture practices therefore, explored as community food gardens within the context of this research, need to be challenge and transforming space, creating countercultural spaces identified as demonstrating the “unsystematic and pluralistic qualities of culture” that de Certeau explores within the everyday (Certeau, 1984, p.165). As Mougeot writes, there is a contrary spatial process emerging central to food-growing where urban agriculture is

“stalling, if not erasing, the compartmentalization of spaces and times that a Western generation has come to know. These developments are transforming the way in which our cities are laid

out and, more immediately, the way in which they work”  
(Mougeot, 2005, p.25).

This quote brings to the discussion both a spatial issue with urban agriculture as well as the temporal and historical within Northern countries. While urban agriculture concepts stress the spatial re-contextualising of industrial agriculture, it also presents a challenge to the historical process of concomitant abstraction of spatial design and food commercialisation. Therefore, in considering ‘making space for food’, I draw on the literature on spatial creativities, that while it does not reference food-growing directly, is useful in order to discuss the actions of people in space (Boudon and Onn, 1972, Ingold, 2000, Hallam and Ingold, 2007, Amin, 2002, Lefebvre, 1991b, McCann, 1999). I draw attention to this because there is a persistent yet little explored discourse on spatial change within organisations that promote community food growing.

For instance, the London based Capital Growth project, run by Sustain, states growers will “improve the local area”, address “the need for a secure and trusted food supply in an urban area”, seeking to make land available to “increase people’s desire to grow food”, where a common goal of growing food also requires communities to improve their local environments (Sustain, 2013b, p.5). Well London is another organisation that promotes community food gardening aiming “to help the community to create sustainable green spaces for gardening, food production ... as part of their daily lives” (Well London, 2013b). Similarly, Food4Families is a food-growing project and town meal event project based in Reading that:

“Aims to enable residents to manage land in their own neighbourhoods for the sustainable growing of food for their own consumption, encourage healthier eating and lifestyle habits and develop understanding of the broader environmental, cultural and economic aspects of sustainable food production” (RISC, 2009).

I had direct experience of both these projects through volunteering as part of scoping work, discussed above in research evolution (1.6). These differing approaches to food growing aim to segue between daily food requirements and food provisioning. However, the multiple social security systems discussed in chapter one (1.3) above

sit silently within this space, safeguarding direct access to food through integration within, and dependence on, current commercial food supply systems at the point of consumption. Social security systems normalise our relationship with commercial food provision; community food gardens, therefore, are transformative at a social, cultural and spatial level.

Further to this, community garden literature generally tends to omit food discussion in a way that connects easily with urban agriculture concepts, and fails to explore the production of everyday landscapes. Recent examples of food-related community garden literature from the USA (Carrie Draper and Freedman, 2010, Pudup, 2008) and Canada (Glover, 2004) have not connected directly with urban agriculture discourse or concepts such as the everyday, meaning there is a lack of coherent literature about community food gardens and urban agriculture for the thesis to draw on. This is further exacerbated by an acknowledgement that urban agriculture practices as a whole in the UK remain negligible compared to examples from Cuba or African countries (Iles, 2005). Community gardens therefore offer a reasonably consistent discourse in research on social capital, health, injustice but a paradoxical discourse on food productivity. They offer a coherent discourse on the variables of community, but not around why gardens vary their engagement with food.

Below I discuss further the historical process, showing that cities and food production have an intimate relationship, producing complementary abstract spaces. However, rather than urban agriculture being the interloper into the modern (abstract) space of the city, the reverse is the case; the removal of food production from cities was part of a decisive modern spatial shift. Unpacking this means emphasising the close relationship between modern food systems and modern urban forms.

#### 2.1.5 Historical aspect of spatial tension

Historically, there is a tension between local food production and the gradual development of the built space of the modern city. I would begin this discussion on the 18th September 1606, when the City of London issued a royal charter for the formation of The Worshipful Company of Gardeners, dedicated to a spade-based urban food-growing practice, distinct from plough-based rural agriculture (Marsh, 2006). It defines its latter day urban agriculture as ‘food gardening’ – a practice

defined through various techniques such as “planting, grafting, setting, sowing, cutting and ‘arborizing’” (Welch, 1900, p.28). I have used the term food gardening in the title of this thesis and throughout as I argue it more closely addresses the lived experience of practice rather than pretensions to agriculture. Welch describes the food gardening practice as a peopled landscape, that ““take awaie the dunge and nysomnes of the cittie’” (reusing city waste), and creating much needed employment (Welch, 1900, p.28). As Moskowitz (2008) describes it, the division between farming and gardening up to the 19<sup>th</sup> century were not drawn as a division between economics and leisure, or production and ornamentation but a distinction of growing types where farmers would grow grain, while gardeners grew vegetables and fruit at a regional scale on small plots.

The historical relationship between the city and productive landscapes is largely unexplored, with French (2000, p.171) commenting that in the context of the UK, most historians have ignored urban agricultural economies that “stretches back centuries”, concluding that 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century “urban agriculture and agrarian resources has been under-estimated, as has their survival and significance into the ‘modern’ period”. Hyams (1970, p.1) reiterates this point noting that before perhaps the 18<sup>th</sup> century, small scale food gardens were ignored and “it rarely occurred to garden writers, diarists or economists to notice the poor man’s garden”. The modern period for Thick begins with the eradication of the last market garden from London in 1825. These gardens once covered one-fifth of London, yet are forgotten as the “ugly sister” of gardening Thick states (Thick, 1998, p11).

For Thick, this ugly sister became the antithesis of new urban development during the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, providing no “careful designs to delight the eye, only an ever-present whiff of manure” (Thick, 1998, p.11). Termed “nonhistory” by de Certeau (1998, p.3), the everyday life of these ubiquitous spaces is almost impossible to piece together and the historical and potential contemporary silence of these gardens justifying the current participatory approach within this thesis for examining the emerging communal food gardens in more detail.

The UK population was largely urbanised by the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, when ideas of landscape design and architecture converged, both being practices that involved the imitative conceiving of space; a “world of abstraction, what’s in the head rather than

in the body”, a space where “ideology, power, and knowledge lurk”(Merrifield, 2006, p.109). Dickens, in his 1848 novel *Dombey and Son*, describes such a space of ideology, power, and knowledge with the arrival of steam railways and their architecture, impacting on the everyday “chaos” in Staggs's Gardens, Camden, North London where, “... little squalid patches of ground ... fenced off with old doors, barrel staves, scraps of tarpaulin ... Here, the Staggs's Gardeners trained scarlet beans, kept fowls and rabbits, erected rotten summer-houses (one was an old boat)” (Dickens, 1970, [1848], p.47). Against this food gardening landscape, Dickens describes the construction and imminent arrival of the 1838 London & Birmingham Railway, “...upon its mighty course of civilisation and improvement” cutting a deep wound through the “...frowzy fields, and cow-houses, and dunghills ... Little tumuli of oyster shells in the oyster season, and of lobster shells in the lobster season” together with “faded cabbage leaves in all seasons stared it out of countenance” (Dickens, 1970, [1848], p.47).

The stark contrast between the daily bricolage of food-gardens and the arrival of the world's first intercity railway, bringing with it new food imports, illustrates that threshold where the ephemeral, commonplace and everyday landscape collides with the new language of transport, architecture and planning. Perhaps the greatest example of the achievement of food distribution during this era was the arrival in the UK of the SS *Dunedin* from New Zealand in 1882, laden with the first shipment of frozen lamb from New Zealand, demonstrating it was commercially viable to move meat across the globe and still sell cheaper than national sources. Food frozen in time, so that its spatial situation could be controlled. Oddy sees the move to an all-encompassing capitalist food system as a decisive shift that happened in 1918 with rationing of food due to World War I, writing that “the principle of tying consumers to retailers formalized the concept that urban consumers were completely dependent upon urban supplies. Food came from shops” (Oddy, 2003, p.101).

It is not just the space of food that changes around this time but, as Harvey discusses, the ushering in of the modern era from around 1910-14: mechanisation, global transmissions, where “time was becoming ever more homogeneous and universal across space” (Harvey, 1989, p.266-267). As Lefebvre comments, “around 1910 a certain space was shattered. It was the space of common sense, of knowledge (savoir), of social practice, of political power, a space thitherto enshrined in

everyday discourse” (Lefebvre, 1991b, p.25). Another such instance, relevant to the discussion on planned housing, is the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act which brought all building under government control, effectively nationalising planning (Darling, 2007). Hardy and Ward, document an example of the pre-1947 period where a marginal practice of self-building existed called plotlands (Hardy and Ward, 1984, Walker, 2010). Scattering themselves across the landscape, using recycled materials and found objects such as railway carriages, they might be thought of as a “cultural generator of housing” in the words of Szczelkun (1993, p.5) creating an amateur, unique “brand of architecture” (Hardy and Ward, 1984, p.2), in part establishing towns such as Peacehaven, on the south coast.

These earlier, yet little discussed, examples of spatial plurality and incremental cultural practices form a link to the Bengali growers of Tower Hamlets, discussed in chapter one. I argue that community food gardens are more than a folkloric landscape; they are vital to our understanding of urban agriculture in the UK context, because they examine how space, as both a living space and a space to cultivate is culturally transformed from the ground up, which I link to the concept of dwelling (Ingold, 2000). The issue therefore in discussing food is not to separate it out as a product distinct from other products or spaces, but one that has become increasingly interwoven with “technological innovation ... capitalist dynamics across space ... of cultural production” (Harvey, 1989, p.266). Therefore, in discussing the potential for urban agriculture to arise in the UK I have tried to give an account of the situation in which it arises; namely the city as a space in which design is controlled through professional organisations, similarly echoed by an all-encompassing industrial agriculture directed through commercial food systems, both highly technological.

Despite the immense impact of transport, and supermarkets, remnants of Dickens ‘squalid landscape’ persists and are re-emerging well into the 21st century. For example, Domene and Saurí (2007, p.296) state that “users of vegetable gardens [Barcelona] create their own landscape in the search for ... individuality, creativity ... social identity”. It is also widely accepted that community food gardens are transformative agents, creating moments of spatial change and imaginings (Eizenberg, 2013, Schmelzkopf, 1995, Shillington, 2013). This is evident in UK cities where self-grown food is subtly creating a new space of food for cities (Milbourne, 2010). What I have begun to outline here is the way the current practice

of community food-growing should not be seen as an ahistorical practice that simply happens in a preconceived and therefore incontestable spatial context. Practice reacts to space but also produces space as a process that means dealing with history (Lefebvre, 1991b).

#### 2.1.6 Key issues: embodiment, spatial creation, and food harvests

In this section I want to examine the literature further drawing out key issues such as embodiment and the everyday, spatial production, and the food narrative and further examining some of the approaches to inconsistent social narratives. In doing so, I wish to emphasise that urban agriculture, as it develops in the North has much to learn from the South and in discussing this I am addressing what Robinson calls “developmentalism”, where “studies of third world cities seemed to occupy a distinctive and separate sphere of intellectual enquiry from studies of cities elsewhere ... it had kept scholars from sharing their understanding of cities, from learning from each other” (Robinson, 2006, p.xi). I argue that part of the contribution of this research is in offering a clear theoretical application of research across geographical areas thus supporting a more robust international understanding of urban agriculture.

Turner (2011) and DeLind (2006) present research closest to the aims of this thesis by exploring community food gardens contextualised as an embodied practice and process rather than focusing on outcomes. DeLind writes that quantitative or economic focused research can “overlook (or marginalize) the role of the sensual, the emotional, the expressive for maintaining layered sets of embodied relationships to food and to place” (DeLind, 2006, p.121). In other words there can be too much emphasis on disembodied outcomes rather than lived and often contradictory process. Turner (2011, p.510) also provides a spatial and embodied linking the everyday and urban space, stating that “individual engagement and re-creations of place are able to reconnect to the food system and engage with the urban landscape in new, productive, and more sustainable ways”. As Turner rightly acknowledges, “future research needs to focus on how such embodied practices can extend beyond the borders of these gardens”, a process she describes as bracketing (Turner, 2011, p.520).

Baker (2004) uses participatory methods exploring three community gardens in Toronto, Canada. Exploring food in detail, Baker writes that gardeners

“garden as part of their everyday routine, to grow culturally appropriate food, to save money on their food expenses, to connect with their neighbors, or to exercise and have an "intimate" connection to the food they eat” (Baker, 2004, pp. 306-309).

Baker notes they produce “staggering” amounts of food “something that is often questioned by skeptics” of community garden and urban agriculture practice (Baker, 2004, p.315). While Baker’s research, through the use of key words such as the everyday, participation, and place making chimes with this research, I would argue that Baker makes disproportionate claims for the value of these small Toronto community gardens as a component of Toronto’s overall food security (Baker, 2004, p.315). I would not disagree that small-scale food production is highly efficient (Edmondson et al., 2012, Tomkins, 2009a). Yet Baker cites secondary research to enforce the wider relevance of communal gardening, stating “that [it] is being recognised globally ... as an important contributor to economic development, food security, and environmental management” (Baker, 2004, p.308). Importantly, Baker states that these food gardens were instigated largely top-down yet provides little reflection on what this might mean for an understanding where the intention for community food gardens originate and therefore what future drives might be. This thesis contributes to this absence where the motivation and ignitions for practice are fully explored and analysed.

This thesis takes a lead from both Premat (2003), and Shillington (2013), who construct their argument through urban agriculture, Lefebvre and the everyday. Shillington states the need to recognise the conflict in the production of space as an everyday concern: “it is through mundane routines and relations that urban space is produced” (Shillington, 2013, p.105). Premat (2003) explores urban agriculture in Cuba, noting a similar perspectival gap where those in official positions to plan for urban agriculture are unable to recognise smaller scale or household food production. Premat is important because of the discussion on Lefebvre and because the research draws out the structural relationship between planning and lived experience, where the former largely ignores the latter. Both Shillington and Premat,



therefore open a discussion on the interrelationship of differing aspects of spatial production within urban agriculture, something I developed in 2012 during initial analysis of results, writing that community food gardens “challenge the ‘suspension of disbelief’” that the urban environment is unquestionable and unchanging rather than a “continuously co-authored space, an architecture *et al.*” (Tomkins, 2012a, p.425). Within this paper I had begun to explore the spatial implication for food growing, writing at a time when I had not developed the triangulation of spatial production through Lefebvre, evident in Premat, and Shillington. This research therefore builds on the discussion above by extending the understanding of Lefebvre within the UK context.

Bohn and Viljoen (2005) have extensively researched the UK situation and despite their overarching strategic planning emphasis they offer a useful exploration of the qualitative aspect of space stating that “there is no qualitative judgement connected to size: small open space is not bad open space, neither is big open space. Size is considered as influencing the space’s designation and its ability to accommodate certain programmes and occupations” (Viljoen et al., 2005, p.109). They call for urban agriculture to have a more “sensual, qualitative measure for the spatial success of open urban space” under the name of “spaciousness” a notion this thesis will address (Viljoen et al., 2005, p.110). This research will attempt to extend this notion with empirical data exploring how a qualitative understanding of space in terms of size and occupation affects harvest.

Mudimu (1996), examines a tension in spatial production by documenting how women in Zimbabwe clear land previously surveyed and physically marked for building plots, to produce new land boundaries to facilitate crop production. The women therefore layer the formal landscape with everyday stories of use and priority. One argument officials use against urban agriculture is that this practice increases the cost of re-marking building plots for sale. Mudimu writes, “The response of the women cultivators was to fight what they considered to be a colonial and male attitude to city planning with regard to alternative urban land uses” (Mudimu, 1996, p.183). Rakodi reinforces the point that urban planning is “often confined to the use of official statistics, thus biasing its policies in favour of the formal sector and against unrenumerated economic activities” such as everyday gardening (Rakodi, 1991 p.544).

While these works stem from differing socio-political situations (Cuba for example as a socialist state), I argue there is a necessity to draw research from the Global South into research in the North rather than assume these are separate entities. The research above shows that food growing is a basic response of people common across cultures towards the daily aim of feeding, which needs to appropriate and transform space and resources.

To further this discussion I would also draw on the work of Lynch (1992), and Thornton (2008). Lynch looks at urban agriculture practices in Tanzania, describing how women who travel with urban agriculture produce to sell at local markets might purchase goods from within the market if they run out of their own produce. This is because they place a high social and cultural value on attending the markets. As Lynch writes, in Lushoto District, Tanzania:

“There is an important social dimension to women’s participation in marketing in Lushoto. Women frequently carry produce on foot for long distances in order to take part ... in some cases, a woman, who has none of her produce to sell, may buy from her neighbours. And may even sell her produce at a loss, in order to attend a particular market” (Lynch, 1992, p.179).

Lynch highlights the need to look at social practice and its outcomes rather than assume the food product alone can encapsulate our understanding of urban agriculture. Extending the conclusions of this research to the UK, we could hypothesise that self-grown food here would show similar contradictions of social outcomes rather than simplistically in confrontation to and as a substitution of shop bought food.

Linked to the discussion in chapter one on social security and food banks, Thornton (2008) also explores how the social security system in South Africa prevents urban agriculture from developing amongst communities that should theoretically be engaged and benefit from food-growing because a robust social security system is in place. He examines two selected small urban centres in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa as examples of urban agriculture asking why people don’t grow their own food. As an answer, the research explains how urban agriculture is stigmatised with apartheid amongst the youth, who have a preference for support through the

social security system. Thus there is seen to be a direct relationship between government intervention in ‘security systems’ – either local or national and the ability of people to act independently and autonomously through food.

Zavisca (2003) emphasises this point with a discussion on post-Soviet allotment practice (dachas) discussing the need to go beyond the question of measuring harvest solely as financial profit. She writes,

“In emphasizing subjective meaning, I do not deny that dacha cultivation can significantly affect family budgets and living standards ... vis-a-vis market opportunity ... but ... analyses of the economics of dacha use inadequately capture motivation and meaning. To evaluate dacha use exclusively in terms of market rationality is to adopt one of the contested discursive positions” missing other ambiguous discourses (Zavisca, 2003, pp.810).

As discussed in chapter one, extending this discussion to the UK, we could assume that self-grown food would similarly draw disinterest or have less of a daily necessity in the face of functioning social security narratives and food banks. Turner therefore, argues the need to understanding a broad plurality of roles to judge engagement against the “broader urban agriculture initiatives that tend to position people as end-product consumers of food” (Turner, 2011, p.510).

This section explored key issues within research presenting detailed reference points for research from the specifics of communal gardens to urban agriculture in Tanzania and Cuba. However, at the core is a need to look at how embodiment, spatial transformation, and the everyday influence of food-growing, which form part of the aims and questions of the thesis. The section below follows on from this, discussing the implications for method.

#### 2.1.7 Methodological implications

The methodological implications of a spatial examination from the lived experience of space are sensitive to Wakefield et al. that “a surprisingly small number of published studies actually talked with community gardeners about their experiences” (Wakefield et al., 2007, p.93). I also respond to Turner et al. who, quoting Myles Bremner, Chief Executive Officer of Garden Organic in the UK, calls for more in-

depth research on community gardens, outlining that the challenge is to be clear about “what community gardening is and who its constituents are, to seek credibility with facts and figures, whilst developing and delivering a compelling narrative about what community gardens achieve” (Turner et al., 2011, p.491). As early as 1985, Niñez (1985), drew attention to the lack of empirical field studies of food and gardens, writing that research methods should use longitudinal observation of local life cultures to crucially realise the importance of self-grown food.

As Thornton (2008 p.245) writes, this is essential if we are to acknowledge the “lack of localised, in-depth empirical UPA [Urban and peri-urban agriculture] research ‘on the ground,’ which may refute or substantiate claims regarding the potential” of urban agriculture within the environment where it emerges. Holland develops this through using postal research on community gardening picking up on contingency and stating gardens “develop according to the needs prevailing in the community they serve ... this is where a bottom up approach will be more successful” (Holland, 2004, p.303). McClintock et al. comment further on the dominance of professional approaches, writing that while “mapping vacant land is an important step in an ongoing process to bring urban agriculture’s potential to fruition”, we also need to account for the “politics of negotiating competing uses of vacant land [which] is far more complex than identifying sites ... The real work in planning for urban agriculture lies in identifying and negotiating the varied interests of multiple stakeholders” (McClintock et al., 2013, p.55).

This brings emphasis to phenomena at a local scale, through participation requiring reflection between researcher and researched. As Redwood writes, it is the International Development Research Centre’s “view that participatory research, done in an environment that balances biophysical and social approaches, achieves aims that are beyond those of singularly focused research” (Redwood, 2009, p.2).

Qualitative participatory research therefore needs to investigate connections between individuals, stakeholders and the local built environment as a product of everyday life, with less emphasis on remote-sensed broad quantitative research that predicts spatial positioning or scale (Hovorka, 2001). This will mean acknowledging the detail of differing residents’ lives as well as differing measures of space beyond the volumetric exploring a “sensual, qualitative measure for the spatial success of open urban space” (Viljoen et al., 2005, p.110).

I argue that this requires researching from the ground up, adopting an ethnographic approach of people and landscape. As Taylor and Lovell (2012, pp.58-66) write, “locally adaptive ... knowledge of urban food production and the material resources ... offer an alternative to wholly top-down approaches to promoting urban agriculture, which have often been unsuccessful in the past in the United States”. With this in mind, this thesis wishes to suspend the theoretical assumptions of urban agriculture as mini-agriculture, and heuristically investigate food-growing practices, allowing data to emerge and guide research rather than predetermine it. To this aim, I have adopted participatory research methods, namely participant observation, discussed at length in chapter three.

#### 2.1.8 Summary: food, spatial transformation, and the everyday

So far, this chapter has explored the literature on urban agriculture, its definitions, and gradual application as a concept with regard to feeding cities. I have also explored the interrelations between urban agriculture, community gardens, and community food gardens towards understanding the context for food production. This section drew out the need to look at spatial conflict and transformation, where urban agriculture challenges prevails planning and design practices through everyday actions of users (Shillington, 2013, Domene and Saurí, 2007, Mudimu, 1996). Focusing on the everyday actions of users highlights the need to account for the use of bodies within practice as noted by Turner (2011). Within this research project, I respond to Turners request to understand the interrelationship of embodied practice in and through the borders of the garden.

Drawing on Holland (2004), who notes that urban agriculture within the context of community gardens might not have a food growing focus. As Wakefield (2007) points out, understanding why this happens has methodological implications because few studies have explored the everyday of community gardens. This was repeated by Thornton (2008), who states there is generally a lack of empirical local urban agriculture studies, which might shed light on variations within potential practice. International Development Research Centre’s (Redwood, 2009) response to this is to highlight the advantages of participation in achieving balanced viewpoints. The lack of informed studies is not just contemporary with French (2000) noting that our gap

in understanding urban agriculture and urban food growing in general stretches back several centuries.

Taken together, this section has brought together the need for participation to understand the qualitative aspects of harvest and space related to the dominate mode of both architectural production but also food provision as something abstracted and hegemonic. This acknowledges and follow several urban agriculture and community garden researchers (Premat, 2012, Shillington, 2013) who have chosen to use Lefebvre's (1991b) writings as a conceptual approach to understanding this spatial situated practice. This discussion will be explored further below in section two which details the conceptual approach, of the thesis, namely the writings of Lefebvre, and the concepts of dwelling, the everyday, and food security and sovereignty.

## **2.2 Section two: Conceptual approach**

The following section deals with the conceptual approach of the thesis, namely, Lefebvre (1991b), dwelling (Ingold, 2000, Casey, 1993, Harrison, 2007), the everyday (Certeau et al., 1998, Certeau, 1984, Highmore, 2012) and food sovereignty (Via Campesina, 1996). I discuss dwelling because of the emphasis it brings to people, landscape and building as well as food security and sovereignty. The latter two terms are important because security emphasises a response based within the market, while sovereignty emphasises people, territory, and self-defined food systems. I have drawn on these concepts as a way of understanding food-growing, particularly harvest, as something social and spatial. I seek to use these concepts with relevance to the thesis subject, context, and justification, rather than as a critique of concepts themselves leading to their reconceptualisation.

### **2.2.1 Lefebvre and the production of space**

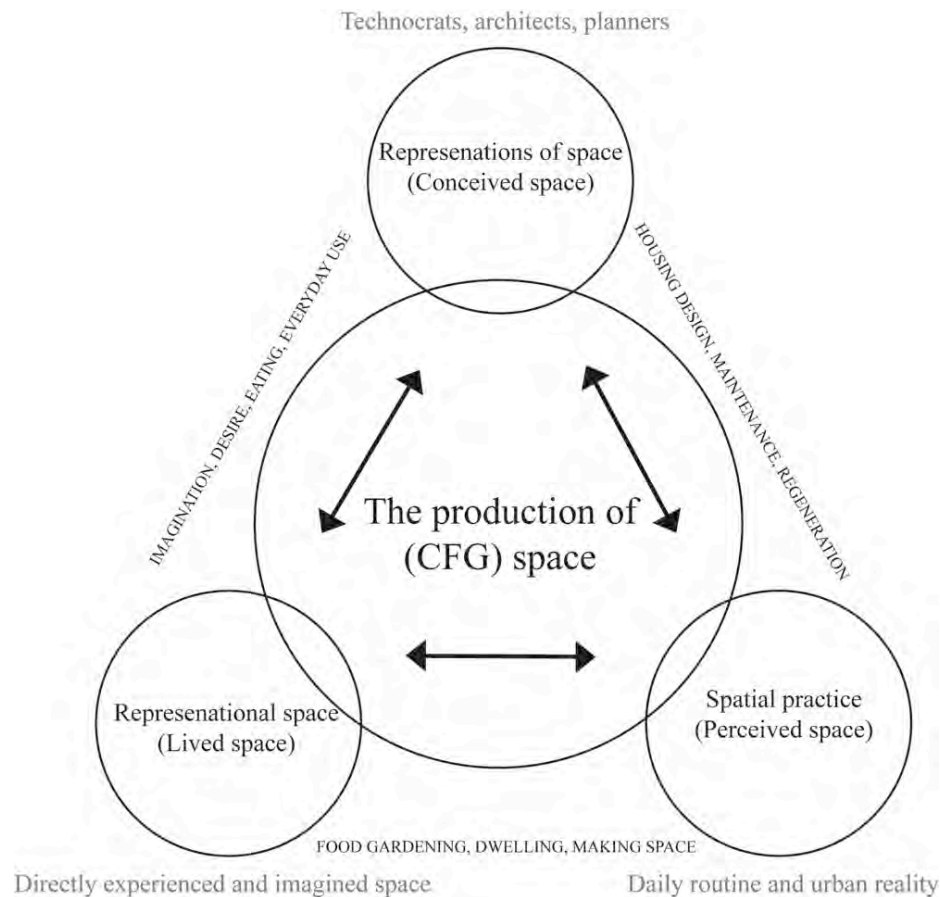
Space, both physical and social, is central to the creation of community food gardens; therefore the analysis of results has in mind Lefebvre's notion that space is not simply a passive pre-existent stage into which people and actions can simply be placed (Lefebvre, 1991b). Lefebvre conceptualises space as something that is produced through a triangulation. Firstly, there are spatial practices - practices that happen within a physical space, secondly, representations of space (conceived or abstract space) and thirdly, representational space (lived space or everyday space).

As discussed previously, Lefebvre has been used in part in community garden and urban agriculture literature but not widely applied (Premat, 2012, Shillington, 2013, Eizenberg, 2013, French, 2008). It has been more widely used in literature on architectural space and user creation which this thesis draws on, such as Till (2009), Amin and Thrift (2002). Lefebvre is useful because he draws attention to the everyday in relationship to conceived (abstract) and material space; “where we enter into a dialectical relationship with the external natural and social worlds ... where essential human desires, powers and potentialities are initially formulated, developed and realised concretely” (Gardiner, 2000, p.76). I am also aware of Soja, who develops Lefebvre’s emphasis on the triangulation which he terms as a “critical thirding-as-Othering”, which does not emanate from the “original binary opposition and/or contradiction, but seeks instead to disorder, deconstruct, and tentatively reconstitute in a different form the entire dialectical sequence and logic” (Soja, 2000, pp.20-21).

Lefebvre’s aim in defining a triangulation was to bring the social production of space into the conceptualisation of material space critiquing a supposed dualism between abstract space (conceived) and physical space (perceived). Elden writes that Lefebvre argues, “Space is a mental and material construct. This provides us with a third term between the poles of conception and perception, the notion of the lived” or everyday life (Elden, 2004, p.190) (figure 4). Merrifield writes of the ongoing nature of spatial production, “relations between conceived–perceived–lived spaces aren’t ever stable, nor should they be grasped artificially or linearly”, feeding into the earlier discussion on the contradictory and contingent nature of urban agriculture and community gardens (Merrifield, 2006, p.111).

In more detail, Lefebvre (1991b, pp.38-39) defined representations of space (or conceived space) as the official conceptualisation of space from technocrats, architects, planners. It is a space conceived abstractly in advance of lived space and, “is the dominant space in any society”. Representational space (or lived space) of everyday life is “the dominated — and hence passively experienced — space which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate ... it overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its objects”. Finally, the spatial practices of a given society are defined as practices that produce the space of that society. This is a perceived space of the senses, a melting pot where “spatial practice consists in a projection

onto a (spatial) field of all aspects, elements and moments of social practice ... in the spatial practice of neocapitalism ... representations of space facilitate the manipulation of representational spaces [lived spaces]”, a domination (Lefebvre, 1991b, pp.8-59).



**Figure 4: Lefebvre's triangulation applied to community food gardens**

The triad of Lefebvre reminds us to fully take into account emotional lives that are subjective and imagined and which need to make sense of the intentions of abstract space and encounters in physical space; this can be linked back to the edible map discussion in the scoping work. While there is coincidence between these social practices, lived space is reducible to neither and should not be seen as something that apologises for inadequate planning nor a failed materiality. In the context of this study, we should not view the absence of food growers as something which could have been foreseen in the planning stage (conceived space) or should have been accommodated at the material building stage (perceived space) but as formed out of and across the use of lived space by its inhabitants that interacts with the dominant abstractions and the material facts of perceived space. Therefore, spatial practices



(conceived, perceived, lived) are not separate compartments of space and time but are constantly moulding together.

Lefebvre's triangulation was not applied in this thesis during the data collection phase where for example, I did not interview NGOs or others who are part of the 'conceived space' to explore the discourse and its influence. My justification for this was driven by the need to not act pre-emptively, but to participate with empathy. Moreover, I drew a distinction between data I elicited through participation and extant texts; the latter refers to data constructed by those other than the participants (Charmaz, 2006). A great deal of extant data was readily available and might swamp data collection, where by contrast empirical data on the lived experience of gardeners is absent. During analysis, where I seek to make sense of spatial practice, the concept acted as a reminder that the garden is being produced by the everyday actions of gardeners as well as the results of other discourses and power relations. As Lefebvre comments, "space is at once result and cause, product and producer" (Lefebvre, 1991b, p.39). It also acts to guard against over-romanticising the environmental and social actions of gardeners, or map practice across dualities, which I feel marks some community garden literature such as Eizenberg (2013).

Merrifield (2006), offers a critique arguing that some have found Lefebvre indulging in spatial fetishism with regard to an over emphasis on the urban. As Edensor writes:

"The tendency of contemporary approaches of cultural policies to overemphasise the centrality of large metropolitan areas as the principle realms for creative production and consumption implicitly denigrates the significance of peripheral, marginal and non-urban spaces" (Edensor et al., 2010, p.5).

Such comments are important considering the need to see food production and consumption in and across space. Urban agriculture stresses the need to see urban food production as part of a complement of practices including industrial agriculture, with some offering caution on a spatial over-emphasis where urban food production is disconnected from other food producing spaces (Ellis and Sumberg, 1998).

While this research is sensitive to the concept of the production of space, recognising its use in understanding how the social world may operate, it does not alone give

insight into how practice might offer radical political alternatives to the current model of territory and control. As Gibson-Graham (2008, p.164) discusses, “our understandings seemed to cement an emerging world in place rather than readying it for transformation”. There is a need to consider how the processes of occupying and managing space are recursive actions where there may be imbalance between managing territory and being concerned with the outputs (food in this example) of that territory. Such action is “not only at the level of production, but of territory, of urban communities” and termed autogestion by Lefebvre, a form of anarchist self-management (Elden, 2004, p.157).

I raise this point because I see urban agriculture as a retrofit project (Tomkins, 2006), appropriating existing space, towards multiple and integrated food production (Viljoen et al., 2005). Lefebvre adds a detail noting that reappropriation should not be confused with a:

“‘diversion’ (détournement)”, where “existing space may outlive its original purpose ... which determines its forms, functions, and structures; it may thus in a sense become vacant, and susceptible of being diverted, reappropriated and put to a use quite different from its initial one” (Lefebvre, 1991b, p.167).

The subtle difference that Lefebvre raises is that diversion does not make anything new and only offers a temporary moment of liberation. This is pertinent to the current discussion where a principle action is to occupy space, which may only be temporary. Related to this is the notion of festival in “which the city is recognised as the site of exchange, par excellence, of festival and ludic centrality ... and as the ephemeral reflection of the social spatialisation: the constantly rebuilt and reappropriated” (Shields, 1998, p.185).

In relationship to DeLind (2006) and Turner (2011), Lefebvre writes that we must demand the “reappropriation of the body, in association with the reappropriation of space, into a non-negotiable part of its agenda” (Lefebvre, 1991b, p.167). In other words there is a performative and playful aspect to reappropriation but not one that may lead to substantive social change, in fact the opposite, as they reinstitute power because instead of “dialectical process with three stages... we have a stagnant opposition” (Lefebvre, 1991b, p.223). We should therefore be careful in claiming too

much for practice that may constitute a brief moment of change, an event that offers no structural change in territory never mind food systems.

Others have rounded on Lefebvre's adherence to Marxism, particularly his need to see the everyday as something devalued under capitalism that is in need of a (Marxist) revolution (Gardiner, 2000). However, Elden writes that while Lefebvre insists that Marxist thought is required to understand the twentieth century "it is not sufficient" (Elden, 2004, p.48). Michel Trebitsch comments further in the preface to the *Critiques of Everyday Life III*, that an exploration of everyday life and Lefebvre does not require Marxism (Lefebvre, 1991a).

There is a shift therefore in Lefebvre's Marxism; doctrine gives way to an emphasis on power relations as social production in space, over those continuing to cite economic production that happens elsewhere as the focus of power relations (Soja, 2000). Within this research, while I have issues with Lefebvre's use of space and the everyday, I argue Lefebvre's triangulation is useful to an analysis of community gardens because he places emphasis on the function of the imagination within spatial production, giving emphasis to the lived experience of gardens, something cited as absent in literature.

Unwin (Unwin, 2000) offers a further critique of Lefebvre's regarding an over emphasis on the word 'space' and its social production. Unwin argues this emphasis undermines the more radical political intention of Lefebvre by offering a new certainty of space where elsewhere he brings tension "designed to elicit debate and engagement, and the metaphors and illustrations he uses are not reducible to a simple set of parameter" (Unwin, 2000, p.13). Ethington goes further, arguing that through a focus on space, particularly in the abstract, he emphasises the "exploitative handiwork of the capitalist bourgeoisie, bearing the same relation to place as exchange value does to use value in the Marxian account of commodities"; Lefebvre loses the more "emotive, subjective, even poetic" understanding of place (Ethington, 2007, p.481). Bender counters this, noting that Ethington "puts the point too strongly" and there is no need to reject Lefebvre's understanding of abstract space to make other points (Bender, 2007, p.496).

Bender, therefore, suggests that it is possible to use Lefebvre and also work with other conceptualisations of space. I have responded to this discussion by additionally

considering the everyday, as well as the use of dwelling, because they give greater scope to the value of the everyday as experienced by residents, as discussed below. Such a discussion brings to light a phenomenological approach, as will be developed in chapter three (Methods), where research is less bounded by the site of case studies but able to wander and follow phenomena as something embodied. As Casey writes, there is a need to note the “circumstance in which bodies travel between different places. No longer is movement circumscribed by the restrictions of a single position or one place; now it ranges among a number of places” (Casey, 1996, p.23).

While the everyday is a constant theme with Lefebvre (Till, 2009), it is acknowledged that Lefebvre senses that “everyday life under late capitalism has become irredeemably corrupted” (Gardiner, 2000, p.159). Lefebvre (1999, p.35) writes that “The revolution of the future will put an end to the quotidian ...its specific objective will be to annihilate everyday life; and the period of transition will also take on a new meaning, oppose everyday life and re-organize it until it is as good as new”. I take issue with Lefebvre’s notion of a corrupted everyday, as something in need of an overhaul or revolution, as will be discussed below, leading me to Highmore (2011, 2002), de Certeau (1998, 1984), and Ingold (Hallam and Ingold, 2007, 2000, 2011, 1993), who see the everyday as being a nuanced and liberating spaces of emancipation where residents generate new meaning within dominant culture practices through direct incremental quotidian use (Gardiner, 2000).

### 2.2.2 The everyday

This research orientates itself through the everyday of residents; the most familiar and mundane spaces of housing estates, as they become gardeners. These mundane, everyday spaces, often get excluded when considering the ‘city’. As Amin and Thrift write, “little of all this appears in ‘big picture’ urban theory, when much of urban life is left out ... the everyday rhythms of domestic life have rarely counted ... as though the city stopped at the doorstep of the home ... the rhythms of the home are as much part of city life as ... traffic, office life, or interactions in the open spaces” (Amin, 2002, p.18). Crawford describes this as an everyday urbanism, writing, “design within everyday space must start with an understanding and acceptance of the life that takes place there. This goes against the grain of professional design discourse ...

professional abstractions inevitably produce spaces that have little to do with real human impulses” (Crawford, 2013, p.347).

Both Highmore (Highmore, 2011) and de Certeau (1984, p.ix) stress the importance of the situated understanding of the ordinary everyday where, “the characteristically subtle logic of these ‘ordinary’ activities comes to light only in the details”. The UK has highly developed national systems; social security, professional discourse of planning and building, and cultural aesthetics quickly dominate and encroach on the more heuristic and incremental aspects of the everyday. Yet, the everyday happens around us all the time, forming part of our peripheral vision; it is there but hard to focus on, formed of fragments that do not necessarily present a whole (Highmore, 2011). In the introduction to *Critiques of Everyday Life*, Gardiner quotes Maurice Blanchot regarding the everyday:

“The everyday is platitude (what lags and falls back, the residual life with which our trash cans and cemeteries are filled: scrap and refuse); but this banality is also what is most important, if it brings us back to existence in its very spontaneity and as it is lived – in the moment when, lived, it escapes every speculative formulation, perhaps all coherence, all regularity” (Gardiner, 2000, p.1).

For Blanchot, the everyday is an escape; its spontaneity resists conceived geometry of planning. The commonplace and the everyday is hard to describe yet pervasive, experienced all around yet eluding descriptions. As described above, the everyday of food-growing, through the long view of history, has been under-recorded partly because of its ubiquity and partly because it is simply all around us. As George Orwell comments in 1937, “it is curious how seldom the all-importance of food is recognized. You see statues everywhere to politicians, poets, bishops, but none to cooks or bacon-curers or market-gardeners” (Orwell, 1937, p.62).

Within the work of de Certeau these small things constitute a radical space of tactical creative intervention that reuse and intervene amongst the strategies of existing space. As de Certeau comments the everyday makes

“it possible to articulate [the] obscure background of social activity ... to make explicit the systems of operational combination

... which also compose a "culture" and to bring to light the models of action characteristic of users whose status as the dominated element in society is concealed by the euphemistic term 'consumers.'" (Certeau, 1984, pp. xi-xii).

The everyday is key to understanding community food gardens because gardens do not exist without the constant attention of gardeners, both to each other and the soil. More so food gardening, whose narrative of care runs deep beyond the daily tending of plants to the daily consumption of food. The everyday emphasises that life is not a blueprint that is then built and lived in (or not) as with architectural thinking. As Hill (1998b p.9) writes, architecture tends to ignore 'the background of social activity', assuming that a "building need not be occupied for it to be recognised as architecture".

However, while de Certeau stresses "the centrality of human agency and the possibility of resistance to the dictates of bureaucratic reason within the ordinary, intimate, and familiar" (Gardiner, 2000, p.158), there is also a hint of romanticism and separation in de Certeau's writing as noted by Amin and Thrift who write:

"We need to be careful with the notion of spaces of escape. Most such spaces are only brief respites. Most such spaces do not light the way to another land; at best, they give hints of another kind of future ... in other words, the idea of escape – which is sometimes hinted at in the writings of authors like de Certeau" (Amin, 2002, p.124).

Massey (2011) also criticises de Certeau for his "romance of the little tactics" against the established and seemingly unchanging strategic dominant space, creating a "false opposition, between space and time, and the consequent misleading characterisation of space as the immobile realm of established power".

Highmore has written extensively on the everyday and the often mundane aspect of the small actions of daily life, countering much of the romanticism of de Certeau (1984). Highmore (2011, p.2) describes the, "the patterning of desire", regarding the differing small actions of daily life. The term seeks not to create compartments for everyday practices, separating them out spatially – shopping from dreaming, rural

and urban, small plot, large garden for example – but instead to examine the differing junctures and situations and how we disconnect to or from them emotionally. In this way, we can give value to desire in terms of its internal functions relative to those that garden, rather than impose a spatial schema as the standard for understanding the scaling up of urban agriculture. Highmore helps an understanding of the everyday through the body, calling for an account of desires as they connect and disconnect in social situations.

Ingold's writing uses the everyday less explicitly but is useful in directing attention to the phenomenological aspect of human interaction with material space and process that are very much at the heart of understanding everyday life. Through the work of Ingold, particularly the perceptions of the environment for example, I am able to explore the process by which material articles take their place within ongoing social processes "wherein both people and their environments are continually bringing each other into being" (Ingold, 2000, p. 87). I found this particularly useful when considering the dialectical relations between gardeners and their interaction with the already built space of the estate from which the gardens (continually) come into being. Ingold stresses the need to resist the abstract and the object within the world placing a reorientation through ourselves and the process of the world. Ingold also specifically deals with how landscape emerges through human action leading to a dwelling perspective which he links to the actions of cultivating and constructing as a necessity of human inhabitation, which will be discussed below .

### 2.2.3 Dwelling

Lefebvre wrote of the tension between dwelling and functional housing where "dwelling, a social yet poetic act ... fades in the face of housing, an economic function. The 'home' ... vanishes ... confronted with functional housing, constructed according to technological dictates" (Lefebvre, 1991a, p.94). In using the concept Lefebvre makes a distinction between a physical home - "a box, a cadre" – and the social action of inhabiting space, and the need not to "begin at the level of abstraction, crucially one level away from the initial level of lived reaction. Dwelling has a more directly rooted understanding of space or place, one that is closer to lived reaction" (Elden, 2004, p.191). Dwelling is therefore a reminder of the needs within research to experience the phenomena within lived space, applying methods such as

hermeneutic phenomenology, that reflect and interpret that direct experience “without taxonomizing, classifying, or abstracting it” (Van Manen, 1990, p.9).

As Cloke and Jones write, experience should be direct where an “understanding of landscape is wrapped up in a rich engagement with that landscape” (Cloke and Jones, 2001, p.653). Pertinent to this discussion of dwelling is Ingold’s notion of moving from “a ‘building perspective’, according to which worlds are made before they are lived in, to a ‘dwelling perspective’, according to which the forms people build, whether in the imagination or on the ground, only arise within the current of their life activities” (Ingold, 2000, p.154). Dwelling therefore links together inhabitants, landscape, and actions of cultivating and building.

Specifically, Ingold acknowledges that ‘to build’ can be defined specifically as:

“to cultivate or to till the soil... and ... to construct, to make something, to raise up an edifice. Both these modern senses of building – as cultivation and as construction – are thus shown to be encompassed within the more fundamental sense of dwelling” (Ingold, 2000, p.185).

Ingold’s dwelling perspective is useful because it links cultivation (growing plants) and the desire to build (construct in a broad sense) as a process. Ingold adds, “To adopt a dwelling perspective is not, of course, to deny that humans build things. But it is to call for an alternative account of building” (Ingold, 2011, p.10). This thesis therefore responds to Ingold’s alternative account of building, looking at how residents, after years of living on estates, are beginning to actively voice a need to create spaces through the conjoined actions of cultivating and producing material space. As Ingold writes we need to:

“Understand how the activities of building – of cultivation and construction – belong to our dwelling in the world, to the way we are. ‘We do not dwell because we have built, but we build and have built because we dwell, that is because we are dwellers . . . To build is in itself already to dwell . . . *Only if we are capable of*



*dwelling, only then can we build*<sup>8</sup>” (Ingold, 2000, p.186, original emphasis).

Dwelling has been discussed in relationship to domestic housing (Boudon and Onn, 1972), orchards (Cloke and Jones, 2001), or vernacular gardens (Kimber, 2004) but is largely absent from urban agriculture, specifically in the context of this country. Kimber uses dwelling to state, “gardens depend on the gardeners for maintenance and are spaces made meaningful by the actions of people during the course of their everyday lives” produced through a need to make sense of the social, physical, and symbolic world (Kimber, 2004, pp.263-266), reminding us that gardens are cultural and social narratives.

Cloke and Jones (2001) issue a caveat regarding dwelling and modern landscapes. They write, “it needs to shed this reliance on idyllic local boundedness”, a closing down but also a need to address wider issues and incorporate “landscapes of conflict” and I note there caution regarding the “romantic overtones which beset the illustrations offered by Heidegger and Ingold” (Cloke and Jones, 2001, pp.661-664). They ask for dwelling to be opened up; “permeable to the cultural flows of ideas, meanings, significations, and symbols operating at different scales” (2001, pp.662).

Journeying with gardeners, who need to situate communal action in order to enact it, takes dwelling from an initial sedentary concept to a nomadic one, giving it dynamics and fluidity. In understanding this narrative, Harrison (2007, p.637) offers a further distinction to dwelling to differentiate between dwelling “in terms of being-at-home-in-the-world” and “openness or unfinished nature of the event of space ... its openness to what exceeds its grasp”. Harrison (2007, p.637) qualifies, such a dwelling is “the ‘sociality’ of dwelling, a sociality which remains that of a community ... the ‘common’ of dwelling, this reckoning of the space between us”.

This ‘space between’ is further taken up by Casey who describes the movement from dwelling in the domestic, in contrast to the “nonhabitual, de-centred actions of traversing open spaces ... of going around a public square or between houses and

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<sup>8</sup> Here Ingold is quoting directly from Heidegger. HEIDEGGER, M. 1975. *Poetry, Language, Thought*, New York, Harper & Row.

outside limits”, which he terms hermetic dwelling (Casey, 1993, p.140). It is therefore a communal space of neighbours, and as Cockayne, draws out in her history of neighbours, the etymology of the word states, “the word ‘nigh-bout’ originally meant ‘the man who tills the next piece of ground to mine’”, literally a near inhabitant farmer (Cockayne, 2012, p.6).

As noted in the above section of Lefebvre, Casey and the use of dwelling also brings a critique of Lefebvre and an emphasis on the phenomenological approach that will be discussed in the methods chapter. Specifically within researching the gardens, a sensitivity to this conceptualisation means approaching gardens where “a place is not a mere patch of ground, a bare stretch of earth, a sedentary set of stones”, where “a place is something for which we continually have to discover or invent new forms of understanding, new concepts in the literal sense of ways of “grasping-together.” A place is more an event than a thing to be assimilated to known categories” (Casey, 1996, p.26).

In using these approaches to dwelling I am drawing attention to the common space of the garden with a bounded notion of housing. Several authors within community garden literature develop a notion of a middle or common space, but one I would argue is ill defined. Milbourne follows Schmelzkopf (1995) in describing community gardens as “developing new hybrid or third spaces that combine the public and private realms and producing new meeting places” (Milbourne, 2012, p.952). Glover similarly writes of community gardens as offering ““third places’ outside of work and home ... where people can gather, network, and identify together as residents of a neighbourhood” (Glover, 2004, p.143). However, I would contend that these are hybrid spaces, assuming a dualism of separate spatial components that then coalesce as new forms; the extant world or a subjective self, the public or the private worlds. It allows architectural discourse and others to claim a certain hold on spatiality to which the everyday subsequently emerges from and dominated by the hybrid. Dwelling refocuses research within the actions of people as they bring landscape into being, something dynamic and sensory. Within the conceptual approach there is also some linkage between Ingold and Lefebvre with the former drawing on Lefebvre’s term ‘meshwork’ to describe the movement and interaction of materials and people that creates trails rather than nodes “along which life is lived” (Ingold, 2007, p.81).

#### 2.2.4 Security and sovereignty

In discussing dwelling, I am arguing for the need to emphasise the importance of people, landscape and practice. Moving the discussion from the more philosophical to the concrete, I want to compare the discussion on food security and sovereignty, where the former emphasises security of food as a product of the market, the latter demands the recognition of people's right to define their own food environment. This follows on from the discussion in chapter one where food security policy direction in the Global North emphasises consumerism rather than farming (Lang, 2009).

The term food security is widely used and widely defined (Smith et al., 1992). The World Health Organization (WHO) writes that food security is “when all people at all times have access to sufficient, safe, nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active life” (WHO, 2012). In contrast, food sovereignty stresses a relationship between people and place, resources, and the rights of people to define their own food systems: “food sovereignty is a precondition to genuine food security... taking full account of those who produce food” and their landscape (Via Campesina, 1996). Urban agriculture literature places great emphasis on food security seen as a key contributor to overall food supply (Koc et al., 1999, Redwood, 2009, Wright, 2009). As Guitart et al. (2012, p.370) ask, “how useful can community gardens be for community resilience and food security? Future research on this topic is vital”.

Globally, access to food is tied to the wider economy of a country, with the World Trade Organization stating “food security nowadays lies not only in the local production of food, but in a country's ability to finance imports of food through exports of other goods” (Rodríguez Mendoza, 2002). In the UK, Defra states that “our openness to trade makes the UK very resilient in terms of disruptions from one or a few sources of supply ... our supermarkets, processors, wholesalers, and food service companies are the best organisations to manage risks” (Defra, 2009b, pp.3-25). Within the UK therefore, where 80 per cent of the population is urbanised (ONS, 2014), there is a market-orientation to food security being satisfied by the supermarket system where, “75% of UK food comes from the big four supermarkets” – namely Tesco, Asda, Sainsbury's and Morrisons (Defra, 2009a, p.9). By 2015, this “accelerating, process ... will soon see supermarkets as the dominant food suppliers around the world” (Traill, 2006, p.164).

Food security therefore, when applied to urban agriculture is conflicting because it may be a factor in influencing the incentive to grow food. Because it places emphasis where emphasising is already on place and dominant, namely access through the market place or social security rather than practice, knowledge and resources access such as landscape. It therefore identifies each mouthful as something that brings residents into everyday contact with capitalism; something that makes a problem of the edible is also making a political gesture. Food sovereignty is useful in reversing the thinking that security equals commerce in the setting of the Global North, stressing a relationship between people and place, resources, and rights (Via Campesina, 1996). Food sovereignty was defined in 1996 as the “right of peoples to define their own food, agriculture, livestock and fisheries systems, in contrast to having food largely subject to international market forces” (Via Campesina, 1996). Merrifield comments that Via Campesina and food sovereignty offer a

“Lefebvrian moment ... they retain a fierce loyalty to local culture and local food systems, but their political activism bonds with other people elsewhere, reaches out across abstract space; in the contact zones a robust, mediated concrete politics takes hold”(Merrifield, 2006, pp.138-139).

Urban areas have had little attention in relationship to the sovereignty debate (Windfuhr and Jonsen, 2005), whose manifesto claims, “We have the right to produce our own food in our own territory” (Via Campesina, 1996, p.1). Yet the principles of sovereignty that focus on the principle of accessing resources such as water and territory seem wholly applicable to a discussion of community gardens. Block et al. (2012, p.14) write that sovereignty in the urban context applied across “alternative food system apparatuses, such as urban ... farms, community gardens, youth programs ... may provide inspiration, a template for change, and global connections” echoing Merrifield above. In exploring food sovereignty, I want to emphasise food less as an economic object of the market place, more as a contextualised social practice whose materialisation within the ‘territory’ of a community requires a prerequisite emphasis on spatial sovereignty, largely unexplored in literature. To explore this further I want to introduce the notion of ‘spatial sovereignty’ within the discussion on food, space and security. I do this to

emphasise that community food gardens require both the transforming and occupation of space prior to growing.

### **2.3 Research questions and aims**

This chapter has reviewed relevant literature regarding urban agriculture and community gardens together with presenting the conceptual approaches, of the production of space, the everyday and dwelling, and food sovereignty. In recent years within the Global North, community gardens have evolved as a defining urban form for urban agriculture (Vitiello and Nairn, 2009b, Firth et al., 2011, Milbourne, 2010, Kaethler, 2006). Yet, we have little research assessing why food harvests from gardens vary widely from high to almost absent (Holland, 2004). I would argue this is related to the fact that the everyday life of communal growing remains severely under-researched (Firth et al., 2011), meaning we lack an understanding of how embodied practices and its harvest interact beyond the border of the garden. Given this noted lack of research I have pursuing the following interrelated research aims:

1. To gain an understanding of the everyday of communal growing to examine the role of the variable harvests within the garden.
2. To use an increased understanding of community food gardening practice to define communal food production in the context of urban agriculture and the broader narrative of food supply systems.

Also, with sensitivity to the actions of dwelling (construction and cultivation)(Casey, 1993, Harrison, 2007, Ingold, 2000), and the acknowledgement of practice as something that needs to create a space within what already exists (Shillington, 2013), I explore the following aim through which I want to draw out the creative entwining of community food gardens and the already built space of estate and environs:

3. To better understand the spatial effects of cultivation and construction within community food gardens and the recursive relationship to the built environment.

The literature shows there is tension in spatial practices, which is explored conceptually through the writings of Lefebvre; namely the idea that space is social produced through a triangulation of conceived, perceived and everyday practices (figure 4). This literature examines the production of space as a social process of

which everyday life forms part of a triangulation (Lefebvre, 1991b). Interconnected to Lefebvre's theory of space, urban agriculture is also cited by Mougeot as challenging the already conceived space of cities; "erasing, the compartmentalization of spaces and times that a Western generation has come to know" (Mougeot, 2005, p.25). These are bold claims and therefore I have framed the following interrelated questions to explore evidence of the spatial impact of community food gardens:

1. How do differing spatial practices initiate and motivate the emergence of the community food gardens and how do they interact with the stated aim of food production?
2. How does the everyday performance of gardeners interact with and produce space in relation to the already built environment and what effect does this have on harvest?

This research is participatory and draws on the everyday literature of de Certeau, Highmore, and Ingold in examining the detail of the lived experience within spatial production. Researching at this scale draws out an accumulation of fragments, and moments that in and of themselves do not easily present a substantial experience easily articulated (Highmore, 2011). Therefore, in relation to food production, I wish to answer the following questions:

3. What significance does the everyday and dwelling bring to an understanding of community food gardens as something that produces a variable harvest?
4. How can we utilise an increased understanding of the everyday practices of growers to extend the conceptualisation of urban agriculture with the UK?

Overall, the aims and questions seek to utilise participation with gardeners to comprehend how we can arrive at a qualitative understanding of the harvest within practice. This is important because urban agriculture stresses food-producing solutions related to the issues of food security, where the daily volume of harvest interconnects with commercial urban food supplies. Food security therefore places emphasis on accessing markets to provide food access stability, which might be local or global, where urban agriculture provides a safety net. Due to the spatial aspect of

the research I argue there is a need to also address the concept of food sovereignty because it emphasises people and territory, and practice:

5. How does an increased understanding of food growing practice as situated, embodied and enacted help in contextualizing harvest within ideas of food security and food sovereignty?

## **Chapter three**

### **Methods, and primary case studies**

#### **3.1 Section one: Methods and primary sites**

##### **3.1.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the methodological response to the literature review and the questions and aims of the thesis, together with a more detailed discussion on the six primary community food gardens previously discussed in chapter one (1.7). The six community food gardens examined are public spaces, requiring residents to form a community identity, the sharing of resources, and the transformation of landscape. The literature review laid out the justification for adopting a qualitative participatory research approach (Redwood, 2009) based on participant observation (Laurier, 2003, DeWalt and DeWalt, 2002, Spradley, 1980). I have also approached my research with an understanding of hermeneutic phenomenology (Sharkey, 2001) and constructivist grounded theory, which I argue add sensitivity to co-creation of data and embodiment.

Participant observation guides the collection of data in the form of semi-structured interviews, photographs, field notes, and archival documents, across multiple sites or case studies (Freidberg, 2001, Marcus, 1995, Stake, 2005). Highmore writes of the need to be flexible and sensitive with research where “‘method’ is not the name of some ‘tool-kit’, some series of procedures or protocols to be performed when confronted with a set of objects, it is rather the name that we should give to the way we apprehend and comprehend the objects we attend to” (Highmore, 2006, p.2).

As outlined in chapter two, I respond to a need for a spatial examination that should not assume that the city simply exists as a passive stage, unchanged by the actions of residents, and I examine how community food gardens contributes, disrupts, and co-produces space through everyday action (Amin, 2002, Chase et al., 1999, Crawford et al., 2005, Lefebvre, 1991b).

This study takes the methodological position that follows a constructivist paradigm and as a researcher I am striving to approach this thesis with relativist-local



ontology. This assumes that the world is co-created and that the epistemological interactions between researcher and subject, between “knower and known are inseparable” and so is the knowledge created (Lincoln and Guba, 1985 p.37). At the centre of the philosophical stance is the use of participant observation, which requires researchers to participate ‘with’ rather than ‘on’ the object of research. While this is no guarantee of co-construction of reality, participant observation creates empathy within the research process especially with long-term participation, as is the case with this research. The sections below will use the above philosophical, and methodological stances to elaborate on the approaches employed in data acquisition, its analysis, interpretation, and the positionality and reflexivity of the researcher.

### 3.1.2 Participant observation

Participant observation forms the approach common to all elements of the research project. Broadly, participant observation requires the researcher to participate with people in their natural environment, researching ‘with’ rather than ‘on’ the community under investigation. (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2002, Spradley, 1980, Creswell, 1998). As Van Manen writes, the “researcher tries to enter the lifeworld of the person whose experiences are relevant study material ... the best way to enter is to participate” (Van Manen, 1990, p.69). This is echoed by Ingold who reminds us that “primary engagement is a condition of being, it must also be a condition of knowledge ...” (Ingold, 2000, p.108), linking participation to constructivist epistemology and hermeneutic phenomenology. Participant observation has its roots in ethnography, having been used for the extended study of contained social groups, forming its core methodology (Hume and Mulcock, 2004). While DeWalt and DeWalt repeat that participant observation is the core of ethnography (and almost universally in anthropology), they identify participant observation within the general category of qualitative research used to understand situated phenomena (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2002).

While participant observation is the central method of ethnography (Hume and Mulcock, 2004), this research does not define itself as an ethnographic study because the output of the research will not be a description of the community gardeners as a cultural grouping. Rather, the research uses participant observation to understand the phenomena of food gardening, grounded within a particular context, respecting the

experience of participants. In contrast, ethnographers seek detailed knowledge of the multiple dimensions of life within the studied milieu and “aim to understand members taken-for-granted assumptions and rules” (Charmaz, 2006, p.21).

The need to pursue participatory work has been clearly examined and stated in the literature review (Redwood, 2009)(Wakefield et al., 2007). As Premat notes, participant observation research that “focus on the impact of sociocultural factors addresses the existing imbalance in UA [urban agriculture] scholarship” that tends to focus on “hard-science” of phenomena rather than the complexity and fluidity of social situations (Premat, 2005, p.177).

Participant observation is also an approach suitable given the subject of research - food gardening - that is practised at a corporeal level, at a one to one scale with land, hand, and eye. Highmore (2011 p.164) writes of such ordinary examples of everyday life “that seem to me to be extraordinary when you get up close to them”, contrasted with distance within research which creates a hierarchy of knowledge ownership. Once research is distanced either digitally or physically from the hand in the ground, one will not be able to observe the subtle nuances of practice (Robson, 2002). This echo’s Creswell’s description of a qualitative research that is “inductive, emerging and shaped by the researcher’s experience in collecting and analysing data ... from the ground up, rather than handed down entirely from a theory” (Creswell, 2007, p.61).

There have been some notable studies in developing countries, which support the need to explore the claims of urban agriculture, beyond the singular ‘feeding cities’ motif, towards examining the practice through case studies from the view point of participants enabling a drawing out of cultural rather than agricultural issues as noted by Redwood earlier (Redwood, 2009). For example, Gabels, (2005) explores the gender dimension in food cultivation in open spaces in Harari, while Chaudhuri (2009) uses participatory action research tied to education, to examine the relationship of health to urban agriculture.

In the North, the Canadian International Development Research Centre has supported such work through its Agropolis program. International Development Research Centre encourages urban agriculture researchers to utilise action research methods at the heart of methodologies and approaches in order to create links

“between the generation of new knowledge and the field implementation of that new knowledge” (Redwood, 2009, p.10). This research project responds to this call regarding the generation of new knowledge, through its investigation of food gardening linked to gardeners, situated within the UK. Participant observation acknowledges “technocratic planners and programmers, cannot produce a space with a perfectly clear understanding of cause and effect, motive and implication” (Lefebvre, 1991b, p.37). Following this, I was sensitive to the arguments within constructivist grounded theory, and hermeneutic phenomenology, both of which will be discussed below.

### 3.1.3 Influencing methods: constructivist grounded theory and hermeneutic phenomenology

I have called these influencing methods because they aided sensitivity as part of ongoing data collection, but contributed less during analysis, particularly with constructivist grounded theory. Both constructivist grounded theory and hermeneutic phenomenology, within Creswell’s approach discussed below, stress an ontology and epistemology that seeks co-construction and co-creation of knowledge. This is particularly important when considering the need to consistently report the positionality of the researcher within participatory approach (Annells, 2006). In using multiple methods, Sohng writes of participation that “there is no off-the-shelf formula, step-by-step method, or ‘correct’ way to do participatory research. Rather, a participatory qualitative methodology is best described as “a set of principles and a process of engagement in the inquiry” (Sohng, 2005, p.76). While Creswell advocates five approaches to such qualitative research: narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study, he also writes that whilst he presents them as separate approaches, he expects researchers to combine these together within a single research project (Creswell, 2007).

I have also drawn on the phenomenological approach through the use of dwelling as noted in chapter two where there is a need to move about in the garden and beyond following phenomena “for we also dwell in the intermediate places, the interplaces, of travel- places which, even when briefly visited or merely traversed, are never uneventful, never not full of spatiotemporal specificities that reflect particular modes and moods of emplacement” (Casey, 1996, p.39).

Broadly speaking, hermeneutics follows the impulse “Zu den Sachen” – literally ‘to the things’ – and “aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences ... it attempts to gain insightful descriptions of the way we experience the world pre-reflectivity, without taxonomizing, classifying, or abstracting it” (Van Manen, 1990, p.9). It places the researcher’s body in direct contact with the subject/ object, reminding them that they also have a position within space and should reflect on the position as discussed below.

Van Manen (1990) states “it has been said that the method of phenomenology and hermeneutics is that there is no method” and that this is a “methodology that tries to ward off any tendency toward constructing a predetermined set of fixed procedures, techniques, and concepts that would rule-govern the research project” (Van Manen, 1990, p.29). This is also a mutual process for participant and researcher. Gadamer, describes this as a fusion, something that “binds the two partners ... when a translator interprets a conversation, he can make a mutual understanding possible only if he participates in the subject under discussion; so also in relationship to a text it is indispensable that the interpreter participates in its meaning” (Gadamer, 2004, p.389). This allows researchers to participate with compassion, and empathy, valuing the knowledge gained from key informants in the field, balancing a need for academic science and theory.

Grounded theory emanates from the conjoined work of Glaser and Strauss (Glaser et al., 1968), whose seminal 1967 text on grounded theory established the approach as a set of inductive strategies and techniques (Birks and Mills, 2011). The aim of grounded theory is to construct theory through constant involvement with phenomena together with its ongoing emerging analysis. It encourages the researcher to suspend the theory they already know, so that the iterative process of collection and analysis can generate new theory from the ground up.

However, following Charmaz, grounded theory has been criticised as a positivist methodology because it brackets out the researcher. Charmaz differentiates between grounded theory, which generates theory and grounded theory method that is involved in the method of generating theory (Charmaz, 2006). Charmaz terms this constructivist grounded theory stemming from a desire to begin “with an area of study and what is relevant to that area is allowed to emerge” (Strauss and Corbin,

1990, p.23), without prematurely imposing concepts too readily. There was a perceived need, both empirically and in literature, to allow an experience of food-growing to generate its own 'local' experience and the need to explicate a process that "is embedded in the research situation" (Birks and Mills, 2011 p.16).

This approach was more suitable to researching a subject that was about sharing space and resources, especially linked to the grounded theory method approach of 'theory agnosticism' (Charmaz, 2006, p.165) that asks researchers to suspend their belief in concepts until they have experienced them in the field. I used the idea of agnosticism to increase my sensitivity during research, to wait and see more, and jump less to conclusions. It also gave me time to develop questions that tried to understand the unfolding narrative of gardening as a phenomenon relative to those who practised. Specifically, being sensitive to theory agnosticism I was able to decentre a focus on food production to give space to a multiple lens of enquiry including exploring built space, creative actions and the everyday. Such an approach is described by Highmore in relation to de Certeau as the necessity "to see the object of observation outside of the frame that has already been made for it. To let the object bite back, to de-pacify the object, what is required is a disrupted and disrupting form of attention; a derailing of observation." (Highmore, 2006, p.7).

#### 3.1.4 Challenges

The challenge with being sensitive to a constructivist grounded theory approach is that I had substantial experience and knowledge about urban agriculture and food-growing generally through previous research and peer review publication (Tomkins, 2012a, Tomkins, 2012b). I had both imagined and calculated the potential for food-growing in these environments and to a large extent based my decision to commit to a PhD in order to further my understanding of food-growing practices in these landscapes (Tomkins, 2006). I was well aware of land availability in cities particularly around housing estates for example and knew that in the broader sense accessing this land would be crucial for community food gardens (Tomkins, 2009a).

Furthermore, during subsequent analysis I felt an approach via constructivist grounded theory did not progress the research any further than that described by participant observation, which was able to capture "all kinds of unarticulated and half-articulated signs – the gaze that is a second too long, the gesture, the tone, the

intonation, the word used in a special way, the language games” (Thomas and James, 2006, p.785). Therefore, while a sensitivity to constructivist grounded theory enabled me to participate with empathy it did not aid my analysis in the same way that hermeneutic phenomenology does, which aims to bring researcher and research closer together when interpreting conversation for instance.

### 3.1.5 Using multiple case studies

The collectivisation of the case studies happened around the research concern; exploring the phenomena of place-based community food gardening. Clarke writes that multi-site research does not mean researching all sites equally in trying to comprehend the phenomena, but rather “living with the tension between density and chaos that characterizes multisite work” as part of the overall research experience (Clarke, 2005, p.166). Clarke also argues that multi-site work “brings us closer to the messy complexities that constitute “life itself”, yet this “places additional burdens of design, data gathering, analysis and accountability” (Clarke, 2005 p.171). She goes on to qualify this process by saying that this process helps to remind ourselves that all knowledge and process is incomplete and temporary.

Principally, the multiple site method arrived because the object of study as witnessed in the scoping stage was not a singular static subject but various, manifold, and evolving. As Marcus writes, methods should opportunistically trace “a complex cultural phenomenon ... that turns out to be contingent and malleable as one traces it” (Marcus, 1995, p.96). Indeed, the method of bringing case studies into research was opportunistic through institutions, individuals and word of mouth. The results therefore, need to move away from reporting on the study of a case, to look at the essential meaning of the phenomena common to multiple cases being studied. Again this was something that was being developed in the scoping phase but without enough data to constitute primary research.

Whilst researching community food gardens I would experience a rolling from one to the next where “individual cases in the collection may or may not be known in advance to manifest some common characteristic ... They are chosen because it is believed that understanding them will lead to better understanding, perhaps better theorising”(Stake, 2005, p.446). This builds on the urban agriculture research of Premat who notes that the “use of a multi-sited ethnographic approach to the study

of UA [urban agriculture] constitutes a methodological innovation in a field that has usually focused on isolated sites and actors, rather than on the interrelationship between these as part of a cultural system” (Premat, 2005, p.159).

This was particularly apt considering De Beauvoir gardeners never materialised beyond discussion and planning yet still presented vital data to illuminate the process of phenomena. Moreover, the use of case study method enables researchers to find what Stake (2005, pp.450- 452) calls “interactivity” and connectedness between the individuals participating in case study while transferring the experiences of the participants to the reader through the development of a story or stories that offer description of “the case in sufficient descriptive narrative so that readers can experience these happenings vicariously and draw their own conclusions”.

Following the advice of Stake, a case study is not defined by a method but its focus of interest. While the case studies use the edge of the housing estate to define its “boundedness” (Stake, 2005 p.444), the physical edge cannot delimit the research because other environmental and social factors, and discourses create new soft beginnings to research practice far beyond the estate. Further I can identify that the case studies are instrumental collective case studies: instrumental in that “the case is of secondary interest, it plays a supportive role, and it facilitates our understanding of something else” (Stake, 2005 p.445). For example, we are not interested in the case study to reach an ethnographic output that describes the culture of the gardeners, rather the case study approach provides a table onto which we can place the various components of the research, which can be used to throw light on theory developments or central concerns which in this research project are the relationship between food gardening, the built environment and dwelling.

Additionally, instrumental cases do not rely on a prior hypotheses to develop intrinsic themes; rather case study themes can emerge during the course of data collection and analyses in a continual process of interpreting and reinterpreting data. The use of case study method enables researchers to find “interactivity” (Stake, 2005 p.452) and connectedness between the individuals participating in case study while transferring the experiences of the participants to the reader through the development of a story or stories that describe the cases.

Below I present a discussion on the selection process of the six estates as well as an overview of the main six community food gardens.

### 3.1.6 Primary research case studies

I started the primary data collection for this research project through an initial engagement with De Beauvoir estate in February 2010 and the end of primary data was marked by the end of a growing season in September 2010. The six case study estates are identified as De Beauvoir estate, St John's estate, and Haberdasher estate, all in the borough of Hackney. Brownfield estate and Lansbury estate are in Tower Hamlets, and Brooks Estate is in Newham (table 1). While the six estates have their own 'official' names as listed above, each garden chose a particular moniker, and where appropriate I have used this new name to refer to gardens. For instance Brooks Estate is referred to throughout using the argot 'Dirty Hands'.

All six gardens had differing formation processes and start dates (see table 1 Date est' column) and not all engaged immediately with funding such as Capital Growth. For example, Brooks estate garden began as a self-started garden by local resident Alison Skeet with subsequent part funding from Capital Growth. These differing agents range from Capital Growth [n= 4], Well London and Poplar HARCA<sup>9</sup> [n=1], to artists, architects, and landscape architects [n=4]. Table 1 below, details the name, date established (date est'), funding route, how I was introduced to the gardeners (recruitment), and the community name used by gardeners.

**Table 1: The six primary case studies**

Estate	Date est'	Funding	Recruitment	Community names
De Beauvoir	N/A	N/A	Personal introduction	De Beauvoir Gardeners
St John's	March 2010	CG	Own invitation	St John's Estate Community Kitchen Garden
Haberdasher	March 2009	CG	via CG volunteering	Haberdasher TRA Gardening Club project
Lansbury	June 2008	WL	via CG volunteering	Lansbury Gardens
Brownfield	April 2010	CG	Personal introduction	Greening Brownfield
Brooks	March 2008	CG (2009)	via CG volunteering	Dirty Hands

Key: CG: Capital Growth; WL: Well London; PH: Poplar HARCA; N/A: not applicable; TRA: Tenants and Residents Association.

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<sup>9</sup> Poplar HARCA is a local housing association.



The six community food gardens also became part of primary research at different times through the primary research period. As discussed in chapter one (1.7), I began primary research in February 2010 by contacting Capital Growth, a London campaign that promotes and supports community food gardens. Launched in October 2008 and backed by lottery funds and the Mayor of London (Boris Johnson), its stated aim is to support “2,012 new community food-growing spaces in London by 2012” (Sustain, 2010). This launch date was also coincided with the Garden in the Sky project being installed on the Croydon multi-storey car park (see chapter one 1.6). Therefore Capital Growth was not in existence during 2008 and just developing in 2009 at which time I had suspended studies for personal reasons<sup>10</sup>.

While Capital Growth is not the only food-growing initiative in London, it is the largest, and most public, with over 2,012 food gardens at the start of 2013 (Sustain, 2010). Capital Growth was a difficult entity to research because it was a live campaign, and it has a political dimension due to support from the Mayor of London. When I started primary research, three out of the six gardens that became my case studies, had received Capital Growth funding, with one coming into the scheme while I was participating as a gardener. Most gardens received funding from multiple sources and I do not consider the thesis to be a comment on the overall success or failure of central funding for these types of projects. My recognition of funding bodies is to account for the stimulus in the initiation of community food gardens, to shed greater understanding of where the heat is being generated and therefore what causes, motivates, affects, and produces practice. This had been mentioned in literature (Baker, 2004) but remained undeveloped. My involvement with Capital Growth was three-fold. Firstly I went to Capital Growth public meetings in order to make connections with gardening groups, secondly I became a volunteer Capital Growth site inspector during 2010, and thirdly, during 2011 and 2012 I was employed to run Capital Bee, the beekeeping campaign for Capital Growth.

Being a volunteer and working for the organisation gave me access to grant applications (460 at the time) from communities. I was able therefore to examine community gardens through residents’ own descriptions of their gardens beginning the data collection process. This presents an example of where constructivist

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<sup>10</sup> I had to suspend studies in October 2008 for one year due to family issues.

grounded theory as a method becomes problematic because my everyday work brought me into contact with direct knowledge yet through the agnostic approach I needed to suspend belief until I experienced this data in the field. For example, many of the applicants from social housing groups specifically articulated a sense of failure in the initial and subsequent urban planning processes for their housing estates because it has created ‘derelict’, ‘blank’ or ‘disused’ spaces approximate to where they live. While these texts became my first insight into how residents felt about the urban spaces around them, I did not impose this as a direct line of questioning.

I was specifically looking for community gardens based around housing because, as identified in the literature review, there was an emerging central concern about the relationship between spatial production, dwelling and practice. This was helped by Firth et al. drawing a distinction between “place-based” practices and “interest-based gardens”, with the former being territorially positioned (Firth et al., 2011). It seemed therefore that examining housing, particularly planned housing estates, and food-growing would enable an investigation of how people might create space as part of their everyday life, through a landscape that was indelibly linked to a domestic landscape.

The researching of community food gardens in London brought the research much closer to home, within easy access of where I lived on the Tower Hamlets/Hackney borders meaning that I could respond quickly to possible gardening requests and events. During this process, I did not set a minimum or maximum number of spaces I was seeking, a required number of interviewees, or particular gender balance. This was in part due to my awareness of the emerging nature of the gardens that it might be too restrictive to address specific issues given the dearth of case studies. I assumed that the sites would become self-selecting dependant on residents inviting me to “hang-out”, chat, and garden and therefore the number would decrease. In other words I had no way to direct this part of the process by forcing gardeners to allow me to research them through participation. This is partly due to the need to be seen not as a researcher, academic or simply an outsider but as someone who shares the aims aspirations, and frustrations of residents; I needed to be welcomed and assume the role of gardener. Following this, some gardeners never returned my calls

after my initial site visit or stated that they did not want to be part of research and were therefore ruled out from research.

As visits progressed, I attempted to bring sites into the research, assuming that some would opt out, others might yield too little data to be useful, and others would become more dominant. During this month, as the multiple case studies began to coalesce, I soon realised that these gardens were at differing stages; some people were still talking, others had keys to spaces but no infrastructure, two were building and others were established. Together they presented a range of practice that explored a shifting temporal and physical emphasis to phenomena proving repeat sampling and refinement of complex and emerging cultural practice. Therefore, once I was committed to investigating community food gardens on London housing estates, the research began in earnest; the spring period (2010) was characterised by a sense of commitment to gardening as much as possible, recording experience initially in field notes and through photographs where appropriate. Overall I decided not to delimit the research through the quantity of case studies. Instead, I decided on a phenological measure of a growing ‘season’ to mark its end. I did this because previous scoping research indicated that growers tended to disperse once the summer ends, due to summer holidays and schools return. Therefore, while the start of this process was opened ended, the finish was more precise, set as September 25<sup>th</sup>, 2010<sup>11</sup>.

I took the view that developing a rapport with participants, over a few weeks or months, would inform a decision on the necessary amount of data collection needed within a site (Charmaz, 2006). This might be a few months, combined with several key informants interviews, or a few weeks, or repeated interviews of one key informant; the priority was placed on developing the relationship with the residents and learning about their lives, rather than a “smash and grab” approach (Charmaz, 2006, p.19), or the long immersion favoured by ethnographers. Table 2 shows the sixteen housing estates initially visited during January - May 2010. The sites in grey became the primary research projects.

**Table 2: Sixteen initial site visits**

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<sup>11</sup> On a personal note our second child was due the 26<sup>th</sup> September, so I would have to cease research at least two days before, taking six-months leave.

Site	Site	Project title	Borough	Estate
1	CG	Greening Brownfield	Tower Hamlets	Brownfield
2	CG	Besford & Dinmont Greens	Tower Hamlets	Besford & Dinmont
3	IN	LansburyGardeners	Tower Hamlets	Lansbury
4	CG	Styles allotments	Southwark	Styles House
5	CG	The Hamlet 'Panhandle' Project	Southwark	Pan Handle
6	CG	Purbrook	Southwark	Purbrook
7	IN	Dirty Hands	Newham	Brooks Estate
8	CG	Clare Allotments	Lewisham	Not Specified
9	CG	Garden of Aden	Hackney	Not Specified
10	CG	Smalley Road Estate Community Allotment Project	Hackney	Smalley Road
11	CG	Haberdasher Tenants and Residents Association Gardening Club project	Hackney	Haberdasher
12	CG	St John's Estate Community Kitchen Garden	Hackney	St Johns
13	NHS	Somerford and Shacklewell Micro Allotment Project	Hackney	Somerford and Shacklewell
14	CG	Aspland and Marcon Food-growing Project	Hackney	Aspland and Marcon
15	IN	De Beauvoir gardening group	Hackney	De Beauvoir estate
16	CG	Edible Golden Lane	City of London	Edible Golden

Key: Funding: CG, Capital Growth: IN, Independent funding: NHS, National Health Service.

At the time that I joined Capital Growth as a volunteer (12th March 2010), there were 460 community food garden sites registered. I was assigned 34 site visits as part of the voluntary post (see appendix 7.4). Yet because of the emphasis on estate-based gardens, schools, offices, or institutions, such as the NHS<sup>12</sup>, were eliminated from this list leaving sixteen sites (table 2). I specifically requested sites in the boroughs of Hackney, Tower Hamlets, Southwark, Newham, City of London and Lewisham, as this was close to my residence and within 20-30 minutes either by foot or overground. As discussed, the initial sixteen case studies were self-selecting and the remaining six case studies in table 2, identified in grey, are considered the primary sites for this research.

The communal gardens all have differing timelines for their creation, with the earliest, Brooks estate (known as the 'Dirty Hands') beginning in March 2008. At the time of research (2010) De Beauvoir gardeners were still negotiating the garden's possible inception (which never actually materialised), while Brownfield and St John's estate both physically emerged during the research period. In the

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<sup>12</sup> National Health Service

appendix (7.8), I present a short summary description of each site. As an introduction for the reader, six images of the estates are included below (figures. 5 – 10). These images are introductory in that it is impossible to capture the estates as a single image but the intention is to give the reader some visual indicators of built form. Other images of the estate gardens are also used throughout the thesis.



**Figure 5 (left): View across De Beauvoir estate showing shopping precinct**

**Figure 6 (right): St John's estate garden and low-rise blocks**



**Figure 7 (left): Part of Haberdasher estate garden and adjoining street**

**Figure 8 (right): Brownfield estate garden under construction**



**Figure 9 (left): Lansbury estate community garden**

**Figure 10 (right): Dirty Hands garden with a view towards the estate**

### 3.1.7 Summary

Section one of this chapter outlined the research approach. I follow an approach through participant observation as a general qualitative method, while also being aware of some of the discussion of constructivist grounded theory and hermeneutic phenomenology that provide extra sensitivity to imposing theory too readily, as well as emphasising bodily engagement. In using participant observation, I seek to understand situated phenomena through participating with residents as gardeners. Ingold is relevant to this discussion, writing that we need an “ontology that assigns primacy to processes of formation as against their final products, and to flows and transformations of materials as against states of matter” (Ingold, 2000, p.3), something exemplified by the ongoing and never complete practice of gardening (Burchardt, 2011). However, the long immersion in the field favoured by ethnographers was approached as participatory qualitative methodology where there is no strict methodology to follow (Sohng, 2005). The following section will explore the primary research sites, my approach to multiple case studies followed by a longer discussion on data collection, analysis, and positionality.

This section also discussed why these case studies were chosen in relationship to the central concerns of the research: communal food gardening within an everyday place-based production. Central to the research is following the phenomena of food growing, something culturally complex, presenting itself with differing emphasis throughout locations. Multiple sites therefore do not weaken the research but provide the opportunity to repeatedly experience practice in what is still a developing situation in the UK. Section 3.2 below will detail how the data was collected from these sites, its analysis, interpretation, and approach to positioning myself within research and how I reflected on this position.

## **3.2 Section two: Data, analysis, and positionality**

### 3.2.1 Approach to data collection

My approach to method prioritised the participation or hanging-out with gardeners, placing prominence on the need to participate and collect interviews with residents. I also used field notes to record experiences, describe events and encounters, as well as some photography. As the participation continued, so did the conversations with residents. As I became familiar, we shared meal times or I was invited to their

homes; therefore barriers fell and “mere chats” became more involved conversations (Van Manen, 1990, p.97). Furthermore, there was a need to seize the right moment to ask for an interview, so that there was not too much pressure to recall via note taking (always done after a participation period). Accordingly, some interviews were done with only a short amount of participation (two gardening sessions in the case of St John’s estate), or up to two months with De Beauvoir estate.

The overall built environment of estates was not explicitly researched unless the residents brought up the issue during participation or in interview. In the case of Brownfield estate this was an issue, as it was a grade II listed building and participants were generally aware that Erno Goldfinger was the architect. Also, De Beauvoir estate housed the Hackney local history library where I would sometimes wait if residents were not around. This gave me access to extant text on the history of the estate. I was comfortable with this serendipity and not too concerned with the need to match such research on all estates, requiring explicit trips to multiple local libraries.

Following this, while field notes, interviews, and photography were common to all studies, I did not impose on the research a need for repetition and equivalence of data gathering across all sites (Clarke, 2005). Each site was approached on its own merit, something that was learnt during the scoping stage, namely the bricoleur, allowing for differing research experiences to be collated (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005).

### 3.2.2 Data collection and data gathering

There are multiple meanings to the concept of data. Denzin and Lincoln (2005, p.25) write that data can be considered as both the generation and collection of ‘empirical materials’, such as “‘interviewing, direct observation, the analysis of artefacts, documents, and cultural records ... and personal experience’”. Birks and Miles (2011) contrast the *collecting* of data, and the *generating* of data; the former being derived from assumed static sources that are researched ‘on’ and the latter characterised by the researcher being engaging in participation research and creating a data source. For Van Manen (1990, p.53), the term ‘data’ has ambiguities, whether one is talking of ‘gathering’ or ‘collecting’ because of the positivist associations of the term, qualifying this by writing that “it is not entirely wrong to say that the

methods of ... interviewing, close observation, etc., involve the collection or gathering of data”. Charmaz (2006 p.16) reminding us that “people construct data”, being first-hand data, interviews, or reading existing documents, and to be wary of who is constructing data that is brought into research projects, the former being called elicited texts (co-produced), the latter extant texts (constructed by others).

Grant applications made by gardening groups to Capital Growth included a 300-word description from residents about their estate – an example of extant data which I had access to, occasionally referring to them in the empirical chapters. These texts became the first data to be collected and this discourse was read initially, prior to meeting residents. In this research project I use both extant (documents) and elicited text (interviews) in direct relationship to participants to gain responses and therefore subsequently generate data. Extant text includes the architectural plans of an estate, existing photographs from archives, or published leaflets about food-growing projects. Overall I was wary of being too presumptive from the reading of extant texts, wanting to leave my research as sensitive as possible to direct experience and the co-elicited data. Furthermore, I used field notes to record experiential data, which ranged from fact, dates and times, to interactions with participants, including personal reflection on the nature of being involved with qualitative research practices.

Therefore, data collection becomes heuristic, contemporary, momentary and sometimes involved in ephemeral data. For example, an unplanned conversation in the street, or a glimpse of a poster on a wall, taking a walk, or the smell of compost. In the case of De Beauvoir estate, I looked through a large collection of historical data such as plans, photographs and council documents, which had no equivalent on other estates. Furthermore, I did not seek parity of data collection across sites, allowing each case study to present its own data. This meant that I was careful not to place demand on the participation that it needed to give me certain types of data but instead allowed the case studies to present their own situation to me.

### 3.2.3 Research as continual process

Using data to guide research and develop ongoing aims echoes the early discussion regarding Schmuck who writes of participatory research involving, “spirals and cycles of research, collecting data, analysis, reflecting, planning, acting, and



collecting data again” (Schmuck, 2009, p.1). However, sometimes one took priority over the other, when for example, I was in a situation where no gardening was taking place; then often the conversations or observation might focus on the tangential social process of the food gardening such as sheltering from the rain. However, while in the garden the focus of the research might switch to understanding the phenomenological and sensory meaning, for example, how cold we were, or our responses to the tactility of touching the soil (Carolan, 2007).

Furthermore, data could be collected, described, analysed, interpreted, and written about all in one day, or the process could have gaps of several days forced by either a work schedule or the need to visit further sites. This is research as process: the sustained search for phenomena and participation, whereby I blended the role of researcher with subject, to witness at first hand what was “demanded by the “things themselves”” (Heidegger, 1978, p.73). As Van Manen reminds us from the viewpoint of phenomenology, we research others to become “in-formed, shaped or enriched” (Van Manen, 1990, p.62). Also, a researcher should better clarify the essential nature of the phenomenon “and of making explicit the structure of the lived experience” from the viewpoint of those that live the experience (Van Manen, 1990, p.77).

#### 3.2.4 Interviews, field notes, and artefacts

As the primary research began in March 2010, field notes were used to record the day’s events, written when I had time alone. I also collected leaflets, took photographs, made phone calls, went to meetings, researched local history libraries, and took walks around estates. This wide-net approach to research was needed, firstly because of the temporal nature of the research, but secondly, it reconciled the need to constantly collect data, reflect, and conceptualise. Field notes tended to dominate during the process, kept as a diary, noting conversations, dates, and ongoing reflections. Ultimately, the participant process would lead to an interview with gardeners. These interviews were semi-structured with me starting the conversation by asking residents to talk about the garden, asking why food-growing? All interviewees were presented with a participant information sheet (appendix 7.6) and asked to sign a consent form (appendix 7.7). I would state that this question was the only one I decided to ask to all interviewees in advance. This was because I wanted to understand the key concern of food within the context of practice and

explore if in fact the ‘food’ in ‘community food garden’ was vital or dispensable. If it were the latter, then I would be dealing with community gardens. The rest of the interview was conversational, covering topics we had discussed while in the garden, or particular issues that had emerged.

Therefore, common to participatory interviews, the starting point was often conversational, being careful not to direct the interview. Overall, 17 residents were interviewed; some several times, producing 36 interviews in total (see appendix 7.5). The age range was not collected but the gender division was ten women to seven male gardeners. The interviews also happened at different stages of the process, for instance, some of the De Beauvoir estate interviews happened early on because the gardening group were still discussing potential ideas and was not going to start the gardening in 2010, raising concerns they might disband.

By contrast, I interviewed Lansbury gardeners later since they were a regular group with most gardeners attending weekly. At Haberdasher estate, I conducted several interviews with a single gardener, Alison; regular attendance by other gardeners was low and Alison and I therefore had a lot of time to talk. Not all interviews happened in the garden or on the estate because the gardening days were busy and the individuals dispersed quickly from the site as the sessions finished. I had to make specific arrangements to conduct three interviews at places of work meaning that the conversations were less immediate and contextualised in the garden and its phenology. I was not too concerned by this because it reflects not only the nature of participation which does not follow a strict design research brief but also that research is a process along with everyday life in general; it is contingent and distracted (Highmore, 2011).

Davies notes that “participant observers may collect life histories, do surveys, take photographs and videos, and so forth” (Davies, 1999, p.71). I found photography to be a useful tool for recall and less intrusive than notebooks. However, participants seemed to rarely take photographs of their everyday gardening practices and gardeners sometimes requested pictures of them holding vegetables or standing next to their raised beds. I was happy to do this but mindful of how it set me apart from the others in the group. The photographs were also useful as a form of field notes, capturing the *mise-en-scène* of participants within the landscape in an instant. I

would also argue that photographs place greater emphasis on the moment captured rather than a fuller picture contextualised within field notes for example.

Participation therefore could not form part of a strict research design because it is largely dictated by residents' own gardening schedules and their willingness to share communications such as replying to phone calls, emails, or text messaging.

Consequently, there was no sustained immersion in the field, favoured by ethnographers (Tedlock, 2005), but a dipping in and out, as the gardeners came together to form a 'community' before they disappeared home. This dispersal of community delimits the object of study in two ways. Firstly, I wasn't privy to some of the discussions that might happen outside of the gardening event, and secondly there was no 'community' (and therefore ethnos) to study other than at times set by the participants. This should not be seen as a limitation of the study but intrinsic to it, congruent with not imposing theory but waiting for participatory events to unfold.

### 3.2.5 Transcription, analysis and interpretation

Aware of Wolcott's discussion on the need to transform "unruly experience into an authoritative written account" (Wolcott, 1994, p.10), I began early on in the research to write up field notes and listing key words and thematic headings for the experiences (table 3).

**Table 3: Example of data analysis: in progress key words and thematic headings**

	Keywords (A-Z)	Sample theme (lived experience)	Paragraph (making plans)	Paragraph (resources)	Paragraph (performance)
1	Allotment	Routes	Routes		
2	Barriers	Community			
3	Building	Making			
4	Children	Memory			Memory
5	Climate change	Tactile		Tactile	Tactile
6	Community	View			View
		Visceral			Visceral
		Outside			
		Sovereignty	Sovereignty	Sovereignty	
~	~~~~~	Water		Water	
		Weather		Soil	Weather
		Soil			
		Walking	Walking		
59	Visceral	Signs	Signs		
60	Water				
61	Weather				
62	Work				

As Coffey and Atkinson write: “The process of analysis should not be seen as a distinct stage of research; rather it is a reflective activity should inform data collection, writing, further data collection, and so forth” (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996, p.6). I visualised the field notes as a washing line spreading in many directions, from which the images, conversations, and notes for example were hung. This echoes, Denzin and Lincoln who talk of the need to see research emerging as “a meaningful emotional whole, as if at a glance, all at once” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008, p.6).

While it was clear there were repetitions and themes developing during the research, I was hesitant to move on to abstract analysis too early, preferring to treat the data as something that could enunciate its own story (Wolcott, 1994). This early hesitancy relates to the difficulty in pacing oneself when doing participant observation, where it is difficult to foresee an end point and also due to the personal nature of the participation with residents. Each interview file was labelled with the name of the estate, initial of interviewee and date of interview (BF\_E\_16/09/10). In the empirical chapters quotes from residents are cited using the following: [name\_interview number\_estate]. So for example, [Cindy\_01\_De Beauvoir gardeners] refers to Cindy, her first interview, De Beauvoir Gardeners. During 2011, I transcribed all interview using ExpressScribe<sup>13</sup> software (figure 11).

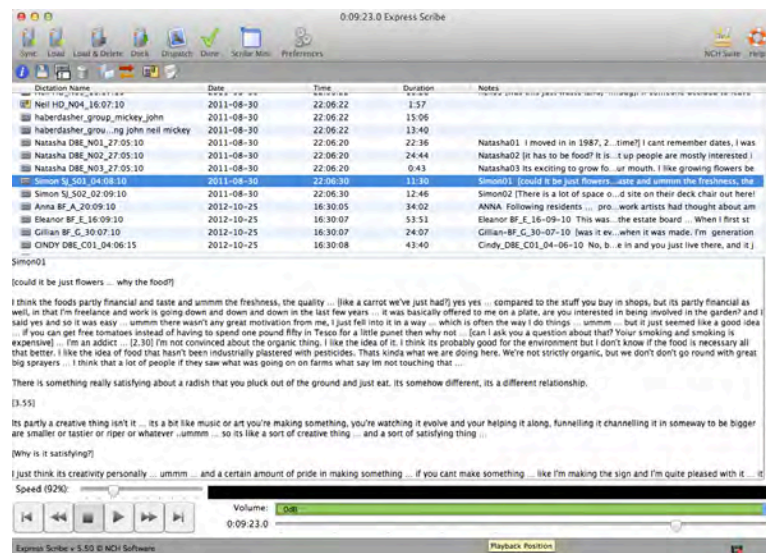


Figure 11: Screenshot of ExpressScribe software

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.expressscribe.co.uk/>

This software gave me playback control over interviews, enabling simultaneous transcription. I then developed an excel document where I listed key words, themes, and paragraph headings to enable writing to develop alongside analysis (table 3). During this process I was mindful of Wolcott who states “qualitative researchers need to be storytellers ... ground[ing] their reflections in observed experience” (Wolcott, 1994, p.17). Wolcott’s statement on the use of storytelling reflects the need to achieve a balance between theorising our experience as well as theorising our concepts and ideas. As Glover writes:

“Fundamental to any narrative inquiry is the assumption that people socially construct their experiences through the stories they tell. In so doing, individuals use plot to understand and describe the relationship among the events they experience and choices they make in their lives” (Glover, 2004, p.147).

Thus the task at hand is the “reconstruction of social phenomena ... fashion[ed] out of or transactions with others” (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996, p.108). Discourse involves the way people create and interpret ideas about practice, both the practice they are involved with and existing practices. As Jørgensen and Phillips (2002, p.1) write discourse is “a particular way of talking about and understanding the world (or an aspect of the world)”, specifically in this context it refers to how residents, either individually or communally communicate ideas, concepts and stories about food gardening where an analysis of discourse looks at what people say about a particular social practice. Such discourse may specifically revolve around growing food but also focus on space and the everyday often not considered by quantitative research. As Potter writes, discourse analysis “is concerned with talk and texts as social practices ... concern with action, construction and variability ... one of the principal aims of discourse studies is to reveal the operation of these constructive processes” (Potter and Wetherell, 1994, p.48).

Consequently, while I was becoming aware of repeated themes I was also writing descriptively, telling the idiosyncratic story of the research process; prioritising the people within the landscape, recounting what happened to individuals or within groups rather than needing coded repetition to validate experience. Table 3 therefore represent a way for me to gain sign posts back into the interview, repeated listening

to the gardeners talk. This process was something I had become familiar with during a 10-year period as a documentary editor. For example, as I repeatedly read through transcripts I would begin to edit interviews into 'chunks', incorporating a reflection within the literature cited and across other interviews creating paragraphs and longer sections of writing.

This follows Barnacle's (2001, p.22) comment on coding that "the hermeneutic conviction is however that coding, of itself, does not necessarily lead to understanding or insight; rather, the revelatory power of research is animated by the researcher's power of "observation, reflection and judgement". As these themes emerged I would start to write paragraphs, which explored these themes relevant to sensitivity gained through the literature review. There was no measurable quantity for thematic repetitions but a sense of importance grew from my interpretation of how much emphasis residents placed on the activity but also reflecting on my own stand point when I was drawn to issues experientially, through literature, and the theoretical position of Lefebvre's spatial production and the everyday. These emerging themes can be thought of as theoretical sampling advanced by grounded theory method. Charmaz for example writes that theoretical sampling can be used to "elaborate and refine" emerging categories (Charmaz, 2006, p.96).

As experiences began to be categorised through experiential practice in the field, I began "seeking and collecting pertinent data to elaborate and refine categories" in the emerging theory, and stories (Clarke, 2005, p.96). In this way categories emerged within, as well as across case studies, expanding as data collected around them until they became saturated. This is provided by analysis and description through writing, recounting the journey the researcher went on. This is more than just describing the digging – both for vegetables and community – that went on during research. Rather, the research collects experiences or, as mentioned above, what Denzin and Lincoln (2005 p.4) call the "bricoles" or bits and pieces of research. These bricoles are described by Clarke (2005 p.166) as "complicated, impure, messy, full of different kinds of "stuff" that the research must somehow handle – rather like life itself", describing the researcher's journey as having a travelling metaphor, where knowledge consists of gathering dissimilar discourse and multiple fragments. Similarly, Okely describes this being like "a surrealist ... open to objets trouvés" which "inevitably affects the subsequent interpretation and analysis" (Okely, 1994,

p.19). The effect is the requirements to stitch together the data, which for clear reasons will not fit into neat tables of comparative data, “reconstructing ... answers as new stories to be told of his or her adventures” (Clarke, 2005, p.166).

I structured the three empirical chapters around a timeline of my involvement with the six gardens; the ‘adventure’ of research encompassed estates that were debating (De Beauvoir gardeners) and emerging (Greening Brownfield), gardens that were initiating a physical stage (St John’s community kitchen garden), and others that were established (Haberdasher estate, Lansbury gardeners , Dirty Hands). This also matches Lefebvre’s triangulation of lived-conceived-perceived whereby the data in table 3 became broadly grouped around these subject areas. While clearly this triangulation is meant to apply constantly, yet unevenly, within the production of space, I began to extract from the data in the excel sheets experiences that related specifically to the everyday (lived), material space (perceived), and narrative of formation (transforming conceived space).

### 3.2.6 Reflexivity

Reflexivity and positionality remind the researcher that they have a position in relationship to the subject being researched and that they should reflect on that position both while conducting research and during analysis and interpretation. This specifically makes reference to the co-construction of meaning and knowledge but also to the taking part in discourse and the joint building of material and social spaces necessary for gardening. Reflecting on one’s involvement “is the process that involves conscious self-reflection on the part of researchers to make explicit their potential influences on the research process” (Hennink et al., 2011, p.19).

Davies writes that “reflexivity, broadly defined, means a turning back on oneself, a process of self-reference” (Davies, 1999, p.4), while Charmaz adds, “we are not passive receptacles into which data are poured ... researchers, not participants, are obligated to be reflexive about what we bring to the scene, what we see, and how we see it” (Charmaz, 2006, p.15).

Thus we are reminded of our responsibility as a researcher, “as an actor, designer, interpreter, writer, co-constructor of data, ultimate arbitrator of the accounts proffered” and that we are “accountable for those accounts” (Clarke, 2005, p.12). This is certainly true when researchers participate and, “use their social selves as

their primary research tools” (Hume and Mulcock, 2004, p.xvii). This positions the researcher at the core of the research project requiring continual appreciation and evaluation of the how they might influence or contribute to the research process and therefore the construction of knowledge. Furthermore, I bring prejudices, interests, and my own sense of wonder to research that need to find some way to be accounted for.

Reflection should also be aimed at understanding how participation might have influenced the investigation of the phenomena of food gardening within and across sites. This is something that can happen both in the field and during analysis (Bold, 2012). For example, creating the object of my own research by influencing the practice too heavily, thus slipping into action research, or informing residents about my ongoing research therefore influencing any responses they might give me during an interview or in my field notes.

Reflecting on this process means acknowledging that some categories were advanced because they had a personal resonance and that other categories might have had less attention because as a (male adult) researcher I was blind to them. One obvious example was that I needed to take my elder daughter on research trips during weekends, increasing my sensitivity to certain childlike qualities of food gardening. What surfaced from this instance, was empathy towards the playful aspect of landscape as discussed by Stevens (2007).

During the analysis process there was a strong need to continue taking account of how I was handling data and continuing to reflect on my position within research. By contrast with the participation of gardening, writing is more of a solitary process. I would state that the regular listening to interviews, as part of cross checking quotes, grounded me and gave me a sense of responsibility that I was describing the actions of gardens empathetically. This was particularly heightened when I heard of the sudden death of one gardener who was a key informant. Listening to her voice reminded me that she would be unable to ever respond to my analysis and descriptions of her actions and that likewise I should not treat my other interviews as if they were ‘dead’ in the sense of no longer having voices. I had remained in contact with many gardeners because of my employment at Sustain (Capital Growth), and the intention is for gardeners to be able to read the thesis once complete.



### 3.2.7 Postionality

Clarke asks, “Who is the researcher? How is who they are consequential?” (Clarke, 2005 p.12). Within the research project I assumed several different roles. Firstly the case studies where I partly approached as volunteer site visitor for Capital Growth, and others where I requested permission to participate stating that I was doing academic research. Both of these positioned me as an authority within the gardening group and I was often introduced as such to new gardeners. This was unavoidable as I was not a resident. What I was aiming for was not for people to forget I was doing research but to place the practice of gardening at the forefront of our engagement. I took time to explain to residents who I was and how I was conducting my research, stressing I might want an interview but that initially I was interested in participation (See appendix 7.7 for participation consent forms). Yet, gardening is a manual process, and another pair of hands is always welcome.

There is also the issue that my immersion in the field was temporal often brief, rather than the prolonged immersion favoured by ethnographers, and while I lived close I don’t live on these estates, meaning that my participation was marked by a need to separate and then rejoin the community. Hume and Mulcock attest to the “difficult, often emotionally ‘dirty’ work” of participant observation, stressing that while this provides for a meaningful result, the process of befriending and embroiling yourself in peoples’ personal lives is tiring, especially across multiple sites. (Hume and Mulcock, 2004 p.xvii).

During analysis, where I spent days alone with data, I found it harder to keep myself positioned as both gardener and researcher. There was a tendency to want to write more in the abstract while in the library than when in the field. Hermeneutic phenomenology becomes a useful approach in that it acts as a reminder to always see meaning though what Gadamer describes as a fusion between translator and gardener, which also includes a self-translation (Gadamer, 2004). The phenomenological approach would then further require me to respect those that spoke of their experiences, in their original context, even if my interpretation of the experiences would require me to link this to the wider subject of “the built environment within which social events and encounters take place” (Atkinson et al., 2008, p.44). Lefebvre warns of the dominance of imposing the norm of fetishised abstraction that “detaches the pure form from its impure content — from lived time,

everyday time, and from bodies with their opacity and solidity, their warmth,” (Lefebvre, 1991b, p.97). I also had an ongoing experience through my part-time employment at Sustain, of setting up community beekeeping projects as part of Capital Growth, which acted as a constant reminder of the lived experience as I switch bi-weekly between community work and writing.

Dealing with issues of participation, positionality and reflexivity means understanding one’s changing role within the research project, not as a problem but as part of the process. This presents challenges as discussed above. Dealing with such challenges did not mean walking away from situations but allowing the live performance to take its course and noting if I felt that the event would not be congruent with my methodological stance. This is important when looking to develop and elaborate categories in research (Charmaz, 2006).

### **3.3 Summary**

This chapter extends the initial discussion on methodological implications in chapter two with an in-depth discussion of participant observation, and influencing methods of hermeneutic phenomenology and constructivist grounded theory. Community gardening is a collective process that involves discussion, consensus, and cooperation. Sharing these local spaces and social experience involves the co-creation of things and moments relevant to a participant observation approach. Within data collection I clarify that process of constant data collection without the need for congruity between differing gardens, emphasising that this research is not led by case study but the phenomenon. I also emphasis that my interpretation of results is based on the need to reconstruct data as an academic process but also tell the stories of those I researched.

The following three chapters will report on the results of the research, its analysis, and discussion. Each chapter looks at a different thematic response to the case studies, stitching together the differing data collected. Chapter four, entitled “Transforming, contesting, and imagining space”, looks at how food gardens emerge in relation to discourse and how this influences subsequent practice. Chapter five, entitled “Making spaces for food”, will present the result relative to a discussion on co-authorship of the built environment through food gardening. Chapter six, entitled “Embodiment, enacting, and harvesting”, will examine more the corporeal aspect of

food gardening in cities, looking at both what it means for gardeners to perform in public spaces, but also reflecting on what it means for me as a researcher.

## **Chapter four**

### **Transforming, contesting, and imagining space**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter explores the longer narrative and process of garden formation, examining the built space and landscape around housing, its transformation and change, and the imaginations of residents. The main findings of this chapter are that landscape, the main resource necessary for urban agriculture is largely an invisible space for residents. The results show that in order for this landscape to become useful for food gardening, it needs to go through a transformative process. This is almost entirely supplied by funding opportunities, sympathetic artists, council regeneration projects or non-government organisations, rather than a necessity to grow food. Once transformation of landscape has been mooted or experienced, residents begin to access the sometimes long imagined desires and frustrations to participate and contribute in creating public spaces around the estates.

The research reveals that the urban form of the community food garden, while it might offer the opportunity to produce food, also offers the chance to create space and social interaction. Food growing is not an abstract, disembodied concept but one that places the residents themselves at the core of practice; it cannot but be sustained without their ongoing presence. This chapter contributes to the thesis argument by demonstrating that an understanding of control over space is essential for food production to commence but also one that displaced food as a central concern. I have termed this spatial sovereignty in recognition that control over space needs to be linked to food sovereignty and food securing concepts within the urban setting. In spending time discussing these stages of the garden formation, I wish to alert the reader that an examination of food production itself does not begin till mid-chapter five.

Therefore, chapter four explores the back story of garden formation accounting for the interrelationships within existing material space, the influence of those that conceive of a planned and (pre)designed space, and residents who use their imaginations to narrate their own spatial desires. For example, it considers how the conceived space of the estate dominates the potential emergence of gardens yet also provides transformative moments and engagements showing that space is not fixed

but mutable. Such transitional discourse grounds the residents' desire to grow food often inspired by existing food growing projects in the

This chapter is the first of three chapters that present empirical data. The need for this is reflected in the statement made by Vitiello and Nairn (2009a, p.3) that "Most claims about the ability of urban agriculture to enable food access in cities lack grounding in empirical research". Overall, this chapter reports on the narrative of garden emergence, before they become physical spaces. Using participation, I report on the interplay between the abstract conceived space of the estate, the transformative moments when space becomes open to change, and how residents imagine space.

Understanding the story of garden formation, percolating through layers of influences, is important for five reasons. Firstly, the coalescence of narratives has almost entirely been neglected in community garden literature. Secondly, it is during this process of formation that many motivations, responses, and compromises get buried, obfuscating any later consideration of the influence on practice. Thirdly, gardeners themselves place a huge emphasis on this unfolding narrative; they tell stories of conflict, creative decisions, frustrated desire, and aspirations. Fourthly, I participated with one estate that was unable to resolve conflict and never moved from talk to praxis. Through this experience, I realised that exploring the intention to grow was as important and integral to actual practice. Fifthly, gardens must emerge from within existent space, which according to Lefebvre will be secreted from the interrelation between conceived, perceived, and lived space. Specifically in looking at the formation of gardens, I am aware of Gotham et al. (2001, p.239) who write that "Lefebvre's task is to bring together objective and subjective understandings of space by tracing them both back to the process in which individuals and groups produce space".

Following this chapter, chapter five explores the process of garden practice, within emerging and established gardens, while chapter six reports on the sensory interaction that happen within this perceived space. Within the participation and analysis I was less interested in unpacking ambiguities and contradictions so they would become more consistent with each other but rather to participate in the social process of making so that I could interpret actions within the thesis aim of

understanding the recursive relationship of community food gardens to the built environment and how this affects harvests.

The three empirical chapters are structured in two sections. Section one presents the results together with analysis and some contextual discussion followed by a second section that involves more in depth discussion related to the research literature and theoretical background. In the three empirical chapters, quotes from residents are cited using their name, interview number, and their estate. So for example, [Cindy\_01\_De Beauvoir gardeners] refers to Cindy, her first interview, from De Beauvoir Gardeners.

## **4.2 Section one: Results and analysis**

### **4.2.1 The landscape**

I open with a discussion on landscape because food-growing has to happen somewhere; land access is essential. As Crouch (2010, p.131) notes, community gardens “emerged through political movements to acquire land for those who lacked opportunity to cultivate”. Simon reflects on his feeling about landscape prior to commencing the garden project:

“This was purely a sort of blank nothing ... I didn't even hardly notice it ... there was nothing to see or think about ... it was just a place you couldn't get into ... with just trapped grass. I suppose it was nice it was grass than just rubbish or a building but apart from that it was just very much at the back of my mind as I passed through” [Simon\_02\_ St John's community kitchen garden].

Neighbour Angela comments on the same landscape, “It was nothing really. It wasn't officially anything. It was just a bit of green space ... I'm not sure what the intention [with the space] was really because in the front there is a community garden type thing but it's always locked” [Angela\_01\_St John's community kitchen garden]. Lesley echoes this idea of a space as an absence stating, “I only really know these spaces from riding about on my bike from A to B ... I never really see people sitting out on the grass” [Lesley\_01\_De Beauvoir gardeners].

The landscape of St John's estate, as with De Beauvoir estate, is hard to miss; it covers the majority of the estate, and a large portion of the landscape interacts with

public footpaths and roads. Why do such large expanses of land simply disappear from people's direct vision and why does food-growing give meaning back to space? Till (2009, p.139) provides a clue on invisible landscapes commenting that "an architecture that ignores the everyday will be ignored every day". Gillian, a resident, talks similarly about the disused tennis court – a walled and gated arena, partially visible to the left as you enter a tower block called Carradale House. She states "I got so used to it being there that you don't look at it anymore, it was just there ... When people started taking about the gardening project on the old tennis court, I was like, where's that? It's so big and so obvious when you look at it" [Gillian\_01\_Greening Brownfield]. Keith describes the tennis court as a lost space: "I never knew there was a tennis court there. I've been past it many times... but I never knew it was what it was until the last six months" [Keith\_01\_Greening Brownfield]. There is considerable agreement about the invisibility and therefore lack of engagement in landscape from residents, with only one resident voicing surprise that people don't spend time walking around their estate and getting to know the site.

What I gained from this was a sense of a familiar, routinely experienced landscape but one that generates "daily inattention", unnoticed yet receives constant interaction (Highmore, 2011, p.59). As Cullen and Know (1982, p.285) observe: "objects only really call themselves to our attention when they step out of line, and become conspicuous, obtrusive, obstinate". Urban agriculture emphasises links between people as land-users and productive local landscapes. Mougeot et al. (1994, p.6) state, "A major determinant of "who farms" is who has access to land". It is an intrinsically pragmatic action: a unit with landscape and the desire to invest in that landscape. Yet some residents, are unable to even recognise physical space as a material fact as exemplified by Simon who talks of landscape as a "blank nothing". Grass in this sense does not present an obstruction; its ubiquity and maintenance create erasure and invisibility.

As Lefebvre states, "The urban (urban space, urban landscape) remains unseen. We still don't see it ... unable to leap over the quotidian, manufactured according to the constraints of industrial production ... (functional units of habitation, neighborhoods, relations, monotonous but required routes)" (Lefebvre, 2003, pp. 29-30). Because there seems so little intentionality in the landscape, offering little in the way of interactivity and everyday memories, it slips from view, becomes invisible

and receives ‘inattention’. Everyday practice therefore precipitates agency, declaring “itself as the name of heterogeneity and threads memory into practice” working against mastery (Highmore, 2006, p.157). It is also because many of these experiences are singular, personal to the individual and little communicated amongst residents as a community. When asking questions about the potential for food-growing, these results show the need to move beyond the quantitative mapping of space to a more sensitive approach, regarding the everyday spatial engagements of community food gardeners and the concept’s influence on food production.

While there is a need to acknowledge that a landscape is doing nothing, it is derelict, blank, in order to recognise that it can be productive, I argue below that invisibility is not an accident but a product of dominant cultural hegemony built by erasing previous histories, and “central to this erasure is the power of the state to reshape the physical spaces of the city” – in other words demolition (McCann, 1999, p.170). In this sense the landscape is anything but ‘blank’; it is embodied with the intention of architects, planned maintenance, and immanent with the desire of residents yet unformed actions. As Whitehead (2009, p.667) writes, “the ordinary environmental spaces of neglect ... are not isolated realms of dereliction (or a lack of human action); they are spaces that are quite literally full of the human and more-than-human action that is critical to the maintenance ... of urban systems”.

These descriptions of landscape invisibility were unexpected – that so many of the gardeners, and passing residents were disengaged from the landscape seemed extreme, almost violent, given that open spaces often exceed housing footprints. These comments all emerged at the end of participation at the interview stage; had they surfaced earlier, they would have challenged my stated method of taking an agnostic approach to knowing. I knew the landscape was there and I knew it had potential, at least quantitatively. Reflecting on my own awareness and understanding of the spaces, I was well aware that open land surrounded by public houses was largely unrecorded in contrast to parks and other open space data (Tomkins, 2009a, Tomkins, 2006). As Lefebvre writes, “Prohibition - the negative basis, so to speak, of the social order — is what dominates here. The symbol of this constitutive repression is an object offered up to the gaze yet barred from any possible use” (Lefebvre, 1991b, p. 319).



Gaining an understanding of landscape interactions is a vital part of this research. I argue here that landscape as a key urban agriculture resource is unrecognised by residents creating a formative experience as it becomes acknowledged through a protracted process, influencing processes and outcomes. The section below looks at this process by which residents become aware of space, largely as a result of top-down initiatives, and how this discourse of formation influences food-growing.

#### 4.2.2 Against conceived space

This section explores three spatial discourses that dominate the day to day of the estate; namely, the original architectural design, ongoing maintenance, and regeneration projects. Regeneration will also be discussed below as a transformative agent. While these relate to the entire built form, I am dealing with open space alone. The emergence of gardens in open spaces creates a dialectical tension between these discourses as well as between other factors such as internal conflict between residents. The data in this section draws on interviews with residents but also some extant data on the regeneration and maintenance.

As discussed in chapter three, this research, and specifically this chapter, refers to discourse as encompassing spoken, written and communicated ideas via drawing, letters, or during public or private meetings. Discourse and practice interact dynamically; practice creates space and also an interpretation and reproduction of discourses. Importantly, discourse is not independent and separate from practice; representing a one-to-one scale copy of what is to be executed in practice but continuous.

The Edible Estates<sup>14</sup> initiative reports the attitude of top-down maintenance to landscape, commenting, “traditionally, the greenspaces in housing estates have been managed with limited involvement of local households. Some Councils now contract large landscaping firms to regenerate greenspace. These contractors have little or no relationship with the residents” (Re:Solution, 2013, p.np). Because of the maintenance remit, the physical creation of the space on the estate is something that residents are discouraged from being involved with. As Cindy states, “this is why people hate living on estates ... there’s no involvement” [Cindy\_01\_De Beauvoir

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<sup>14</sup> Edible Estates is a community food-growing initiative based in Edinburgh, Scotland.

gardeners]. As Gottdiener (1994, p.126) writes, the abstract space of design, professionals, and advocates “has come to dominate social space, or the integrated space of social communion, and the very productive potential of the latter has itself been attenuated”.

Council maintenance cycles therefore work against a dwelling perspective; actual responsibilities for tending landscape are contracted out, attenuating a sense of agency for residents. As Keith states, the lawn areas are “designed to look good, to be cosmetic more than a place to live ... act” [Keith\_01\_Greening Brownfield]. Food growing projects which need to access landscape as a key urban agriculture resource make explicit the tension and disconnect between autonomous actions “to live ... act” and planned maintenance. As Anna qualifies, “I think, underneath what we are talking about is a deep need of people to be connected to where we are from ... the place we are all inhabiting” [Anna\_Greening Brownfield\_01].

However, some residents might be content with short grass, and tidy spaces that maintenance produces, as Louise comments “The key thing is that people like things to be the way they are and don’t like things that they perceive to be messy and untidy. Some people like the garden, others don’t ... but then this is the nature of growing things” [Louise\_01\_Lansbury gardeners ]. It’s not so much that the gardens are messy, it’s that the architecture is very tidy, static, and overly maintained. Louise’s comment reminds us to resist romanticism and be inclusive of all the residents. Therefore, the idea of community food gardens as producing conflict should not be mentioned alone. Everyday artefacts often cause conflict, with councils regularly removing such everyday augmentations as door mats, plant pots, or washing lines. As resident Graeme explains

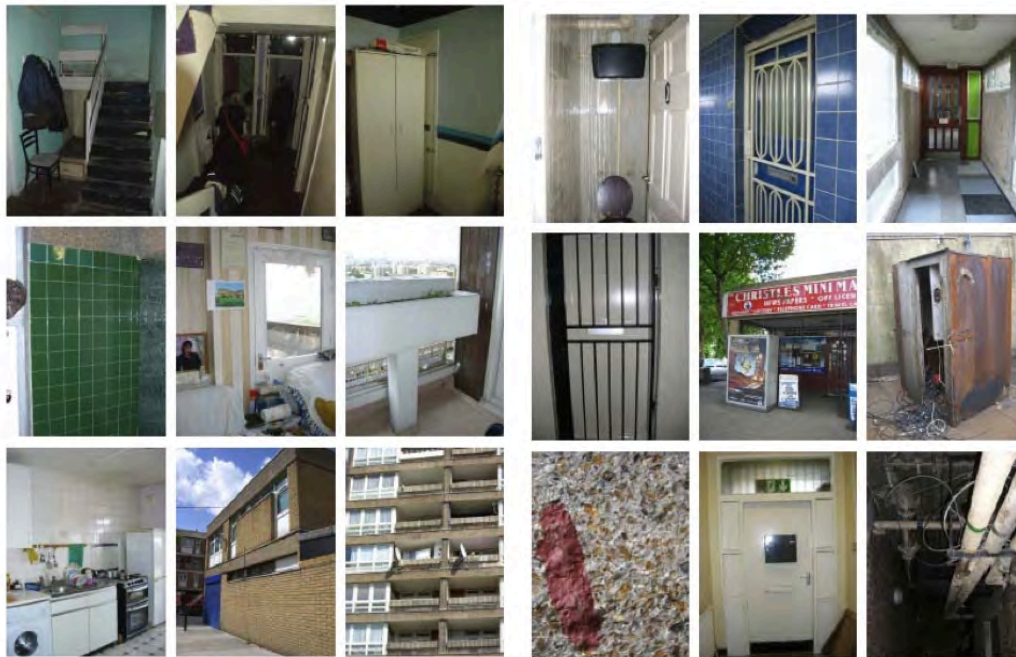
“Whenever I got a letter asking people to remove their washing from drying in the sun, I’m thinking no we should be doing exactly the opposite... but I think partly it’s ... because ... the aesthetics of washing, ya know, washing out across the street means working class poverty ... you can’t afford a tumble dryer” [Graeme\_01\_St John’s community kitchen garden].

While on a site visit on 11 November 2010, I picked up a copy of the weekly East London Advertiser. Its front-page headline proclaimed, “Families celebrate victory

in laundry war” (Brooke, 2010, p.1). The article discusses Tower Hamlets council decision to “cut washing lines, impound door mats” on Will Crooks Estate, Poplar. Resident Christine Frost is quoted as saying, “they cut washing lines ... taken hanging plants pots from walls and our doormats ... if they don’t want us to hang out our washing in view of Canary Wharf they can buy us all tumble dryers”(Brooke, 2010, p.1). Natasha also expresses the gulf between everyday life and objects recounting: “I was carrying my shopping from along the canal, I had nowhere to sit down, all the benches have gone, I mean it’s ludicrous ... it’s a vicious circle. If you take away benches it makes people sit on other things anyway. It makes people more angry” [Natasha\_01\_De Beauvoir gardeners].

Regeneration re-imposing the authorship of space towards the architect. As part of the regeneration of Brownfield estate for instance, Avanti architects (2007, p.1) produced a best practice document stating that, “cumulative changes which have, over the years, contributed to a gradual erosion of the visual order and architectural character of the estate ... It is desirable that future works conform to the original design intent”. The document contains images detailing “examples of inappropriate interventions, incremental additions and poor workmanship which damage the character of the estate”, presents a continuing discourse on erasure; top-down control, and the discourse of architectural authorship (figure 12).

However, figure 12 can also be read as a beautifully observed tableau of everyday life; incremental additions necessary to make life work. In this sense Avanti Architects might also be saying ‘it is desirable that everyday life conforms to the original design intentions’ where regeneration is viewed as regenerating the authorship of space; that of an architect rather than the user.



**Figure 12: Examples of “inappropriate interventions, incremental additions”.**

Source: Avanti Architects, 2007, p.1

Gardeners generally argued against this mode of spatial control; they argued for autonomy and greater involvement in how the estate looks. Cindy is frustrated by the lack of channels for her engagement in open space, stating: “we are all amateurs, I know, amateur architects, amateur landscapers, but if they would just let us get on with it [gardening and making], we would get better at it, wouldn’t we?”

[Cindy\_01\_De Beauvoir gardeners]. The ‘amateur’ needs of residents to act heuristically and ‘get on with it’, consequently present a challenge to professional conceived or more abstract aims of planned space. As Smith (2005, p.ix) writes, the “everyday aesthetic experience inheres in the fusion of sense and imagination that is the experience itself, and not in the object of the aesthetic experience”.

Angela adopts heuristic tactics to by-pass needing permission stating,

“so what we thought we’d do was a sneaky approach ... taking over something that nobody would think attractive turning it into something attractive or attractive to the majority of people ... and then everybody would say yeah fantastic rather than say ‘don’t mess with my estate’” [Angela\_02\_ St John’s community kitchen garden].

Some residents therefore understand the distance between themselves, their needs, and the conceived space of the estate. For example, I attend a gardening meeting on De Beauvoir estate, from 7.15pm till 9.40pm, writing in my field notes,

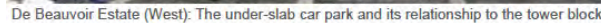
“A great deal of time is spent talking about getting permission; consent, funding, storage space, and getting access to temporary rooms for meetings. At 9pm food gets a (very) brief mention. I’m sure with any new project, the practicalities are important. But I don’t sense food is top of the agenda” [Field notes 12th April 2010].

‘Top of the agenda’ is, instead, the existing built space. Food may emerge, over time, but the spatial concerns of residents create a frisson regarding access and self-management of the estate, which I argue is longlasting. For example, Cindy describes the kind of thinking about space that occupies residents’ time:

“They’ve got a little room downstairs ... It’s got a little sink ... I’ve showed it to April’s partner [a resident] and he could put some shelves and things in so I said to him, ya know, this is the room ... Clean it up. Get the tap connected and you’ve got cleaning facilities. And then in the basement, we found another large room. And I thought well, it’s a slow process, but if I can get permission and get it sorted out they can use that as storage for putting like wheel barrows and wood and stuff” [Cindy\_01\_De Beauvoir gardeners].

Cindy uses her imagination to populate empty rooms with gardening activity. Space is never neutral but always already occupied, even in absence. Angela works against the imposed design by stealth, Cindy recognises the need for time within space, and its gradual remaking according to needs. Natasha reminds us that there is emotion within everyday spatial interactions, not just objects. A relationship to space – specifically the open space of the estate - begins to change for residents when faced with an external intervention focused on altering or transforming the original intentions of space. This was termed “appropriation” by Lefebvre, where territory becomes “diverted, reappropriated and put to a use quite different from its initial one” and is reported in detail below (Lefebvre, 1991b, p.167).

A discourse on transformative agents questions ‘who’ makes landscape and ‘why’ it is being made the way it is. It collectivises the experience of residents and space, drawing the potential common experience together within a material location. These transformative agents are, sympathetic artists or designers who present new spatial concepts for estates, existing local food gardens that inspire, NGOs that advance a discourse on spatial change and funding, as well as attempts by councils to fill open space with new building. I would also class academic researchers as part of this process because they act as advocates validating emerging desires to garden. In short, this section explores those that are advocates for community food gardens, existent community food gardens that act as predecessors, or transformative moments, which must also take account of residents’ imagination



This under-slab car park represents a huge space of 1,500m<sup>2</sup>, accommodating sixty cars. The open structure post/beams is holding a perforated slab that creates an accessible terrace down the blocks.

We propose, at first, progressive appropriation of this terrace by residents with the creation of small vegetable gardens, as vectors of social exchange. Moreover, it will create a constantly changing landscape seen from the flats and made by the residents own hands.

The second step, in parallel with the first activity, aims to open the internal area of the car park at ground level by removing some of the walls. The space could eventually be use for community facilities.

**Figure 13: TICArchitects: photomontage of De Beauvoir estate.**

Source: Périn and Barraud, 2008, np.

Natasha, for example, discusses her four or five year involvement with external advocates (figure 13). These include gardeners, landscape architects and artists. Such advocates are grouped by Lefebvre within representations of space, whereby a certain type of artist becomes aligned with the dominant discourse of planning and

science because they similarly classify, the lived and the perceived with concepts, “who *describe* and aspire to do no more than describe” (Lefebvre, 1991b, p.39 original emphasis). For example, Natasha states, that TICArchitects practice began looking at the underground car parks and open space of the estate, proposing a project to “reuse the tops of the garages for gardens ... the way forward was seen to be if people were interested in gardening, which most people are” [Natasha\_01\_De Beauvoir gardeners]. TICArchitects produced a supporting booklet (figure 13) entitled, “This is a Canvas” (Périn and Barraud, 2008) which visualised “the progressive appropriation of this terrace [above the disused car park] by residents with the creation of small vegetable gardens, as vectors of social exchange” (Périn and Barraud, 2008, p. np).

Such involvements from professionals become self-referential. For instance, a second proposal for De Beauvoir estate, from a company called Ediblehabitat (Hankart, 2014), draws two examples from already existent neighbouring gardens developed by architects, which therefore act as predecessors to formation. Firstly, an architect practice called What-if (discussed below), and secondly, Haberdasher estate (a primary case study for this thesis). This is important because there is a need to examine the motivation for food gardening as an emergent form and its subsequent practice. I would argue that these are not the same, enabling a disaggregation between discourse and praxis with regard to food harvests.

Neil on Haberdasher estate states that he was influenced by watching a Sky television programme, the garden also emerges more directly in 2009 through an influence from two existing local garden examples. Firstly, a design practice called MetaboliCity, “a design-service system that integrates both traditional and hi-tech industrialised agricultural techniques into the fabric of the built environment” (Inhabitat, 2013). Secondly, a successful neighbouring food garden by What-if practice, established in June 2007. The What-if website states that they “have been mapping vacant and neglected spaces that surround inner city housing estates in London ... investigating strategies for how these unloved spaces can be appropriated” (Morris and Steven, 2013). The idea of investigating vacant or neglected space, or the ‘canvas’ of Périn and Barraud above, reemphasises the approach whereby designers of space assume that space is empty (a blank canvas), rather than already filled with the absent desires of residents. While it is easy to

inveigh against these design-led practices, I would argue that they are key at the local scale to the emergence of community food gardens because they draw attention to a landscape of change through interventions based on transformation. While they represent an abstract idea they also ignite a debate about the use and creation of space.

As mentioned, residents are also inspired by gardens on other estates that lead to imitation, a desire for 'best practice' at the level of the individual. Cindy [De Beauvoir estate] explains:

"I went to visit someone on Arden estate [a neighbouring estate] and right in front they've got this gorgeous gazebo with all these raised flower beds round and I looked at that and I came back and I put that picture into the green space behind me [on De Beauvoir estate] and I thought brilliant" [Cindy\_01\_De Beauvoir gardeners].

Alison becomes inspired by an architect-led project in Shoreditch to start the Dirty Hands garden stating:

"I saw the Hackney project on TV, on one of those London Tonight type programmes, it ... was the catalyst for me getting Dirty Hands going, as it made me see that you can start growing anywhere; whereas before seeing it I would've thought you'd need to be in a field, or at least somewhere that was covered in soil and grass" [Alison\_06\_Dirty Hands].

Alison is able to action the above experience because she notices the arrival of porta-cabins on the estate, which cover the disused ball court. This event sparks a realisation from Alison that the space is empty and now in transition. A decisive factor in the creation of food gardens is linked to NGOs and institutions that specifically fund food-growing; Capital Growth and by Lottery project Well London. Most active is Capital Growth, with twenty per cent (out of 2,012) of the project's community food gardens on housing estates (Sustain, 2013b). Neil states that while there was a drive to create a general garden because of anti-social behaviour, the fact that Capital Growth only funds food-growing shaped the emergence of the edible garden, "When we first started two years ago we had ... flowers and shrub boxes



because we weren't part of any growing thing ... then we got some more funding and obviously to be part of Capital Growth you gotta grow food"

[Neil\_02\_Haberdasher estate].

Lansbury gardeners were funded initially in June 2008 by Well London, with secondary funds from Poplar HARCA<sup>1</sup>. Well London has a wide remit 'that builds stronger local communities by getting people working together to improve their neighbourhoods ... themed around mental well-being, physical activity, healthy eating, open spaces, and arts and culture' (Well London, 2013a). Unusually, Poplar HARCA made the application to Well London, dictating that it would be a food-growing project, without consultation with residents. This project was then presented to residents, some of whom happily took on the project naming it 'Lansbury Gardeners' (Lansbury Gardeners, 2011). As Gordon explains,

"Right from day one I was into the project as soon as the soil arrived. But only from day one ... I wasn't there when the project was being formulated by Well London, didn't really know much about it. Out the blue ... we get the phone call, come and join in we're shovelling the soil ... I took some photos, did some shovelling. But I don't feel myself to be the great overarching expert ... of gardening" [Gordon\_03\_Lansbury gardeners ].

Each of these grant-giving bodies has an agenda making connections between food-growing, space and the collective action. As Anna explains, "I think that possibly then when you bring in other people like Capital Growth which is a food-growing project that has an influence on it, as does the 'grow your own [food] project' that's also about health boroughs growing their own [food]" [Anna\_01\_Greening Brownfield].

Natasha and the rest of the De Beauvoir gardeners are hungry for advocates to validate their nascent garden project on an estate that is in conflict with both Hackney Homes<sup>15</sup> and other residents. I am also seen as an advocate, being invited to speak at a meeting of the Tenants and Residents Association supporting the food

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<sup>15</sup> Hackney Homes is the Arms Length Management Organisation for Hackney Council

garden project along with architect Isabel Hankart (Hankart, 2014). I write in my field notes of the difficulty this raises:

“I will be empowering them by coming to speak as an 'expert'. I can do this but this means that I will need to rethink the methods again ... or is this what happens? You can't impose methods on people/situations. Once you are involved then the boundary is blurred. Within one sentence research becomes participatory action research (PAR) and not participant observation or both? They need me to be an outsider. I want to be an insider” [field notes 5th May 2010].

This type of confrontation only surfaced during the initial stage of research and diminished as practice became more routine, as will be discussed in chapters five and six.

I argue the external discourse of professionals provides a focus on the potential for spatial change, sometime aimed directly at food gardening. It is often recursive of existing gardens already established by architects or finding by non-government organisations. Therefore, gardeners aren't reacting to a daily food crisis, but are able to recognise the transformative discourse of spatial change. Food growing as a practice places the actions of residents at the centre of landscape transformation. It places the collective action and its creative potential as primacy, relegating the inchoate food-growing practice (i.e harvest) as a future development.

#### 4.2.4 Motivations

I have called these motivations, rather than ignitions, because they do not seem to provide a starting point on their own. I have also separated out motivations that stem from personal situations from motivation from a broader discourse of climate change, food safety, or grow your own that will be dealt with in chapter five linked to the emergence of practice. While motivations have been discussed by others (Milbourne, 2012, Pudup, 2008) I frame the exploration differently exploring how they influence space, imposed design and food harvests. I argue this is the case because personal issues or wider environmental concerns for instance, do not necessarily provide a critical mass that can be collectively shared and act on. Many residents I interviewed were motivated by desires to improve, the look of estates,

health, a need for community, or personal crisis including economic problems.

Unsurprisingly, there is a strong economic motivation – all six gardens are in the top three most deprived boroughs in London<sup>16</sup> with problems being compounded by the 2008 credit crisis (Talukder and Frost, 2008).

For instance, Alison describes herself as a single mother on benefits, struggling to pay debts off after the breakup of a bad relationship. Food gardening may give her a source of food, but it is small (by her own acknowledgement). However, she is empowered by the idea of garden because it gives her control over her life that is perhaps absent in other areas. Her personal transformation is analogous to the spatial transformation she achieves with the garden and its food harvest, both becoming a witness to her life. I would argue therefore that the garden represents a space where she can clearly articulate the various crises and achievements for her and her daughter. I certainly felt this from participation where Alison was eloquent and open about her personal transformation as part of the garden formation. Alison says:

“When I started doing this I was like coming out of this time of treading water. I had bailiffs coming to my house, all this kind of thing. I could have easily, so easily shut down ... if it was someone else telling me, well, this person, ya know, a single parent and she's having to cope on her own, get out of this mess, you'd think the last thing they're going to set up is a community project”  
[Alison\_05\_Dirty Hands].

Alison does mention food-growing but her route to this is not direct or simple; she mentions becoming aware of the empty ball court at the corner of the estate because of the temporary porta-cabins for staff working on a regeneration project, furthermore she's inspired by a local food-growing project, but she also wants to grow organic food for her daughter. Food production is a strand amongst many and during participation and within the interviews it is evident that the garden is a place that has empowered her at a point of crisis in her everyday forming links between a communal space of growing and her home. This is part of what Anna [De Beauvoir

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<sup>16</sup> As a measure of multiple deprivation

estate] calls the ‘ensemble theatre’ of food gardens, connecting together differing aspects of people’s lives that make sense within the practice of communal gardening.

However, poverty also causes disconnection where gardening is seen as burden rather than liberation, as Alison explains further:

“I’ve noticed this year [2010] where the ... credit crunch has really kicked in, people have even found it hard to come just because they struggling in so many ways ... a lot of them are out of work ... I’ve even got one guy ... and he’s had some real hassles going on in life, he’s not working ... can’t draw benefit ... and I can see depression kick in ... I ring him and I say ... will you go to the site and water for me and a couple of time he’s said to me, ‘I was gonna come down today but I just couldn’t get myself out of the house’ ... its quite worrying ... you think that ... you’ve got your ... flippin’ field of dreams, gonna set it up [a food garden] and all these people are gonna come running but I think we are in [a] challenging area”  
[Alison\_05\_Dirty Hands].

Alison is reconciling her conceptualisation of local food production with her lived experience – her ‘flippin’ field of dreams’. These motivations, personal or otherwise quickly become embedded issues and not spoken about, something that participation has enabled me to witness through conversation and actions, recorded in field notes, and interviews.

The Greening Brownfield garden stemmed from an earlier resident led project to design and improve public benches and play spaces, providing motivation to move forward. However, as the food garden emerges its actual focus is unclear, as Eleanor comments, "it would almost be a simpler project if people were united and wanted to grow healthy organic vegetables ... there’s a lot of people who are not sure why we are doing the project ... there isn’t a shared understanding" [Eleanor\_01\_Greening Brownfield]. Yet in some ways this retains a feeling of cohesion; community gardens are messy places where unreflective decisions get made in the moment and things appear to get thrown together; however, this is not contrariwise to a plan but the way practice occurs in the everyday as a co-constructed space. I argue that the

garden, as a communal space, generates direct experience in that material space which residents can deal with.

I argue therefore that personal motivations alone do not directly form a cohesive ignition and pathway to practice. They come into the mix but are not the primary drivers because they are not linked to a perceived space due to the disconnect residents experience from landscape. Understanding motivations therefore means not working back from the assumed ideal or theory of the necessity of food production but working alongside the gardener in the garden so that concerns, actions and discourse can emerge and express their own priority, justifying an approach sensitive to grounded theory method as discussed in chapter three (Charmaz, 2006).

#### 4.2.5 Imaginations

This section expands on how residents express intention through imagining landscape reflective of perceived material space, past experience, and everyday life. Imagination is where people make sense of the world through what they feel and experience. Imagination therefore forms part of what Cloke and Jones (2001, p.657) describes as landscape “being temporally complex with the past being co-present with the present both through material and through imaginative processes”. As Merrifield (2006, p120) puts it, the ability to reclaim a radical space of non-conformity require personal change, yet “before imagination can seize power, some imagination is needed: imagination to free our minds and our bodies, to liberate our ideas, and to reclaim our society as a lived project”. These imaginations range across, the fictitious, memory, the sensory, social organisation, and memory.

As Lee explains,

“When we lived in the mobile home, there was gardening, I remember pulling carrots and the like. Then we went to live on the estate high up, as a kid I hated it, really wanted to feel... ya know, like in my past I was an agricultural labourer or something! No, this is the first chance I’ve really had to grow. Making up for lost time” [Lee\_01\_Haberdasher estate].

Lee revisits his childhood along with a feeling of other lives lived and now not lived, all as functions of differing landscapes; the mobile home, the estate, and the past

agricultural life. Exploring how imagination about space opens up everyday creativity, desire, and inventiveness rather than closing it down to economics and pragmatics.

Graeme lives alone on St John's estate and is deeply conflicted by his desire to remain secluded from neighbours, yet sensing the landscape could offer more: "I became absolutely not interested in who lives there ... but ... meanwhile, thinking out the window in my glass bowl ... what is possible in this [green] space ... I've been thinking this for about two years, I've been looking out and imagining, ummm ya know" [Graeme\_01\_St John's community kitchen garden]. The "imagining ummm ya know" isn't casual but insistent and forceful, as if visualising in and of itself is a vital act, conveying the passion Graeme feels for wanting change, both personally and through landscape. Graeme reflects on his social disconnect, yet also dreams simultaneously of connectivity, looped through the landscape of the estate.

Keith was interviewed after the garden was a few months old and imagines the garden developing into a haven away from the urban: "This little sanctuary in the centre, this little communal area, where people can go, sit, talk ... eat their sandwich read their book, paper, then you've got the gardeners working on the outside ... that's my sort of visualisation ..." [Keith\_01\_Greening Brownfield]. Keith's mental picture of the future garden seems like a mini-garden city; a cultural centre with its productive hinterland, and the wildness of the external space beyond. Keith's mini-garden city is the antithesis to architect Goldfinger who designed the estate, who spoke against the garden city as a housing solution (Warburton, 2005, Darling, 2007).

On De Beauvoir estate, the garden has not yet emerged (and does not emerge during research) and as we discuss the potential future garden Cindy closes her eyes visualising a landscape that connects with her olfactory: "the fragrance is brilliant ... you sit there, you can smell the rosemary or the lavender. It's calming, it's refreshing and it can always take away the sense of, oh god, I live in the city surrounded by these buildings" [Cindy\_01\_De Beauvoir gardeners]. It is worth restating that both Graeme (St John's) and Keith's (Brownfield) community gardens emerged during research [2010] and they are imagining yet reflecting during their interview. Cindy

however, who lives on De Beauvoir estate has no garden and is imagining while looking out on her 'blank scape' of grass and concrete.

Listening to these interviews I was drawn into the subjective worlds of residents as experts; experts of their own environment, their own lived experience of space, and their bodies. Residents often spoke about space in visceral terms of talking, walking, eating, looking, smelling, and tasting. The structural elements of space do not necessarily emerge directly from this imagination. Yet, these imaginative processes begin to explain why Place-making becomes of increasing interest for residents during practice; they have become part of the process of creation and are not necessarily 'produced' solely from the garden once it has been made.

Imagination, separate from and subsequent to practice, provides insights into the evolution of spatial and social engagements; "social in the sense that they have social origins - they are socially generated, and their nature is dependent on the social relations and struggles out of which they were generated" (Fairclough, 1989, p.24). Food becomes embodied and influenced by these imaginings, in contrast to a world dominated by "space reduced to blueprints, to mere images - to that 'world of the image' which is the enemy of the imagination" (Lefebvre, 1991b, p.360).

#### 4.2.6 Summary

In this section, following Lefebvre (Lefebvre, 1991b) I have begun to outline how differing spatial practices play a part in producing the community food garden as it emerges. External advocates, either with sympathy or continued domination, provide transformative moments that generate a loop-through for access to landscape.

External advocacy, together with existent examples or predecessors, ignites the idea of accessing space, providing a grammar of transformation to landscape, through ideas of mutability and the provisional. Within this process, when spatial change is advocated, the transformative moment acts as a vector creating "possibility, contingency, inconspicuous cracks, holes in the net, little shafts of light, and pockets of air" showing capitalism as less than seamless (Merrifield, 2006, p.26). External advocates consequently become key agents in developing awareness of the local environment as a deliberately conceived space, yet they also create connective moments focused on the estate landscape as something that can be remade.

I argue that landscape is largely an inert space for residents, invisible and blank. This displaces key urban agriculture resources, offering only minimal connectivity; residents have aspirations, concerns, and imaginations that cannot be spatially anchored. Farmers need fields, and currently these potential farmers are landless, strengthening the link to concepts of sovereignty and territory discussed in chapter two.

This is not to say food is not an important issue for residents, one which they speak about with passion; what is being discussed is the route that these desires need to travel, through imagination for example, and the impact such journeying has on variations of harvest. Following the trajectories and interconnection of the residents' desire to grow produces a space for food that is imbued with social and cultural discourses, and should not be disconnected from, or assumed equal to, each other.

I would argue that the initial stages of the intention to grow food, sometimes no more than a statement or imaginative leap, should not be seen as a prequel, a blueprint or a speculation of actual practice, but as integral to its production. For example, De Beauvoir estate never establishes food-growing, yet the lack of physical existence is not a barrier preventing people from making connections, validating other aspects of their lives. It is part of a continuing process that begins before gardening starts and has an ongoing dialectical relationship in tension with other factors. Intention is an integral part of an ontology that insists on process over product; the fluid enfolding and altering of material space, rather than space as a flat plane. The motivation for food gardening, in its emergent form, is not the same as in subsequent practice, something that will be explored further in chapter five.

### **4.3 Section two: Discussion**

The discussion section of each empirical chapter relates the findings to the discussion of literature and concepts outlined in chapter two. I have organised the discussion sections around a reaction to concepts and literature to draw out a response to aims and questions rather than each section commenting like for like on the sections above.

#### **4.3.1 Contesting landscape**

Residents receive continual top-down pressures from those that conceive space – redevelopment, artists, and existing non-government organisations -funded gardens –



reproducing a discourse on abstract ideas about how space could be used in advance of use. Yet as Merrifield (2006, p.136) writes regarding Lefebvre, “absolute space always offers an everyday entry point for confronting the global sway of abstract space. Lefebvre insists on this vital fact, without which grassroots leverage would be neither possible nor permissible”.

I think such comments are applicable to the way estates are planned, maintained and regenerated, which, while seeking to eradicate “inappropriate interventions” as stated by Avanti Architects (2007), the top-down advocates also offer a way into spatial change. I felt that residents themselves were only just beginning to articulate their desire spatially, taking account of their own personal interactions as well as the accretion of daily observations; in the words of Lefebvre (1991b, p.47) “autogestion”. What I outlined in the literature review is the way the current practice of community food gardens should not be seen as an ahistorical practice that simply happens in an unchanging spatial context relative only to international concepts regarding food issues. Community food gardens are part of a longer urban agriculture historical process, stretching back centuries, whose significance and survival have not been understood within the modern period (French, 2000). As Henri Lefebvre comments, “If space is produced, if there is a productive process, then we are dealing with history” (Lefebvre, 1991b, p.47).

As demonstrated by interviews, residents need to contest space, yet historically space has been rendered largely invisible or so ubiquitous to be seen as inert, “just trapped grass” as Simon, resident of St John’s estate states. Haeg (2008, p.16) writes of grassed suburbia; “What is that chasm between house and street? Why is it there? Or rather, why is nothing there?”. Most estates I researched follow a house and garden motif; wrapped and carpeted in close-cropped grassed areas, bordered by small fences, with buildings set back in the landscape. Haeg, in his attack on the lawn, critiques close-cropped grass through a connection of housing and power, writing:

“The front lawn was born of vanity and decadence ... The English estate owner in Tudor times would demonstrate his vast wealth by not growing food ... Instead this vast swath of land would become a stage of ornamental green upon which he could present his immense pile of a house ... It is an enticing and toxic stew of male

seduction, aggression, and domination ... Once that fertile farmland in front of the English estate had been turned into a sterile monoculture, where did the cultivation of food happen? ... Hidden ... where visitors and the lord of the estate would never see it. This was perhaps the beginning of the notion that plants that produce food are ugly and should not be seen” (Haeg, 2008, p16).

Haeg’s description of the dominance of maintenance on the English estate is analogous to the housing estate as demonstrated in 4.2.2 by Keith, who comments on how the aesthetic lawns are not “a place to live ... act” [Keith\_01\_Greening Brownfield]. The high rise dwellings, as Short (1982, p.109) writes of post-war housing, were an aggressive architectural ideology in which people barely figured – “there was no more visible sign of an authority’s housing achievement than a row of gleaming concrete towers punctuating the sky”.

The aristocratic tendency to dominate landscape is recreated in the social housing motif of house and garden. As reported in the results, this cleared space remains blank for residents, unable to perceive or interact with space. Confronting space therefore means contesting not just the immediate landscape but also the obscured (a)historical production of space that continues to enforce dominance through something as benign as mown grass. Returning to one of the aims of this research, namely to understand the recursive relationship between community food gardening and urban space and the influences of food production, I would argue that community food gardeners tend to work within the space they find, favouring an entwining and not clearing out of space that signifies modern building or swidden industrial agriculture<sup>17</sup>.

Understanding the historical process of landscape and the entry points offered means contextualising the motivations and imaginations of residents as a reaction not to food crisis alone, but to spatial and social process that these moments of awareness open up between directly experienced space and conceived space. For example, Natasha needing somewhere to sit with her shopping on the way home makes her aware of space, but not yet as something to directly transform. These interactions are

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<sup>17</sup> Swidden agriculture represents a practice of land clearance prior to growing.

temporal, with differing rhythms: some instances stretch back years, others are more momentary. In this moment of flux, the rhythms of everyday life are reified against the external spatial concepts (including the initial instances of building) exposing their differing spatial and temporal states.

Within urban agriculture, the task is to give detail beyond the univocal erased space that may offer a strategic approach to food planning with urban space (Premat, 2005), but may also ignore the plurality of practice that contributes difference, and differently through an everyday and tactile experience of space (Carolan, 2007).

#### 4.3.2 Connecting and disconnecting

As Highmore (2011, p.2) comments, “everyday life is a thoroughly relational term and that rather than try and pinpoint its characteristic content we would do better to draw out its grammar, its patterns of association, its forms of connection and disconnection”. I would argue therefore that the practice of food gardening is a catalyst for combinations of actions. So for example, when considering Keith, Simon, and Gillian who testify to their lack of attachment to estate landscape, their ‘disconnection’ from landscape highlights the absence of other social or cultural connections that start to give a grammar to residents’ spatial interactions. What emerges is a narrative on connection and disconnection, relative to space.

In drawing this out, I want to add detail to how social interactions are created within the garden but also note that the garden forms a barrier that might bracket in (or out) connections as noted by Turner (2011). However, I would argue that resident’s ability to connect or disconnect with space is not oppositional but expressive of how existing spatial patterns regulate, contain or expand the frustrations, desires, and potentials of residents – what Highmore terms a “patterning of desire”. We see this clearly with Graeme, who lacks interest in neighbours and whose desire to access landscape is paralysed until a gardener neighbour knocks on his door. Community food garden practice creates new connections, opening up Graeme’s desire to talk. Space is therefore produced not so much physically but socially through Graeme’s decision to take part in the community. Thus, I would argue that the results demonstrate that the derelict and blank landscape spoken about by funders or advocates is in fact always already colonised with the dreams and imagination of residents whose desire to inhabit space is constantly silenced. As Lefebvre

comments, “continuities and discontinuities are thus interwoven in a confusion”, a space of contradiction and the chaotic between the volumetric and the inhabitation of space (Lefebvre, 1991a, p.94).

Returning to Highmore’s notion of “daily inattention” to the surrounding landscape, discussed in 4.2.1, the results lay out the way in which spatial awareness of the lost, derelict, invisible landscape increases for some residents due to external interventions, motivations and stimuli. They become connected. The interventions do not directly connect with food-growing but create a sense of awareness and connection about landscape – a key resource for urban agriculture – and its potential transformation and everyday use. Communal gardening offers rhythm, routine, independence and a sense of getting things done. This can address the random, uncontrollable, and frustrating nature of the social and cultural crisis residents felt regarding estate life.

Residents contextualise transition within the local situation as something that requires a communal body to emerge to give it existence. This is contrary to Colding and Barthel (2013, p.161) who argue GGs “have a tradition of being self-organized and self-emergent, i.e. being initiated by the stakeholders themselves within the community”. As we saw from the results, these gardens emerge direct in the form of architects proposals, or funding potential, indirect in the form of regeneration projects. To be clear, I would argue that residents are largely self-organised but they are not self-emergent. While some residents may feel they already have an awareness of the social value of gardening, these gardens are connected through an historical and social process and they are therefore not autonomous but embedded within obscured discourse and pressures. Participation as a method, at least within the timeframe of the practice, is able to witness the growing connectivity and sedimentation of the historical process.

While Natasha’s pronouncement seems emphatic, having spent quite considerable time with her she is believable – the crack in this edifice, between imagination and agency is huge. The promotion of urban agriculture practices, with limited resources and research, may encourage community food gardens as a spectacle of practice with little return in the way of sustainable food supplies. I say this because, as the results demonstrate, residents are subjected to manifold pressures through the process of

creating garden space. Moreover, during the research period (both scoping and primary) I began to realise that practice often returned a low or non-existent harvest, yet I also experienced the draw of the creative narrative, the pleasure of their discovery as they connected with each other and the built form. People like Natasha made me believe in the urgency of growing food yet I watched many gardeners spend considerable time on negotiating agency ranging from tea bags to keys and the rights to naming practice. In other words, spending increasing time growing community, not necessarily growing food.

Community food gardens therefore can be seen as part of what Johannes et al. describe as “the new food geographies” that internalise environmental, social and economic costs in contrast to the externalising tendency of industrial agriculture (Johannes and Andre, 2012, pp.25-19). Community food gardens establishes differing relations between civil society and food provision by demanding something new from space, What interests me when asking what motivates residents to create such food geographies is seeking to reflect on the complex and persistently shifting narratives within discourse and practice that provide this opportunity and how they affect food-growing.

#### 4.3.3 The contingent garden

The discourse of food gardens emerges through a substantial element of chance, a convergence of people, knowledge, location, time, resources and so forth. As Anna says above, it’s an, ‘ensemble theatre’ of factors that create the character and practice of gardens “the randomness of it, allowing randomness in when mostly people have to be controlling”. As I witnessed gardens forming, it seemed almost arbitrary the way they coalesced into working forms. Scribbled notes, conversations, walking and talking or perhaps a grant application generate a critical mass from which the food growing emerges. In research I was less interested in trying to correct the unevenness of this experience. Instead, I recorded data enabling an understanding of how this impressed on the character and influenced the phenomena of growing.

Contingency, along with the malleability of the gardens is sometimes talked about in literature (Delind, 2006, Firth et al., 2011, Ferris et al., 2001), yet, similarly, so is their emphatic nature with regard to food harvest for example (Baker, 2004). Therefore community gardens are not a consistent whole and in exploring the

narrative of gardens I wish to pay attention to their shifting emphasis. As, Gibson-Graham (2008, p.165) writes, “theorizing the contingency of social outcomes rather than the unfolding of structural logics” embraces a “performative orientation to knowledge” that cannot be predicted, but that builds gradually overtime.

Maintained spaces of architecture, by contrast, are generally about predicting, controlling, and eliminating public performance. For example, Cindy imagining a gazebo in front of her house seems random compared with the towering blocks around her. Yet this is the point. It is only relatively random compared to the planning of the estate, premised on “the banishment of chance ... the triumph of the rational, the building of the new on cleared ground” (Till, 2009, p.42). Yet food growing, in the sense of agriculture, cannot be too random an action if you want to feed cities the size of London where a certain amount of ‘rational’ thinking on ‘cleared ground’ is required. This research does not contradict that need, being pursued currently through commercial projects such as the rooftop hydroponic farms of Lufa (2014) and Gotham Greens (2014) with their discourse on efficiency and quantification, as discussed in chapter one. This research adds weight to the differing characterisations of a plurality of urban agriculture, a qualitative understanding why the current expansion of communal gardens has a spectrum across food harvests.

In the results, I report on how Alison set up the Dirty Hands community project despite her current personal difficulty with separation and bailiffs. She comments, reflecting on her situation, “you’d think the last thing they’re going to set up is a community project”. Alison’s need to instigate the project might be seen as taking control, but it could also be viewed as opening herself up to possibilities though chance and randomness. Her life was closing down in many ways; yet, the feeling you get from spending time with her in the garden is one of experimentation; adding various factors together and learning heuristically with little or no experience.

In the words of Cindy, above, “we may be amateurs but that’s one way of learning”. I would argue that Cindy’s amateurism is not a failed professionalism. Stating this draws on the literature review, namely Hardy and Ward (1984) who discuss the amateur brand of self-built housing prevalent up to 1947 before planning was nationalised. Gardening speaks directly to the process of heuristic learning and everyday creativity discussed by Hardy and Ward, where “all forms of gardening are

continuous process: one task leads into another, and there is almost always something which has been started but not completed” (Burchardt, 2011, p.170).

As Highmore discusses through the work of de Certeau, amateurism is a radical practice that includes “the arts of speaking, inhabiting, cooking and so on” (Highmore, 2006, p.157). We are used to people talking about amateur gardening, its rise from 17<sup>th</sup> century aristocrat to the 20<sup>th</sup> century middle classes (Constantine, 1981), but the amateur works of the architect abound less, even illegal as the exclusive relationship between the architect and state emerged in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, compounded by the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act (Hill, 1998a). For instance, Alison does not have a written plan, but she does have a way of learning because clearly the recycled water butts, raised beds, and tonnes of soil do not arrive without some level of organisation. Furthermore, she has no access to running water, reliant on the local fire brigade to regularly fill large recycled water butts.

In the words of de Certeau, Alison is someone who; “simultaneously organizes a network of relations, poetic ways of "making do" (*bricolage*)” (Certeau, 1984, p. xi). I feel however, that it is more than just a romantic making do. Alison is incredibly resourceful; her garden is a landmark as you depart from the number 262 bus at the top of Plaistow Road (figure 10). The garden is a mixture of neatly lined yet sagging soil bags, raised beds and recycled wood for seating, echoing the words of de Certeau (Certeau, 1984, p.xviii) concerning the tacticians of everyday life as “unrecognized producers, poets of their own acts, silent discoverers of their own paths in the jungle of functionalist rationality”.

I would agree with Till (2009, p.164), that in participating with gardeners I shared this hermeneutic journey of discovery which “relishes the engagement with contingency; the variables and potential conflicts are not something to be smothered but become the crucible for exchange between a mix of interpreters: professionals, amateurs, dreamers, pragmatists”. Communal practice is able to embrace these differing voices as it coalesces. Through this process, food becomes entangled with life stories, learning processes and dynamic narratives, and becomes disentangled from efficient agriculture, and as yet not necessarily engaged with by professional planners.

#### 4.3.4 The mutability of community food gardening

These last two sections examine the character of the garden; its mutability, and how their formation creates a compressed space for practice. The results demonstrate that gardens do not emerge from a blue print or a decisive factor but develop incrementally, shaped by multiple characteristics such as outline, size, and demographic, absorbing the discourse of others, conflicts and imaginations. Broadly, they make gentle demands on existing social and physical space, compromising and shape-change as necessary. Community food gardens therefore seem to be spaces of displacement where new demands or pressures force other less fixed factors out, a key one being a demand for food. They react at multiple levels: to conflict, planned space, funding, imagination and advocacy, meaning it can be shaped to differing spaces, scales, and discourse. But it also means it can lose sight of key aims such as food production that other practices such as the allotment, market gardening or commercial production are less willing to do. It also surprising given the definition of such gardens is emphatically about food production.

From results, I would argue that during the initial stages, gardeners are very adaptable; suggestion, advocacy, conflict, and funding all play a part in the manifestation of the food garden. These are local concerns, emanating from within the estate and the developing community rather than addressing broader food security issues. I argue this thesis contributes to an understanding of the exchange between hegemonic discourse and residents own imagined and experience of space by illuminating that it has variability rather than rigidity, its own narrative and discourse is nascent, responsive, and procedural not directed by pre-set factors such as today's meal. As we can see, residents imagine a space where they socialise, have sensual engagement, or inhabit rather than spaces that might solve diurnal food requirements.

This chapter has presented results in which the need to appropriate space becomes a vital act, one that creates frisson and focuses long held resentment about being excluded from the spatial responsibilities. This is not to say that they can't address food aims directly, however, as with the discussion recorded in field notes food falls way down the agenda.



The absence of food growing from this chapter reflects further the circumstance where the needs of daily food can be satisfied at local shops, cafes or domestic kitchens. What the results demonstrate is the need to pay attention to the creative and social aspects associated with the garden which are rooted spatially and socially and can only be acted on in that space communally. In other words, the community situation creates a space that reflects the concerns of that community, such as “saving or making money, and education ... reduced crime and increased safety, environmental sustainability, enhancing cultural heritage, life satisfaction, environmental equity and increased biodiversity” (Guitart et al., 2012, p.367). I felt that the food-growing concept was a proxy; it acts as a Trojan horse, trespassing on landscape already invested with absent intentions enforced by inert, tidy lawns, the built space designed and designated by architects, or a ‘canvas’ as expressed by sympathetic architects TICArchitecture (Périn and Barraud, 2008).

This reflects Casey (1993, p.138), discussed in chapter two, who speaks of the acts of dwelling in a common external space (as opposed to private space) as having the character of the “thief, the trespasser, and the traveller”. Landscape is a key resource for urban agriculture and food production in general and one which residents organise around. The research reveals that landscape is not an inert, neutral, readily available resource onto which we can place practice. Landscape is a shifting space, contested by some, partly invisible or perhaps imagined for others. It is a place where the everyday thoughts of residents struggle to find agency against the dominant discourse of designed space.

Therefore, food-growing as a concept did not present me with simple linearity from the needs of food to its local production, where urban agriculture is seen directly as a “common survival strategy used by the poor ... to deal with food insecurity and poverty” (Redwood, 2009, p.4). The emphasis placed on poverty for example may not be the motivating force for residents. In fact, as Thornton (2008) points out, urban agriculture will be less essential despite poverty, where social welfare schemes emerge as offering primary support. As discussed in chapter one, food security in the UK is wedded to solving the issues through existing market structures, where urban agriculture in the UK might be pursued for leisure rather than produce; “For many poorer developing countries, urban agriculture is more a matter of economic value than of recreational or aesthetic preference” (Viljoen et al., 2005, p.97).

For instance, results discuss how economic difficulties can breed inaction, such as with Alison's discussion above. This troubles the notion that food gardens offer succours from poverty when in fact they can heap pressure on those that are already feeling deeply burdened by crisis. Put simply, I could not put food at the centre of a diagram and connect outwardly, it was never a target that I could approach straight on; as Eleanor reminds us it would be simpler if the community food garden was about growing organic vegetables, but it is clearly not. As discussed below, they are a connective agent that draws together disparate aspects of social life. As McCann (1999, p.168) notes, space is "in a process of being shaped, reshaped, and challenged by the spatial practices of various groups and individuals whose identities and actions undermine the homogeneity of contemporary cities".

#### 4.3.5 Gardens as compressed social spaces

Community gardens are compressed spaces, in which a large volume of social, cultural, and personal actions get compacted into small urban locations. Largely these gardens occupy a relatively small physical space, gardened for sometimes merely a few hours per week sometimes where social functions such as basic greetings and cups of tea occupy time. Through the idea of a landscape being compressed, I imagined the daily routine of residents being like an hourglass. Large at one end, representing their domestic sphere but the journey out of the estate being squeezed and compressed in the middle until they surface at their destination; a landscape between the internal domestic and the external spaces of work, school or shopping; a middle ground of communal actions and dwelling.

Community gardens on the whole occupy the interstices of urban space; small fragments of open space in the overall built environment of a city (Eizenberg, 2013). These existing spaces are sometimes invisible, derelict, or unmanaged spaces that need appropriating and transforming. This process of transformation means multiple social, cultural, and personal actions, desires, and intentions get pushed into a relatively small urban setting already saturated with narratives and intentions of maintenance and designers. Far from being 'blankspace', spaces are already colonised by a plurality of everyday intentions and dreams.

Brownfield estate residents successfully established an extensive community food garden as result of a long process of negotiation between different agencies and

projects. It is convenient, especially when conducting an interview in a summer food garden full of edibles, to assume that the motivation to create a garden space is the surrounding harvest situated within a physical garden. Yet the story did not begin with a statement of intent to simply grow food; differing strands of narrative build up from architectural design, ecology, maintenance, disuse, desire and daily routine. Brownfield estate resident Eleanor is keen to stress that community cohesion not organic vegetable production was the instigation for the resultant garden. As Colding and Barthel (2013, p.162) discuss, “The emergence of communal gardens (amongst other self-managed spaces) is not only correlated to periods of food shortage. Equally important is that available physical spaces exist in cities ... closely related to the reorganization of cities after some kind of crises”. In these gardens I would argue that the crisis is both spatial in terms of the failure of overly conceived material space, as well as social and personal crisis in terms of community.

Residents therefore bring individual narratives to the communal space – financial, personal, social factors. As we saw with Alison, while she intends to grow food for her young daughter she is also personally empowered by gardening to move her life on. The space she has chosen is a disused ball court. A site of occasional vandalism, temporary porta-cabins, and overtaken by pioneer weeds. Alison in a sense is all of these things: a vandal, a redeveloper, and a pioneer. She is in the wrong place, like a weed confusing boundaries of use through the layering-over onto faded markings of the ball court with new grow bags and raised beds. Alison’s “flippin’ field of dreams” contains personal stories, aspirations to feed the local population, history, and the every present threat of redevelopment. It is an almost overwhelming fusion and confusion of factors secreted in a small material space.

As noted community gardens occupy a relatively small physical space, the interstices between pavement, car parks and buildings for example. Yet they also occupy social interstices; a communal gap between home and work routines, maintained for only brief periods sometimes a few hours per week: Dirty Hands on a Saturday morning, Lansbury gardeners on a Thursday morning for two hours, while others are more ad hoc forming around work schedules. Growing food takes time, but so do tea, biscuits, and finding the keys to store cupboards. Highmore (2011 p.15) draws our attention to these everyday domestic scenes as a; “micro-geography” of “furniture ...

coffee and tea breaks” and the “emotional intimacy of friends, boredom ... routine ... familiarity”.

Also, compressed within the space of the estate are the original expectations of social behaviour. Literature on architectural space argues that expectations of social performance runs deep, back to post-war narratives of modernity where the creation of new urban spaces was fundamentally related to ideas of expected behaviour from the residents (Darling, 2007, Hornsey, 2010). This is a continuous and recursive process between the resident and the space of the estate. One dominated by the cultural hegemony of planned housing exemplified through landscape presented culturally as preconceived, inert, tidy, and visual, contrariwise to everyday life, exerting a subtle cultural power even in the absence of those who conceive of space (McCann, 1999). As Gottiener (1994, p.127) writes, “spatial contradiction of society is the confrontation between abstract space ... and ... the complex interaction of all classes in the pursuit of everyday”. Urban agriculture practices therefore, at the local scale within material space, challenge notions of urban behaviour, municipal landscaping, and the modernism of housing through everyday practice.

Community cuts across this grain causing conflict, compromise, and diverting residents from meaningful food production. Polyphonic aspirations, desires and conflicts become forced into small physical and social spaces, compressing actions. I argue that it is through participatory research that the process of such spatial practices can be clearly seen enabling an understanding of how food production becomes subject to multiple influences or even side-lined.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

This chapter has explored the factors that influence the formation of garden space demonstrating that the garden should not be seen as an object that produces effects only at the point that it physically exists.

The results show that residents need to appropriate the planned space of the estate, meaning that while residents talk about food-growing, they also need to find a grammar to articulate spatial interactions. In considering discourses that influence the emergence of the garden, external advocates, who focus on spatial transformation, are vital; they open up a renewed dialectical tension into which discussion and debates around space are made public, articulated, or simply

imagined. In short, community food gardens largely emerge because there are advocates, predecessors in the local environment, or because of instances of transformation. Whether ideas are fed top-down, from architects, or through local council land grabs, media discourse or already existent local gardens, they all bring a vital focus to the idea that space is not fixed but changeable and therefore holds social potential.

I argue that the results demonstrate that there is a spatial crisis with regard to the potential for urban agriculture; if food deserts measure the potential (dis)connection of residents from fresh food outlets, then these residents can be said to live in spatial deserts, disconnected from meaningful interaction with immediate landscape. This is an important result because landscape is *the* vital resource from which food production will emerge, demonstrating the need to understand space through its social situation and not rely on quantitative mapping alone.

What is evident is that estates are a landscape of exclusion; excessive grounds maintenance leads to their near invisibility for some and excluding potential use. I would argue that the close-cut grass of estates censors a fallowing of land which would permit new ideas to originate. By contrast, the dereliction of space due to retrenchment in public spending precisely offers a fallow space into which ideas can form. In differing forms, the most immediate landscape to their homes is not one that residents feel they can engage with. I have termed this spatial sovereignty, emphasising the need to have autonomy over space as a precondition for food sovereignty or security.

The work of Lefebvre has been a useful conceptual guide within this chapter because the conceptual triangle is able to draw attention to the way conceived space, perceived space, and imagination vies for spatial production. Despite the historical dominance of conceived space (the original design and maintenance or regeneration), it is also one that residents are able to envisage as a lived experience through food growing that provides sensory and social engagement. The following chapter takes the reader from discourse into the space of practice and direct participation with residents as gardeners.

## **Chapter five**

### **Making spaces for food**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

Chapter five explores how residents move from imagining and debating to actual practice; both forming a material space and gardening itself. Garden practices fuse together DIY and growing to produce a new space of communal food production. This action means negotiating with other residents, existing space and ‘borrowing’ from and producing interactions with the built environment. In exploring the material space of the garden and its emerging practices, this chapter contextualises the basic question asked of residents which was “Why food gardening?” The findings show that the food harvests of the gardeners should not be separated out as a discreet and disembodied objects but are best understood spatially and socially contextualised. This means that that the amount of food produced by the communal actions becomes relative to and addresses these social and spatial factors. This chapter, therefore, concludes that community food gardening gives greater attention to occupying and resolving crisis in the in-between spaces of the city and estate community and less attention to crisis in the food system.

The community food gardens explored in this chapter exist at differing stages, some existent (Lansbury estate, Dirty Hands, Haberdasher estate), others transitioning and forming (Brownfield estate, St John’s estate), some still debating (De Beauvoir estate). The transitioning and formation stage of the food garden involves residents moving from interactions with advocates, each other, and their imaginations to begin the creative actions of making a food garden. This brings together the requirement to construct and to cultivate within the already built space of the estate. As Lefebvre states, there is a need for people to “generate (or produce) a space” because “new ideas ... have difficulty generating their own space, and often run the risk of aborting” (Lefebvre, 1991b, pp.416-417). How this space is generated is important if we are to understand how gardeners create new spaces for food and how this impacts on the long term potential for gardens as a sustainable food practice.

I present a qualitative and embodied exploration of the ongoing production of garden space across these differing states as a lived experience, offering insights into how to value such things as resources, materials, and food while resisting quantification or abstraction. I follow Massey (2011) regarding the need to not research surfaces (garden landscape in a moment absent of people) but one “imbued with temporality ...a cut through ongoing histories. Not a surface but a simultaneity of stories-so-far”.

The material community food garden is a highly creative place where residents begin to gain sovereignty and become communal. Underpinning this chapter, as with all the empirical chapters, is the conceptual approach of the everyday presenting an understanding of the lived experience of community food-growing that this thesis accessed through participation. Practice within a physical space of the garden brings greater focus on dwelling (construction and cultivation), as well as a chance to explore how the garden space interacts with the wider built space and broader environmental concerns such as climate change. This chapter also explores the meaning behind the emphatic use of the word food within the conjoined term community food garden. I explore why residents feel so adamant about the word and how they value yields and harvest as part of making a space for food.

To remind the reader that this thesis is not a gardening manual and there is little data on techniques in isolation. What is presented here is data on the social, spatial, and everyday interaction of people and place that aims to understand everyday spatial entanglements and its influence on food. What needs to emerge, relevant to the questions and aims, is how these interactions affect and produce harvest in order to position community food gardens relative to urban agriculture and its focus on food provision.

This chapter and chapter six are linked through their exploration of material space. As a distinction, Chapter six extends the exploration of the garden space, looking at the phenomenological aspects of everyday growing such as the sensory and performative aspects that do not leave traces or objects.

## 5.2 Section one: Results and analysis

### 5.2.1 Fusing construction and cultivation

In this opening section I look at how residents bring together building and gardening, which I approach through the dwelling perspective of Ingold (2000). A dwelling perspective draws together the need to cultivate and construct as an ongoing process. The link between construction and gardening is common to residents as Eleanor explains:

“It’s either DIY or growing things isn’t it and we managed to fuse both. It’s partly to do with the satisfaction, the sense of reward through your manual labour, whether it was planting something or making something, there’s something to show for yourself at the end no matter how modest it would be” [Eleanor\_01\_Greening Brownfield].

Planting and making are bound together, achieving the desired aim of making something that one can be proud of, as Keith explains:

“I’m more interested in the gardening side of it but I love building things, making things ... like, furniture, benches things like that ... just cause I like doing it ya know, it’s part of what I do, I love doing that ... but living in a flat ... you can’t do that ... you don’t have the space ... but if you have a space where you can go and express yourself through gardening a little bit or producing something or making something ... I think that’s absolutely fantastic” [Keith\_01\_Greening Brownfield].

Keith clearly echoes Eleanor; the community food garden becomes a place that draws together those aspects of dwelling discussed in the literature review – the need to see building as a verb indicating transformation that includes the need to “till the soil... and ... to construct, to make something, to raise up an edifice” (Ingold, 2000, p.185).

Brownfield estate food garden is largely constructed from stripped down wooden pallets, remade and neatly painted as raised beds, seats and a large communal table. The process is more than just the pragmatics of needing to contain the soil for



growing food. With many residents there is a sense of a joint creative act contextualised within the space of the garden. Jim describes this simply as “you want to be a creator, you want to plant the vegetables” [Jim\_02\_Greening Brownfield].

The need to transform and create space is evinced from the Haberdasher estate application<sup>18</sup>, where the residents write:

“We will pull down the old boards to let more light into the car parks [sic] to discourage drug users and vandals ... as well as a poorly maintained, half empty, weedy flower bed together with a second site that ... is not and never has been used ... ensure residents interact with each other, get out of their gardenless flats and get satisfaction from growing their own food” [Haberdasher estate Capital Growth application].

The residents not only pull boards down but also replace them with thick wire grilles. In front they place grow bags to cultivate runner beans that grow up against the wire to the upper balconies. Figure 14 shows the physical interaction that this produces between residents, plants, and architecture, showing the wire grill addition of residents. The upper storey residents, who look down on the plots, also become involved; the plants creep onto their balconies and the architecture gets an edible covering. As Jim, Brownfield estate, comments, “the plants almost come part of the architecture” [Jim\_02\_Greening Brownfield].

I feel that the Haberdasher estate’s Capital Growth application draws together complex experiences of residents, the history of their space, its everyday use, and their emotional responses. Residents have made small but significant additions to the estate; in the background food grows, meandering slowly across the landscape, literally and symbolically binding together the actions of residents, architects, and the (poorly) maintained estate. Yet, the potential to “get satisfaction from growing their own food” is less one that satisfies the daily needs of cooking or eating, but instead provides a creative and emotional process in making and linking landscape, food and their homes.

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<sup>18</sup> Applications for Capital Growth funding were made by residents on a public website and formed a database managed by Capital Growth. I had access to Capital Growth applications both as volunteer but also as a campaign officer at Sustain, 2010-2012.



**Figure 14: Runner beans Haberdasher estate**

I reflect on this in my field notes, on the 7th July, “Hunger. It’s that food moment again. We go to a café. The opening times are on the door and there’s a menu ... beans, chips, tea, cheese, baked pots, beef burgers, bacon. Self-grown food is more unreliable, it takes weeks but the building of the garden space can bring almost instant satisfaction” [field notes 7th July 2010]. There are no short cuts to eating the food from the garden – it takes time to grow a meal, during which time multiple other trajectories and emotions are explored, sated and embedded.

There is therefore an asymmetry between cultivation and construction and the concomitant social outcomes. Residents produce tangible progress in the garden during a single session, getting to know each other better; the harvest may fail to emerge but in the meanwhile gardeners socialise, create cities, and produce a space for food.

### 5.2.2 Qualitative aspects of making space

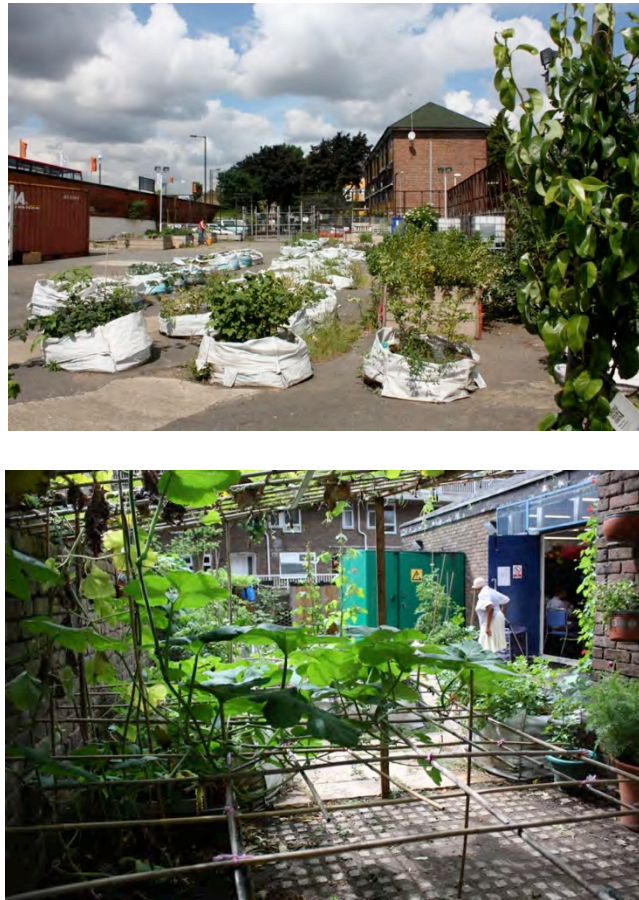
Community gardens produce a multitude of dissimilar spaces evident in figures 5-10. This is because they occupy available space, working within exiting boundaries such as wall and fences. These dissimilar spaces are therefore inherently variable in terms of how they might be able to produce food. Gardens are not designed around requirements to occupy a certain volume of space towards an expected yield; harvest emerges from the incremental additions of raised beds or grown bags through enactment. While it might be possible to measure the growing spaces quantitatively, in this section I want to explore an understanding of harvest that takes account of the situated social action of people rather than the objects of practice. As noted above, practice produces much more in the way of construction than it does cultivation; it is the former that occupies residents' energies and imaginations. Moving beyond this observation, I want to demonstrate how a qualitative understanding of the process of making space influences food harvests.

Figure 15 below shows Dirty Hands (top), the largest garden, occupying a disused ball court, side by side with Lansbury gardeners (bottom), the smallest, tucked away behind Hind Grove community centre. In discussing these images I do not want to fall into using geographic dimensions to lead the discussion, obfuscating other discussions and understanding regarding practice. In other words, when considering the need to access land, I want to explore this beyond measurable space, drawing out the social, cultural and everyday actions and how these influence food-growing.

As Bohn and Viljoen (2005, p.109) state: "there is no qualitative judgement connected to size: small open space is not bad open space, neither is big open space. Size is considered as influencing the space's designation and its ability to accommodate certain programmes and occupations". They call for urban agriculture to have a more "sensual, qualitative measure for the spatial success of open urban space" under the name of "spaciousness", as discussed in the literature review (Viljoen et al., 2005, p. 110).

In considering the "spaciousness" of Dirty Hands (figure 15, upper) for example, against that of Lansbury gardeners (figure 15, lower), one might assume that the former would be more 'productive' than the latter. Dirty Hands has the potential to

be more productive for food in terms of land area; nevertheless, from participation it was not clear that this was actually the case.



**Figure 15: Dirty Hands (upper image) and Lansbury estate garden (lower image)**

However, considering the social harvests, the perspective shifts: the size of Dirty Hands sometimes prohibited exchange and interaction as your tasks could separate you at either end of the extensive site; conversing tended to happen when we occasionally sheltered in the tools store or for tea breaks. Lansbury gardeners' tight space was highly productive for social interaction; its "spaciousness" to use Bohn and Viljoen's (2005, p.109) term for a qualitative understanding of space, triggered constant contact and you could be clearly heard from one end to the other. As Amin and Thrift (2002, p.40) write, "we need to be careful about space ... the smallest spatialities can have the largest social consequence". This is evidenced by Louise's comments that during the Thursday morning sessions at Lansbury estate, conversations can outweigh gardening in practice; "Sometimes there'll be a lot of sitting down and drinking cups of tea and I look at them and say I think we need to

do some gardening now and they say ‘oh alright, OK’!” [Louise\_01\_Lansbury gardeners ].

The community food garden on Haberdasher estate is split between several estate sites. This patchwork, while making the distribution of soil and water an issue, encourages the spread of social contact as gardeners move around. There was a sense of presence throughout the estate, with gardeners feeling comfortable occupying differing levels – walkways and ground – and internal sites as well as those that abutted the surrounding streets. At first glance, the fragmented space would seem to be a hindrance to practice; perhaps more precisely, one would not conceive a strategic plan to grow food in such a scattered way, yet the fragments aid circulation, meaning more space is inhabited by greater social interaction. It is interesting that Neil happily considers giving up space for growing in exchange for space for people saying: “if someone said to me, if a new person came to me and wanted to get involved, then no problem to me, what I’d do is give up one of my [tonne] bags” [Neil\_03\_Haberdasher estate]. You cannot plan for social interaction. It must be generated and owned by those that use the space daily.

These ‘bags’, or ‘tonne bags’ are common to most of the estate spaces, which are typified by a thrown together, readymade, or recycled approach. Tonne bags are woven plastic bags, approximately 900mm square and 800mm deep, convertible to instant raised beds. At Dirty Hands, these are lined up across the tarmac, while on Lansbury estate they are dotted around the small, walled community space so that you need to weave in and out. Alison comments that until she saw soil bags used as raised beds on concrete she would not have made the connection that food-growing does not need a field or at least grass.

The tonne bags of Haberdasher estate (figure 16), occupy a thin strip, previously home to ornamental shrubs which, in the words of Neil, were only useful to the council because they were “really dense and it gives good coverage” [Neil\_03\_Haberdasher estate]. The bags gave Neil a unit of measure enabling an understanding of space through food-growing technology as an example of creative and transformative practices. While walking around with Neil, looking at disused space on the estate, he began counting; “We could get – [pointing] two, four, six, ten, eighteen [tonne] bags in there” [Neil\_03\_Haberdasher estate]. Neil engages in

the making of space through the language of food production enabling him to visualise, and construe space through his practical experience of it. While it is clearly an estimation, Neil does not only approximate food production but also social production; what he is visualising is the number of people that could garden and who “will make it [the landscape] look occupied” [Neil\_Haberdasher estate\_03]. Measurement, or exactitude are therefore made relevant not to harvest but to people and social contact.



**Figure 16: The tonne bags, Haberdasher estate**

On Brownfield estate, Eleanor sees wooden raised beds as objects that impose rigidity of form that can create exclusion. She scoffs at fellow gardener Keith who seems to have developed an obsession with box making to a strict intention. Keith confirms his interests but making an off hand comment that he “doesn’t give a toot about growing vegetables”. Eleanor comments, “the thing that worries me is that this box fetish is going to translate into people not being allowed to bring their own things” [Eleanor\_01\_Greening Brownfield] into the garden because they will conflict with Keith’s matching boxes. Residents therefore offer differing approaches to the physical construction of space; a fetish, a passion, an instant hit, or concerns with equity of design processes. Construction is considered in multiple ways but seldom in terms of food production alone. As space is being constructed for cultivation it connects to social, aesthetic and emotional narratives of space, including the conflict of Eleanor and Keith. An understanding of the qualitative aspects highlights a divergence of urban agriculture and community gardens where the former might seek consolidation and the latter seeks dispersal and fragmentation with the body providing a sense of consolidation between spaces.



### 5.2.3 Borrowing: between design and everyday making

In this section I explore how residents begin to merge the existing built form of the urban silhouette as a “borrowed landscape” (Schmelzkopf, 1995, p. 367). This borrowing is at once physical and literal in terms of reusing a surface or wall, but also in language as residents borrow estate names, reusing them. Residents also borrow from the wider landscape through enactment within the garden which becomes recursive of the garden space, the gardener and the wider cityscape.

For instance, I ask Cindy if she has any photographs of the estate landscape, external to her flat, from which she wants to ‘borrow’ in order to create her garden. She replies simple, “no, why would you, it’s rubbish!” [Cindy\_01\_De Beauvoir gardeners]. She goes on to explain, “Nothing happens ... nothing changes round here and they won’t let us make changes” [Cindy\_01\_De Beauvoir gardeners]. She is finding an expression for the temporal asymmetry between her desire to create a garden, the seemingly static architecture, and her daily interaction with the space of the estate. In response to this I look in the local history library for images of the estate, finding a photograph from 1987 showing the broad view of her estate (figure 17, left hand image). I spend the afternoon walking around the estate looking for the same vantage point, taking a second photo 23 years later (figure 17, right hand image).

I am drawn to do this because I want to enter that space in Cindy’s imagination where nothing changes and empathise with her own life story. As Highmore (2011, p.1) writes, “The everyday is the accumulation of ‘small things’ that constitute a more expansive but hard to register ‘big thing’”.

Cindy and I compare these images side by side (figure 17). Generally, almost nothing has changed in the images. Cindy comments by narrating from her life, “I moved in in ‘72 ... [the estate] was just finished off, the plastered was just dry[ing] and from then till now this estate hasn’t really changed ... not that I could look at and go wow ... you know they’ve made a difference” [Cindy\_01\_De Beauvoir gardeners]. The bright red handrails are now faded to pink, the paving shows patchwork repairs, and a tree has grown. There are actually massive changes like the addition of a low-rise block, on the right. Yet, I would argue that Cindy is right because she is commenting beyond the material space of the estate, about her lived

experience; she is her own, and the estates spatial expert, reflecting on the absent traces of her own life, invisible in both photographs. This is more than a comment on two static images; this is also representative of the personal journey Cindy must make from passive residents to gardener as amateur architect.



**Figure 17: De Beauvoir estate, Left 1987 and right 2010**

Source: left image: Chris Dorley-Brown. Right image the author

On the Brownfield estate's Capital Growth grant application form, the residents write of creating a garden in a "currently derelict space located in front of the iconic Balfron Tower" [Brownfield estate Capital Growth application]<sup>19</sup>. Residents are borrowing from the iconic silhouette of the tower relative to transforming the dereliction at ground level. Yet within the juxtaposition between 'derelict' and 'iconic' the garden marks a point within material space, rather than an opposition, because both are equally part of the same spatial narrative conceived by professionals. Space fails, not because it no longer functions but because it does not do what it was abstractly conceived to do.

On the 17<sup>th</sup> June, I met with residents of Brownfield estate to begin transforming the overgrown ball court into a food garden. Palettes are placed around the ball court; residents are only permitted to build where there are supporting walls below in the disused car park (figure 18). A copy of the plans are laid out on the tarmac of the ball court against the faded lines of tennis, now punctured by weeds that are evident in figure 18. My field notes record

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<sup>19</sup> Applications for Capital Growth funding were made by residents on a public website and formed a database managed by Capital Growth. I had access to Capital Growth applications both as volunteer but also as a campaign officer at Sustain, 2010-2012.



“Anna has architectural plans to work out where the disused underground car parking structural supports are. Raised beds can only be built above these. We trace their lines ... drawing with chalk across the faded lines of the tennis court. Her two year old draws on floor with chalk. We walk, we talk, and we draw on the map and floor” [field notes 17th June 2010].

While this is a pragmatic task it is also one she embraces, interacting with the broken tarmac surfaces, and marking across the weeds and broken tarmac. As de Certeau (1984, p.202) writes, “place is a palimpsest”, where the everyday produces a mutual interaction between differing spatial practices within the same place. Scientific analysis knows only its most recent texts ... the result of its epistemological decisions, its criteria and its goals. stressing that the everyday has “fictive character” which succeeds not because of critical insights but because it can mediate between different dominant forces.



**Figure 18: Ball court, Brownfield estate showing gardener placing palettes**

Broadly, garden projects represent a change of use for a small part of the estate landscape from an otherwise largely unnamed expanse (Ravetz, 2001). This change

starts in language, as residents begin a ‘nicknaming’ process leading towards the development of a local, emic discourse of community food-growing. Reflecting on this process shows how residents begin to debate a communal practice and space, often opting against the word ‘allotment’. St John’s estate gets renamed an ‘St John’s Community Kitchen Garden’, while some residents don’t rename the space but rename themselves as a group identity, becoming the Lansbury gardeners for example. Others describe a group action such as ‘Greening’ Brownfield [estate]. These acts of (re) naming become useful wayfinders within communal action; community garden food gets contextualised within the existing space through renaming but other food spaces remain external, abstracted, and unchanged.

Simon, who formerly considered the garden space invisible, argues that his making of the public garden sign is a significant occurrence; it melds food-growing and eating with the transformation of space as a creative act:

‘There is something really satisfying about a radish that you pluck out the ground and just eat, it’s somehow different ... it’s partly a creative thing isn’t it? It’s like music or art, you’re making something, you’re watching it sort of evolve ... and pride in making something ... like I’m making the sign [for the garden] and I’m quite pleased with it, it will be quite nice to see it hanging up there ... it’s claiming something back [from the city]’ [Simon\_01\_St John’s community kitchen garden].

Borrowing for Simon brings story and escape albeit a momentary one, a ‘brief respite’; he neatly performs a hop, skip and a jump from soil, to radish, to eating and his creative acts, contrasted with that of the cityscape. Standing next to Simon, I share with him his “watching it evolve”; his transforming actions now form part of the essential landscape story and so is my participation with him. The act of eating does not form an ending but borrows from his view of city from which in turn he is able to “claiming something back” from the city, a “brief respite”.

#### 5.2.4 Why grow food?

This section explores the why food question, while the following section will explore residents’ expectations of harvests. During interviews, one of the few direct questions I asked consistently was “why food?” As discussed in chapter three, this

question arose in order to establish that community food gardens were in fact food-based (and therefore examples of urban agriculture) rather than simply adopting a moniker. The following data explores how residents perceive and value cultivating food (as opposed to ornamental gardening for example), in terms of expectations but also sensually and practically. We learn that, in terms of measurement, success can be weighed in stories and experience, as much as the combined weight of potatoes and peas. Gordon states “the main impetus of this garden is food production” [Gordon\_03\_Lansbury gardeners ]. This incentive drives all case studies; there was a consistent attention to the phenomena of growing food with only a few residents stating that they would be happy combining some (ornamental) flower growing. This is a core thesis concern; residents are overwhelmingly emphatic that food is *the* essential component of these community gardens, yet it is not clear how and why food is pursued given its lack of significant harvest or yield.

Residents’ responses ranged from “it has to be food”, to Gordon, who was happy to concede to growing nothing, yet still identify himself as a food gardener. In the middle ground are many residents like Gillian, whose expectations of food are something that is an exception; “I don’t expect it will feed me with dinners every night of the week! But if there was the odd special thing I’d be quite happy” [Gillian\_01\_Greening Brownfield]. Angela repeats Gillian’s contentment of a small exemplar harvest; “because to be able to grow potatoes ... it’s probably going to give us about four meals [laughs!!!]. But just to be able to do that in our time feels good” [Angela\_01\_St John’s community kitchen garden]. Angela is making time with food growing, producing space embodied with temporal emotion beyond quotidian feeding schedules.

Lee expands on this ‘good’ feeling and the narrative of growing.

Mikey: “Why food?”

Lee: “To do things like benefit my family, the people I love and care for. Sorta gets ya talking, just opens me up more ... yeah it would have to be [food], just to see how it grows ... it’s the story” [Lee\_01\_Haberdasher estate].

Lee’s story is both that of love and care for people and the narrative of the gardener cultivating food. Food is able to ‘grow’ both a narrative of cultivation and a culture

of social interaction. Natasha explains simply why food is core; “food is concrete ... It’s exciting to grow food because you have this end product that you can put in your mouth” [Natasha\_01\_De Beauvoir gardeners]. Natasha’s comment encapsulates much that is the focus for residents, often stating you have “something to show” - a creative action with a tangible product. The metaphor of food being concrete gives a direct emphasis to the story between food and architectural space. Food growing and the built environment fuse and are consumed together. This is not an activity that fills the stomach, but a practice that feeds emotions and imaginations.

For Keith it is a “wow, wow, wow, that’s produce in that I can eat that ... we have to eat, definitely” [Keith\_01\_Greening Brownfield]. Graeme, a resident of St John’s estate, explains further:

“The greatest pleasure is to eat a bit of your own food on a summer’s evening, they’re your potatoes, your courgettes, they taste best ... you have grown them and so even if you’re a dilettante urban farmer but you are actually farming food ... even a few tomatoes off your window box, they’re your tomatoes and you’ve watched that process and it’s different from flowers, ya know it’s a slightly deeper experience [with food] but similar. So I think the pleasure in growing stuff is that you get a bit more of a high from food not just at the aesthetic level” [Graeme\_01\_St John’s community kitchen garden].

Food-growing, consequently, is not something that residents conceive on a grand scale, in terms of volume, but linked with emotion, sensuality, and pleasure. As Giard (1998, p.183) states, eating is more than biology but makes “concrete one of the specific modes of relation between a person and the world, thus forming one of the fundamental landmarks in space-time”.

Yet, while Graeme is, in his words, a dilettante, he is also at the same time ‘actually farming food’, though at the scale of a few tomatoes. The fulfilment is to witness the process of growing in the context of where people live; it is the ‘greatest pleasure’, a ‘wow, wow, wow’ and a ‘high’ situated within the communal landscape of their estates. These are primary feeling, as Louise confirms: “Putting something into your mouth, it’s very powerful. It does take you back to real basic things, to survive”

[Louise\_01\_Lansbury gardeners ]. This is something Gillian recognises: “[I’ve] nurtured it, grown it, produced it ... potatoes you've grown yourself and dig up and eat them. It’s primal, yet ... related to the arts ... a creative thing”

[Gillian\_01\_Greening Brownfield]. Food becomes embodied, and, relational to the space and narrative of its creation.

#### 5.2.5 Variable harvest

As discussed in the literature review, community food gardens can grow volume or nothing. This variation in harvest is explored in this thesis as a journey from intention to grow, to making space to grow, to consuming its harvest. It is what is produced or generated from practice, and how this is entwined and influenced by the situation of the garden, not a measurement of volume alone. Residents, on the whole have few misconceptions about the potential for volume or self-sufficiency from practice. As Simon discusses, “Graeme and I were having a chat about how much space you'd need to feed one person or a family. We reckon probably you'd need the whole space [estate] just to feed a family for a year” [Simon\_01\_St John’s community kitchen garden]. As Louise explores further:

“I don’t see it as being anything near self-sufficiency at all ... I think my involvement here was really because I was so pleased to see something happening ... I wanted to be part of it and see where it took me ... I don’t think there would be enough space [for self-sufficiency] and it’s difficult to get an idea of who is interested in [food-growing]. This is the other thing. Who really wants to do it? There are whole different layers of interest. And I think this is why this garden works quite well in a way because people are interested but they're not interested. But they're happy to come once a week or twice a week, pop in and out but they don’t really want the long hard slog” [Louise\_01\_Lansbury gardeners ].

I felt the disinterest in self-sufficiency, as characterised by Louise above, was expressed in a way not to cast doubt on potential production but to re-emphasise that residents were much more interested in the ‘different layers’, the joining of narratives and the connectivity discussed in chapter four. The variable harvest of community food gardens satisfies the fact that people are interested in food

production but in the same breath are not; as Louise says, “Who really wants to do it?” This is not a dualism between growing and not growing; it is an indication of the lack of urgency around food, an acknowledgement that food consumption and the desires of residents to feed themselves can be dealt with elsewhere unlike issues of community, creativity, or dwelling. It is also evident of the way residents connect and discounted across the foodscape of a city; food is a common desire whose pattern and intensity varies across the city. At supermarkets, the daily desire to eat is fully realised, in the garden, the desire for food shifts to the needs of social, creative, and situated connectedness.

Louise, as with other residents, speaks of being pleased to see ‘something happen’ and wanting to be part of it, to see where it takes her, to detour, to wander, rather than preconceive a planned route. There is an element here of gardeners becoming ‘diverted’ within acts of reappropriation as noted by Lefebvre, discussed in chapter two. community food gardens on the whole generates story, new routes, and flux, which against any blue print might seem unsystematic or disorganised. As Massey comments:

“The truly productive characteristics of material spatiality — its potential for the happenstance juxtaposition of previously unrelated trajectories, that business of walking round a corner and bumping into alterity ... this is an aspect of the productiveness of spatiality which may enable ‘something new’ to happen” (Massey, 2005, p.94).

As Anna confirms, “I think it’s that notion of ... work[ing] together, for a common purpose. Sometimes you could put a load of seeds in together and they might not grow [but] you've done it together and wasn’t it nice” [Anna\_01\_Greening Brownfield]. The failure to grow therefore also becomes part of the success of the community food garden “and wasn’t it nice”. Anna pushes this point further: “part of the reason why I like gardening is I like the randomness of it ... what happens when you allow randomness into your life. When, like most people I can be quite controlling about things” [Anna\_01\_Greening Brownfield]. Yet, I would argue that this is also specific; previously unrelated paths cross and entangle generating a new spatiality based on community, cultivation, and building. Food-growing, as argued in

chapter four is contingent; it responds to diverse aspects of community and space but less so the singular earnest works of ‘agriculture’.

I discussed the idea of the inherent ambiguity with Gordon in a playful exchange. I had noticed that Gordon facilitated things for the gardening group (getting keys cut for example) rather than actual gardening. Gordon speaks of being deeply involved but had not “actually got to the point where I’ve ... taken seeds, [and] put them in the ground” [Gordon\_03\_Lansbury gardeners ]. In the conversation below we discuss his attitude to gardening in which he emphasises the importance of the social aspect of practice:

Gordon: “I think maybe that’s the buzz I’m getting [social contact].

It’s not so much putting a seed in the ground and growing a carrot”.

Mikey: “But you still have to grow the carrot?”

Gordon: “ummm, [Gordon draws breath and laughs!] Yeeaaahh”  
[said slowly and reluctantly].

Mikey: “because if you just put a rose in the ground?”

Gordon: “Ohhh no, no, no, no, it’s got to be edible, you’ve got to eat it, arable, is that what it means? Arable ... eating? It’s arable farming. It’s nothing else, but it’s not farming, by any means. The bags are one square metre!” [Gordon\_01\_Lansbury gardeners ].

Gordon is resolute he is farming; yet almost simultaneously, he was not farming, analogous to Graeme in the section above, who can be a ‘dilettante farmer’ but at the same time ‘an actual farmer’. Witnessed through participation I would argue this narrative is not as contradictory as it sounds; self-sufficiency is predicated on a separation from systems so that communities can become self-reliant. Conversely, community food gardeners are seeking to produce connections, spending a great deal of time discussing, negotiating, and creating a space, sifting through “whole different layers of interest” as Louise stated above.

The practice of growing food generates its own local, spatial, and communal narrative; importantly, both success (harvest), and failure (nothing grew but ‘wasn’t it nice’), generate story, memory, and space, they ‘make something happen’

providing triggers within the community for agency within the garden and across the estate.

For example, I attend a general meeting of residents on De Beauvoir estate, who are interested in gardening and record in my field notes:

“The initial period revolves around tea, milk, biscuits and cake. This takes time. The small kitchen is shared and there is a discussion about whose milk, tea bags, and spoons they can use. In a sense this is a macro narrative that represents the larger narrative of negotiation for space and resources” [Field notes Monday 12th April].

The two and a half hour meeting debates institutional power structures, consent, funding, storage space, access to temporary rooms. Two hours into the meeting someone briefly mentions gardening but the subject doesn't surface again. I want to remind the reader that De Beauvoir estate residents were in the planning stage of a garden, and during participation (2010) had not physically started growing food. This is also a reminder that I was following the phenomena of growing not gardens as case studies. Yet, within this emerging stage of the garden, these are important events because they are the first times people have initiated social contact, in this instance focused on communal spatial creation leading to food-growing; a teaspoon may be more valuable than a spade in this context. Through participation I am able to capture these emerging moments where the 'community' in 'community food growing' begins to form around spatial and social concerns, all of which I argue has a decisive effect on growing.

#### 5.2.6 Bracketing

Before closing this section, I want to present data on the wider media discourse and its relationship to practice. Through this discussion I want to show that food gardening finds it difficult to map these wider discourses to the space of the garden as it produces a material space. This discussion is important to explore the bracketing as noted by Turner (2011), where practice with a physical space brackets out other meaningful engagements. Turner discusses how day to day practice tends to bracket-out wider or articulate the abstract discourses of grow your own or climate change. I am not saying these are not important to growers because they are, but that



they are not necessarily being actioned within the garden as part of dwelling or that the garden produces an external influence in these areas. For example, there is a wide set of responses to the broad media discourse on food-growing cited by gardeners, such as, grow your own and potential family self-sufficiency, and in one case Cuban urban agriculture. Gardeners also refer to climate change, organic food, and general environmental crisis.

As Natasha states, “people are mostly interested in food because various things have converged. The oil crisis, air miles debate, organic food debate, pesticides and all that and it’s all converged on people wanting to do food” [Natasha\_01\_De Beauvoir gardeners]. Neil reports on being influenced by television media reporting on the hypothetical self-sufficient home food garden; “‘Heaven’s Garden’, it was on Sky [TV]. It was basically a pub out in Sussex. They were showing you, from a three-metre by two-metre box, how you could feed a family of four for a year” [Neil\_02\_Haberdasher estate].

I would argue that these have significance for residents but are too abstract to lend substance to everyday actions driven by more immediate, on the ground interactions. As Bendt et al. write regarding public access gardening in Berlin, “much knowledge required in everyday settings is not learned in abstract, but through practice” (Bendt et al., 2013, p.19). A response from Anna typifies this:

“I thought I knew a lot about that [climate change] ... food miles ... it’s a really thorny subject. Much of what we are living through is very unknown, a lot of it is quite frightening and can lead to inactivity in people ... so if a group of people in east London get off their arses and make a community garden and it’s not explicitly about saving the planet ... maybe it’s about ... loving themselves a bit more ... empower people to take some element of control and decision making in their local community” [Anna\_01\_Greening Brownfield].

Anna is passionate about the project but reflects on the difficulties of bridging the gap between the ‘saving the planet’ and the day to day of her community food gardening. Thomas (1951, p.4) qualifies this, writing, “we do not ... lead our lives, make our decisions, and reach our goals in everyday life either statistically or

scientifically”. Graeme was the only person who was aware of (Cuban) urban agriculture and therefore spoke of the emerging garden in terms of its agricultural potential: “Cuba, the Havana allotments thing made my jaw drop, completely influential from seeing it on TV from a Monty Don documentary about it, thinking wow this is about food production, it’s very, very, productive, they’re really doing it” [Graeme\_01\_St John’s community kitchen garden].

The ‘it’ is primary food production that meets basic food needs and Graeme talks excitedly about wanting to understand how this might work in London, specifically in relationship to climate change. The image of productive urban agriculture stays with Graeme, yet he found himself, “paralysed in terms of doing anything meaningful until this [the garden] came along in a way, even though whatever it is, the great thing is it stops at my front door” [Graeme\_01\_St John’s community kitchen garden]. Graeme’s paralysis is eased by the knock of Angela at his front door. Inspired by seeing another local garden she wants to form a food gardening group on the estate. As we saw in chapter four with Alison and the bigger picture of the 2008 credit crunch, or above with climate change, food discourse can cause inaction, fear, or with Graeme, paralysis.

It is the proximity that appeals to Graeme and other residents, as Louise states, “what I’d really like to do is do something on my doorstep so I can go outside and do it here” [Louise\_01\_Lansbury gardeners ]. Linking his own house to landscape, eases Graeme’s ‘paralysis’. His paralysis is one of scale; like others it is difficult to connect the bigger picture of industrial agriculture to the local everyday environment. His desire to garden on the wide-open spaces of the estate is further constrained by a deep biographical crisis routed in Graeme’s desire to remain indoors. Gardening requires Graeme to perform a 180-degree turn and step “out of my front door and talk to people for the first time in five years properly and knock on everyone’s door” [Graeme\_01\_St John’s community kitchen garden]. While Graeme was inspired by Cuban urban agriculture and the quantitative potential of gardening, actual practice is much more emotional and Graeme equally states that taking “part in that environment right outside my window has changed me and the act of growing things, digging with people together has been so personally kinda joyful and transforming” [Graeme\_01\_St John’s community kitchen garden]. From speaking to Graeme I do not doubt his passion and commitment to the issue of

climate change will dissipate because of the garden, but that the garden will generate a new story of food and space that may in time connect to this bigger discourse.

Therefore, the ‘spectacle’ of television with its professional gardeners does not necessarily translate to everyday practice (Gardiner, 2000). I argue here that while residents are aware of and sympathetic to the broader media and scientific discourse, community food gardens are broadly day-to-day practical spaces of direct participation in which long-term strategic discourse implicit in grow your own media coverage are talked about but not engaged with.

### 5.2.7 Summary

As quoted in the introduction to this chapter, Lefebvre states that new ideas need to produce an appropriate material space or remain abstract or just imagined (Lefebvre, 1991b, p.417). Through participation I was able to record the divergent ways that gardeners approach spatial creation and food production, gaining insights into the distracted nature of practice. Characteristically, the resident becomes a creative amateur, distracted, spontaneous, and responsive. Cultivation is not separate from the built environment but exemplifies the recursive relationship where residents borrow from the built environment as well as working on it physical, or describe it differently, and demand more from it.

As the narrative of producing a space for gardening emerges, so too does the distance from ideals of self-sufficiency and efficient agriculture. Gardeners are able to occupy multiple spaces at once: farmer and not farmer, engaged and disengaged. However, ‘not farming’ or ‘not being interested’ are not opposites of meaningful production or mark its absence and I would argue that it is in this seemingly negative area that resides most of the affirmative social and cultural aspects that interest people. Such polarisations are not calibrating production; in fact, much affirmative social and cultural meaning resides in the seemingly negative aspects (‘not farming’, ‘not interested’).

Practice embraces these differing positions developing a provisional approach to food growing, characterised through a qualitative understanding of space that demonstrates how social production does not need consolidation (efficient fields) producing a dispersed and fragmented patterning, permitting the body to provide the continuous link between spaces.

However, this fragmentation of food production into the multidimensional, fluid, and corporeal does not weaken its potency. The cultivation of space acknowledges the emotional production; the ‘greatest pleasure’, a ‘wow, wow, wow’ and a ‘high’ that food-growing triggers, a simultaneity of plucking, eating and looking around the cultivated landscape. Community food gardens are therefore spatially intoxicating, socially seductive, and culturally playful; within such an environment it is difficult to ‘focus’ on the production of food to the degree that we could rightfully duplicate these systems and claim we are feeding cities.

### **5.3 Section two: Discussion**

#### **5.3.1 Dwelling**

Construction, cultivation, the everyday, and their influence on food growing dominate this chapter. I will begin a discussion of these aspects of ‘making space for food’ by discussing the results in relationship to the concept of dwelling. Following this, I will discuss the building process in more detail (5.3.2) leading to a discussion on the creative aspects of community food gardens, closing with a discussion on harvest. As stated in chapter two, dwelling is used to bring focus between communal cultivation and construction contextualised by a close relationship to home; specifically Ingold’s “dwelling perspective”, in comparison to a “building perspective” that only acknowledges the edifice as a product of abstract thinking (Ingold, 2011, p.10). Furthermore, I drew on the work of Harrison (2007) and the notion of a communal dwelling as well as Casey (1996) that brings an understanding of the dynamics of dwelling, where we follow the phenomena across landscape.

Residents fuse domestic construction and small scale growing, reconfiguring space in the moment, with openness to each other or a “common of dwelling” (Harrison, 2007). Eleanor is specific: practice is a fusion of both everyday making (DIY) and growing (gardening) resulting in “something to show”. The ‘show’ is edible, public and communal (as opposed to hidden or private); it identifies an action within the space of the garden whose audience is both self and others. Gardens emerged from the joint busyness of the day, where “the needs of human dwelling are achieved when they are allowed to arise spontaneously out of the requirements and concerns of particular people and landscapes” (Kimber, 2004, p.266).

In describing these dwelling moments I am not simply inveighing against professional spatial design, or romanticising dwelling, but drawing instances of spatial (co)production into an understanding of food-growing. The results demonstrate that construction does not negate the role of architect, planner, or builder but is inclusive of all stages of building as an ongoing process – a verb rather than a noun (Turner, 1972) that recognises the professional construction process as a small part of an overall narrative of continuous spatial creation that includes all human and non-human interaction. In using dwelling I do not want to set up an opposition between architecture and users but to be reminded that there is no external relationship to the built environment but a mutual reappropriation of spatial practices.

Goldfinger's architecture for Brownfield estate would have no life without the actions of residents in dwelling (inhabiter) – it would remain theoretical. When considering the sketches of Anna, these are not separate from the formative designs of Brownfield estate, but show that the Brownfield estate uses differing methods of design throughout its narrative, some exact to scale produced by Goldfinger others imaginatively penned by residents. In other words, the research demonstrates that cultural practices are interlinked, where the borrowing of the landscape by gardeners gives value to instances of everyday culture but also imbues dominant cultural acts with the values of the everyday. To further extend Schmelzkopf's (1995) comments on borrowing landscape as if a backdrop, I would argue that the creation of a garden might borrow from existing landscape, but also existing built space borrows from the garden and its practice; it becomes connected and embodied within the food and therefore consumed alongside it.

As with Simon who is "claiming something back [from the city]" during the act of eating a radish while standing under the sign he made by the New North Road. Simon links actions, senses, and bodily engagement achieving a resonance in the space he has created. For instance, he is involved with neighbourly interactions, relaxing below his sign, eating the fruits (vegetables) of his labour. It is an act of brief reverie that connects together life's otherwise disparate moments. It does not create a singular object (a vegetable or fruit) that is divorced from its situation, distanced and given meaning elsewhere. In short, food becomes contextualised. I would therefore argue that self-grown food does not function abstractly in the

manner of commercially bought food but as a symbolic representation of food and therefore not a derivative of it.

As noted in the results, gardeners are a minority on estates of several hundred people; gardening happens on relatively small land areas within large estates, in a major world capital. In taking a dwelling perspective I have deliberately moved away from the romanticism of ‘the good life’ in community gardening in response to Cloke and Jones (2001). In studying the complexity of practice I have considered the fetishism of Keith for example, Graeme’s passion for community, or Eleanor’s concerns with equity, and Louise, who notes that the garden is a site for conflict amongst non-gardening residents. I would argue that my use of dwelling understands the intricacy of place that is not historically over determined or idealistic rooted in the ‘local’, seeking a “dynamic rather than fixed ways of understanding embodied engagements with landscapes” that includes both conflict and change (Cloke and Jones, 2001, p.664).

As reported in the results and literature these estate gardens are not arcadia; for instance, De Beauvoir estate is locked in conflict and the garden never materialises and Cindy notes that food production itself is conflictual compared to flowers alone. Additionally, Gordon comments that non-gardening residents argue food-growing ‘allotments’ are not part of the residential landscape and should only happen on the already sanctioned allotment site. What concerns me, in this research, is how these events intermix and influence food production.

In considering this, I would contend that seeing food-growing as an example of dwelling provides a catalytic effect on space; it produces unstable moments of change allowing differing cultural, social, and environmental factors to be addressed. In relationship to food security, this creates unreliability in terms of production because the “surroundings become engaged in living” (Crouch, 2011, p.139), where food enters a state of deep contextualisation. The dwelling perspective, as both a common act (Harrison, 2007) and the hermetic act (Casey, 1993), gives meaning to food within that of the communal body and within its immediate environment and beyond. In terms of food sovereignty, where residents claim rights “to produce our own food in our own territory”, there is clear resonance with dwelling in the context of occupying territory and the creative acts of transitioning landscape for food

production, (Via Campesina, 1996, p.1). The territorial aspect in urban settings is a prerequisite and I have termed this spatial sovereignty to focus attention on this crucial part of the process.

However, territory in this context does not refer to existent farm land but emphasises the need to appropriate land as a precursor to practice. The use of dwelling adds distinction to researching communal growing because it enables a more detailed understanding of the dynamics of appropriated space in relation to harvest. Harvest within a common of dwelling adds an understanding of the collective nature of food, while Casey's hermetic dwelling brings attention to the travelling action of food across open spaces, "between houses and outside limits" enabling an understanding of food harvest as something situated, relational, and contextual (Casey, 1993, p.140). Such an approach addresses the aims of the thesis to understand the variable nature of the food harvest within the garden, but also as something recursive to built space, seeing food harvest beyond something fixed within the grounds of the garden. All too frequently we unwittingly fall back on respecting the objects of design work, rather than understand the detail of everyday life as a contribution to spatial production; the use of dwelling offers such a reminder.

### 5.3.2 Building: demolition and entanglement

This section is closely connected with section 5.3.3 below, in that they both deal with the self-made or vernacular production of space. I am using the word vernacular to capture numerous significant qualities of everyday creative practices, where "vernacular creativity is *ordinary*, as in non-elite and grounded in the materiality and experience of everyday life ... grounded in contextual *specificity*" (Burgess, 2010, pp.117-118 original emphasis). In drawing on this quote I would argue that there are two parts to the vernacular, firstly, the material, secondly, the everyday creative experience of space. Firstly, I want to discuss this space in relationship to the already built material form of the estate as something that produces form or materiality of its own. To balance this discussion away from spatial determinism, I will then discuss space as an everyday creative practice in section 5.3.3, one that begins producing its own epistemology. Community food gardens chime with Rudofsky's (1964, p.1) comments about "nonperdigree architecture" and instances of building that are so little understood that they remain unnamed, perhaps referred to as "vernacular, anonymous, spontaneous, indigenous, rural".

Hallam and Ingold (2007, p.4) note that the “inhabitants’ efforts to do-it-themselves, play their part in the building’s ongoing creation”, asking why “do we not celebrate equally the creativity of those who subsequently use the building in the course of their own lives?”. As discussed above in dwelling, residents fuse the amateur arts of DIY and gardening in order to grow food. An answer to Hallam and Ingold lies partly in post-war planning policy that sought to demolish space in order to create something new. As Leach (1997) writes, demolition serves the purpose of controlling space; all the case studies in this research emerged out of a demolition programme that cleared the ground as a prerequisite for the blueprint. Demolition, as an exclusion, is commented on by de Certeau who writes:

“Every urban “renovation” ... prefers a *tabula rasa* on which to write in cement the composition created in the laboratory on the basis of discrete “needs” to which functional responses are to be made ... it has engendered its own discursive and practical space, on the basis of points of concentration the office, the factory, the city. It rejects the relevance of places it does not create” (Certeau, 1984, pp.200-201).

Community food gardens as an everyday practice connects with existing material space, yet modifies it. As Bohn and Viljoen write of their conceptualisation of urban agricultural which:

“will not be about knocking cities down or erasing urban tissue; they do not seek a *tabula rasa* from which to grow. Instead, they will build on and over characteristics inherent to the city by overlaying and interweaving a multiuser landscape strategy to present a newly reclaimed open space... adding a new sustainable component to the city” (Viljoen et al., 2005, p.11).

The everyday practices of community food gardens provide evidence of this process of “reclaiming” and building “on and over” open space of this instance of urban agriculture, exploring what drives it and how this might diverge and meander through growing food and making space.



On a wider global scale, Hardoy and Satherwaite (1989, p. 15) comment on practices, noting the “unnamed millions who build, organize and plan illegally are the most important organizers, builders and planners of Third World cities. But most governments do not recognize this”. Food-growing residents similarly have to ‘build, organize and plan’, anonymously and spontaneously in order to create areas in which to garden. Yet currently food growing does not have a clear sense of spatial articulation either through the broad term community garden or the planning and policy term urban agriculture. As Amin and Thrift (2002, p.771) state, “what is needed in order to understand the modern city consists of the invention of new socio-spatial vocabularies that can unlock new insights”. Lacking a cohesive spatial discourse means they are framed relative to existing “socio-spatial vocabularies”, whose modernism has consistently sought to expunge the mess of the food garden.

Food-growing unlocks the vocabularies of the built environment to include heterogeneous discourses; it requires both the architect and the ‘accurate enough’ vernacular measurements of Neil to produce space that can contain the practice of food-growing. Neil, and many other gardeners, seem to be able to act, with little interference from landowners, and limited conflict from residents. These gardens, I argue, might be seen as a rebalancing of practices within space that have recently been dominated by the top-down planning; the development of a “language common to practice and theory, as also to inhabitants, architects and scientists” (Lefebvre, 1991b, p.64).

As a counterpoint to this is the attempts by architects to pre-empt the use of space such as the idea of underground car parking, communal laundry rooms, pram sheds. As Warburton (2005, p.166) discusses “Goldfinger [Brownfield estate architect] seemed to have thought of everything, providing hobby rooms, a nursery, and even well-equipped communal drying rooms as a deterrent to residents hanging out their washing on lines on their balconies and thereby spoiling the look of the building”. Furthermore Goldfinger did not add doorbells anticipating people would use letterboxes as door knockers: the addition of external wiring for “unsightly” door bells was an immediate action of new residents (Goldfinger, May 1968, p.1133). The planned materiality, measured with exactitude, now suffering from disuse. Food-growers therefore demonstrate the need for architectural designers to “admit the

possibility for a more inclusive transformation of everyday surroundings” demanded through new imaginings of the lived experience (Keiller, 2013, p.1).

In contrast to the “thought of everything approach” above, the creativities of gardeners, are accumulative, enmeshing with that already commissioned and built. As Ingold (2000, p.154) notes: “buildings, like other environmental structures, are never complete but continually under construction, and have life-histories of involvement”. The importance of this is to stress the nature of place making that food stimulates; where gardens emphasise the ephemeral nature of the whole built environment, expounding its dependency on seasonal change, the makeshift, and the everyday inhabitation. As Till states, “architects tend to deny this dependency. They feel more comfortable in a world of certain predictions, in linear method, in the pursuit of perfection” (Till, 2009, p.1). The random and spontaneous practices of community food gardens begin to surface, whose happenstance potentially clashes with the more unambiguous aims of feeding populations and maintaining space. I would argue there is an emphatic and little enunciated need to build within food gardening in the context of the Global North, which requires taking imaginations into physical places.

### 5.3.3 community food gardens and everyday creativity

The razing of urban space favoured by modernists, discussed in 5.3.2, contrasts with urban gardeners who often seek not difference from space but creative entanglement with it. Gardeners embrace a culturally heterogeneous urban practice (Premat, 2005), meandering, and zigzagging, distractedly unfolding space. As Bonsdorff (2005, p.74) comments, “a view of culture as cultivation that answers to the understanding of building as a process, where building not only means creating new things, but also dwelling among what is given”. Dwelling (amongst what is given), as explored in this thesis, is one in which building process is a food producing process - importantly both are social processes.

The everyday of community food gardening emphasise the transitory, the communal, and personal, expounding the interrelationship between practice, season, a moment of fancy, ephemera, and bodies. For instance, the experience of Brownfield estate gardeners, who carefully work on top of the structural supports of disused underground car parks, clearly demonstrates this, exploring how residents make

marks, shapes, the structures, embedded within that already built. Ingold offers a distinction: “human actions in the environment are better seen as incorporative than inscriptive, in the sense that they are built or enfolded into the forms of the landscape and its living inhabitants by way of their own processes of growth” – “growth” here can be taken almost literally (Ingold, 2000, p.87). In taking growth literally therefore, within the context of a food growing as creative spatial practice, there is a reminder of the cultural with cultivation and agriculture itself (Bonsdorff, 2005). It draws attention to the need to see urban *agriculture* as a cultivation of both growth in the sense of plants but also cultivation of space, which because of the urban situation, means community food gardens are indelibly part of an historical architectural narrative. The fact that we have arrived at an ontological division between formative ‘civilised’ spatial practices and the ‘chaos’ of the self-made landscape, as discussed in chapter two (2.1.5), is not the fault of the gardens. The ontology of gardeners stems from the need to create the environmental conditions in which plants, people and spaces can grow and develop (Ingold, 2000). This is an essential part of process, one in which ideas, as discussed in chapter four, become actual spaces.

While the discourse of the built environment repeats a motif of creative coherence and consistency; the minuscule, incremental, and random daily acts of gardening (amongst others) are merely attritions to be corrected either through maintenance regimes or later via ‘regeneration’, as discussed in chapter four (4.2.3). Crouch discusses the creativity of everyday life as something that has a distinctive character and importance often ignored because of the “privileged prevailing notions of creativity” (Crouch, 2010, p.129). Creativity, and therefore material space, in the modern sense is largely understood as something that is new at the moment it is made rather than generated through use; focus falls on the artwork or technical innovation, merely substantiating the credo of the author, architect, or institution rather than those that subsequently inhabit space (Demian and Wastell, 2007). We see this with Haberdasher estate gardeners who remove boards used to block-up disused car parking, adding metal grill to facilitate food growing. It is a creative act that needs to be read “‘forwards’, as an improvisatory joining in with formative processes” rather than erasing backwards from object to intentions of designers (Ingold, 2008, p.3).

The results show there is a need for a different way to discuss creativity that is not measured relative to existing dominant notions of a congenital built space. I have argued in the results that this is a qualitative understanding of space relative to food growing. Creativity that produces food from architecture exemplifies the need to see buildings as giving way to use, compromising all in order to facilitate spatial production in the moment. The architect, planners, and builder represent a moment in the production of a building, a few years at best; the greater part of the story of a building is the lived experience and actions of residents. One of these actions is the practice of food gardening. Residents are no longer contained within the architecture of the flat or home looking out, but spending considerable time outside looking across; perspectives have shifted and now the architecture looks small and the action on the ground is at a human scale. As Hill (2003) notes, this challenges the embedded cultural dominance that predicts and edifies use, an architectural space that creates an “institutionalization of subjectivity” (Hollier, 1989, p.78). The gardeners’ transformative practice from soil, to construction, to action therefore works against the predictions embedded within planned space and maintenance. In discussing food-growing in cities there is a clear need to link these factors and not see food production in isolation from landscape and people and its political ideology such as advanced planning and build regulations, a point made in the literature review.

Community food gardens presents another dependency on architecture, one less predictable, linear, or perfect, yet one that might be able to contribute a level of certainty, geometry, or beauty. Moreover, the modern city and industrial agriculture share a similar ontology and methodology regarding eradication or demolition; the swidden practice of industrial agriculture (clearing ground for large scale planting) is analogous with the demolition of urban streets as part of master planning. Gardening can cultivate connections with small divisions of space, instances, and people adding an embodied understanding to Bohn and Viljoen’s (2005) concept of urban agriculture as a continuous landscape.

Deleuze and Guattari (1987, p.17-18) follow this through in contrasting industrial agriculture with that of horticulture; agriculture seeks blank spaces, “fields carved from the forest are populated with seed plants produced by cultivation based on species lineages of the arborescent type”, while horticulture is related to the garden,

a multiplicity of connections: “cultivation of tubers by fragmentation ... defined only by their state at a given moment”. This develops the argument explored in the literature review that community food gardens are closer historically to urban gardening than (an urban) agriculture where an emphasis on the latter merely restates a strategy of spatial dominance. As discussed in the results, gardens vary in size from large to small, where garden size is not planned in advance by the need for a predetermined yield; yield emerges from the space produced, a soft space of social potential, conversation, and sagging soil filled bags.

In the results, I also discussed the notion of borrowing the landscape described by Schmelzkopf (1995) which is echoed by de Certeau (1984, p.xxi) who writes of such modifications as making “the text habitable, like a rented apartment. It transforms another person's property into a space borrowed for a moment by a transient”. I would argue part of the character of everyday creativity specifically resides in its transient and bitty nature. As Highmore write of the everyday, “The almost glacial movement of dust settling is too slow to watch, it’s a constant drift of particles building up and becoming visible” (Highmore, 2011, p.1). While the raised beds and signage of gardens are part of the everyday becoming visible, the acts of borrowing are largely embodied through gardeners who produce moments of architectural space through physically resituating themselves within a landscape. In other words, everyday creativity needs to be viewed performatively, and qualitatively, not just physically. This was exemplified by Gillian for example, who connects growing with art or Anna who wants the immediacy of the grow bags so she can instigate the social aspects of growing as soon as possible.

In these two sections I have demonstrated that food-growing enmeshes itself within that which already exists; an on going expression of an everyday ‘vernacular’ language of spatial production. To give more depth to this phrase, Brownfield estate gardeners for example, demonstrate that practice is a palimpsest, where food growing writes directly onto the surface of architectural space, in this case the tarmac of the ball court. However, as a vernacular practice it also borrows from the broad silhouette of the estate. Despite the urban space of the estate being already fecund and dominated with conceptual narratives, the harvests and the built space collectively, cannot remain neutral, or disentangled. This means that on a pragmatic level harvest, as an edible vernacular artefact, cannot simply emerge as if from

cleared ground, but is already entangled in creative actions and social space. While the estate architecture itself might like to deny such entanglement, it is unavoidably enmeshed and dependent on these everyday actions.

#### 5.3.4 Food gardening as catalyst

This section and the one that follows look at how food functions within the garden and beyond. Specifically, this section looks at how food sparks other actions but in and of itself it is not resolved. Food needs time to grow, it needs long term tending usually months, yet the DIY and building described above is more immediate, flexible, and direct bringing results in the moment. The differing temporal aspect of cultivation and construction means that creating the built form of the garden can become dominant, especially when practice happens during small time periods. As I participate and watch residents assemble the elements of the site, I share the feeling of landscape as something malleable stimulating a sense of agency.

Creative entanglements exemplify a momentary resolution as part of a creative act catalysed by food. This is something Gillian and Simon recognise when they liken food growing to a primal yet creative act. I want to argue that creative acts are not diversions from growing but emerge unevenly alongside them. Building is catalysed by growing and residents jump-cut between various actions; digging, primal emotions, and the arts are a criss-crossed set of trajectories. Land use categories separate food and its consumption out across vast distances, as farm, supermarket, and home, while gardens collapse them together into a spontaneous and playful temporal collage of ensemble actions and intentions.

Specifically, spontaneity brings contradiction which is only problematic with a pre-set narrative, an assumption of a fixed hierarchy from garden, to market garden, to field agriculture. As Louise states above, she is involved to “see where it took me”. Therefore, following Massey (2005, p.94) quoted previously, research needs to observe and analyse the nature of “bumping into alterity”. Community food gardening does not have a single meeting point that we can focus on such as food harvest but rather it is a constant unfolding and connective practice; the geographies of community food are always shifting, require careful listening, and sensitive recording of daily patterns from discourse, to practice, and its phenomenology. Contradiction has been explored by McClintock (2013, p.3), writing that “seemingly

divergent processes operate in an ongoing and co-productive manner” with regard to urban agriculture practices. He develops this by applying an understanding of how dialectical tensions operate on food harvest expectations.

I would argue the results show that food-growing should not be measured as disembodied harvest but as a facilitator or catalyst; it precipitates change. However, in and of itself a grower’s relationship to daily food needs remains constant because the other space of food – commerce – is spatially stable. These engagements with food draw residents into a catalytic examination of surrounding landscape, its conceived use, generating new personal and physical space. I would argue that cultivation disrupts the plans of architectural space but it does not disrupt the external space of commercial food.

What makes the dialectical tension between desires to grow food (volume or otherwise) and actual practice (food actually eaten) so strong is not the promise that practice will be concluded as vegetable harvest but that its conclusion is permanently suspended. Much like eating itself, it is an ongoing process that can only ever be offered a moment of satiation before erupting again. This is why harvests can be small to negligible but also why these gardens, as an example of urban agriculture can sustain the contradiction identified by McClintock (2013).

For example, actions of building and creativity, or the naming of spaces, present a stream of machinations and divergences that act on the stated aim of food-growing. Observing the evolving state of gardens, I would argue that community food gardens are a responsive practice based on the everyday where gardeners are able to switch quickly between different aspects of practice within the moment. Considering the influence that the above has on food-growing, I would suggest that even the short term tactics of food-growing are combined by gardeners with a flexible and creative approach to place making meaning that they deviate and detour, a historical process where environments and people are repeatedly recreating each other (Ingold, 2000).

Tracing the characteristics of practice, community food gardens extend from the intention to grow such as De Beauvoir gardeners, to ‘non’ gardener Gordon, (Lansbury gardeners), to Graeme (St John’s community kitchen garden) who spoke of an influence from Cuban urban agriculture. Gillian Greening Brownfield expresses her harvest as a special meal, while Angela (St John’s community kitchen

garden) laughingly acknowledges that the harvest will barely stretch to one meal. The breadth of these responses does not water-down notions of cultivation within practice, rather, as discussed in chapter four, it is a continued expression of community food garden as malleable and resilience in approaches to practice. Nor should we dismiss “feel good” or “nice” as sentimental comments; these are essential emotions for gardeners who are finding a voice for “joyful pleasures” of gardening clearly linked to the catalytic effect of growing food and space in these personal, domestic, yet private planned estates (Bhatti et al., 2009, p.61).

What participation shows is that community food gardens surfaces not so much because food is an everyday crisis when considered relative to such statements as, urban agriculture “is about food self-reliance: it involves creating work and is a reaction to food insecurity” (Redwood, 2009, np). If we are to consider community food gardens as forms of urban agriculture in the Global North we might need to reverse this thinking. It is through the contesting of space within moments of flux that the door of potentiality opens. The results begin to demonstrate that food becomes vital, not because of food insecurity *per se*, but because food growing makes something happen; it catalysis and embodies food within the actions of residents contextualised spatially. It is from this contextualised position that we need to speak about urban agriculture harvests.

### 5.3.5 Food-(es)scapes

This section discusses in greater detail the dynamic of the food harvest in relationship to the other spaces of food. Observing the evolving narrative of gardens, I would argue that community food gardens are responsive to the needs of making space for food but not necessarily to the daily production of food. Therefore, while community food gardens can be considered tangible as a foodscape, embodied with meaning, food production within this landscape also ‘escapes’. To put it another way, while gardens are able to appropriate the in-between spaces of cities, in this case the nameless areas around housing, they have difficulty occupying the in-between spaces of food provision. The harvests of food gardens are elusive in contrast to other food provision systems such as shops or cafes that are designed to be more unequivocal, constantly offering food ready to eat. One can reliably tinker with a garden, but not reliably harvest from a garden. In other words, they are



responsive within the environment of the urban estate led by social and cultural frustrations rather than food frustrations alone.

Food-growing practice precipitates change where the resident's relationship to eating remains relatively spatially constant because it can be satisfied through the more consistent economics of commercial food supplies. As Morgan and Sonnino (2010, p.216) discuss, communal growing projects such as Capital Growth are largely symbolic, "while it helps to promote the city as a site of food production and not just consumption, its capacity to transform the urban food system is limited ... compared to the ... supermarkets and food service companies". Therefore, I am intrigued by research such as Baker (2004), who asserts that community food gardens are an important contributor to food security in North America and Europe. Baker offers little detail on how such gardens might relate to the greater part of the city or acknowledge that community food gardens vary their food contribution enormously (Holland, 2004, Vitiello and Nairn, 2009a, Evers and Hodgson, 2011). Moreover, while such gardens may be able to grow food in relatively high quantity, they comprise a fractional contribution compared to the over commercial or semi-commercial urban agriculture and tend to only benefit those directly involved (Brown and Carter, 2003).

I would argue that there is a need to read security in three ways. Firstly, safety from disruption to food supplies; secondly, that the food system remains secured by capitalised markets from access or influence; security therefore speaks of both the ability to protect oneself in the urban setting from a crisis of food but also the need to break into food systems, developing new knowledge, space and practice. Thirdly, I would argue that communal food growing, because it makes demands on actual urban spaces also needs to break into spatial knowledge challenging the compatibility of both material space and the commercial space of food, each helping reproduce each other (Merrifield, 2006). Therefore, space and rhythm of the garden are not to be confused with the existing space or rhythm of hunger and food supplies; agriculture, transport, and purchasing sit external to the new community space that forms in the garden and their interchange is brief and unsynchronised if anything.

Should commercial food spaces go into crisis then perhaps the garden might attend to food production more methodically. However, there is a fall-back position of

social security before this might be activated as discussed in chapter one. Thornton (2008, p. 243) discusses this in relationship to Urban and peri-urban agriculture in South Africa: “the social welfare scheme has, effectively, emerged as the primary contributor to household income and food security. Consequently, UPA [Urban and peri-urban agriculture] does not play a major role”. From this I take that urban agriculture, as a crisis induced strategy, needs to fall through several safety nets before practice might comprehensibly shift to food production as a necessity (Drescher et al., 2000).

In the literature review, I discuss Page (2002, p.52), who cites the prominence of technical responses to urban agriculture often negligent “of the pleasure associated with gardening”. Page argues that this is “symptomatic of the need to portray urban agriculture as an earnest response” to food needs (Page, 2002, p.42). Through participation in gardening, I would argue that while residents are clearly aiming towards a food based resolution within a defined space, the incidental, temporal actions, fleeting moments and resting points of process allowing harvest to escape attention. Gardens, displaying aptitude at responding to the contingent social and cultural interaction further externalising a need to engage daily with a reliable food system.

This is significant in two ways. Firstly, residents get a great deal of empowerment from talking about their individual and community interactions framed spatially and the potential for creating and building at the local level. Secondly, this local material space becomes the dominant narrative within subsequent practice as it engages with long held problems of life on the estate, typified by Cindy De Beauvoir estate commenting “this is why people hate living on estates”, softening the focus on actual food-growing. In other words, residents are prepared to compromise food-growing because food itself is a symbolic object whose actuality can be satisfied elsewhere; however, residents cannot take the desire to organise social and physical space elsewhere, it is indelible to the estate and the communal space they are creating. Food is spatially more fluid, able to move from point to point across the city. Simply creating a food space by name and intent does not mean it will replace or equal other spaces that share a similar etymology.

## 5.4 Conclusion

The purpose of this research is not to show these spaces can or cannot produce food but to understand why currently they produce the food that they do. In this chapter I have demonstrated that residents state emphatically that the food-growing needs to be present continually in the garden; residents do not act without it but they also do not act consistently on it. While food-growing is affirmative it is also contradictory, allowing attention to move elsewhere. As Highmore notes, this is not oppositional in the sense of getting distracted from a task one should be concentrating on, but of understanding the patterning involved and not the consolidation of practices. The lack of consolidation (for example monocultural crop production) is only conflicting when there is an assumption of deviation from a preconceived plan, concept or script. The wider discourse of grow your own, climate change, or concerns with industrial agriculture, while influential, does not currently form part of the everyday gardening practice which attends to more immediate experiences.

Following Lefebvre (Lefebvre, 1991b), the fusing of a self-made landscape and cultivation, within the already built form, demonstrates spatial production is a synthesis of the exact, the imagined, and everyday life - an heterogeneous discourse developing through a local vocabulary for spatial coproduction. While Lefebvre has been discussed less obviously in this chapter, the conceptual approach of the production of space is still applied intrinsically to keep awareness on spatial production. For instance, community food gardens need to appropriate and alter space exposes the schism between professional design and user-led construction, where the latter becomes a “cultural generator of housing” (Szczelkun, 1993, p.5) through the use of an “appropriate morphology” in the words of Lefebvre (1991b, p.417). This morphology draws on the material space gardens can touch, such as the tarmac and grass, but also borrows visually from the wider silhouette of the estate.

However, the creative, social, and structural space accrued from this process produces a space that attends to multiple social engagements and therefore food production in and of itself becomes less stable. Specifically, the construction of space, which is both material and social, and the acts of cultivation are asymmetrical; while practice is attending to occupying the in-between material spaces of the city, it does not give attention to occupying the in-between spaces of food-provisioning systems.

This chapter has explored practice beyond what is produced by the food gardens as an already existent geographical object towards understanding the intransitive processes residents engage with and how these factors influence subsequent practice. As Ingold (2011, p.10) writes, “dwelling ...is intransitive: it is about the way inhabitants, singly and together, produce their own lives, and like life, it carries on”. To put it another way, rather than focus on the connections the material space of the garden produces *a priori*, I have begun to research how and why connections are made as part of a process of garden creation through discourse and praxis, asking how do these connections then go on to influence food production related to our understanding of urban agriculture?

Dwelling is thus an uneven concept meaning that residents spend more time constructing than cultivating where the growing of food takes months but construction a few hours. It is also uneven because you cannot apply these moments of dwelling to all the lives of all the residents.

Chapters four and five, taken together, have presented data on how differing factors influence garden practice and therefore harvests. Food is therefore not abstracted as an object – a tomato or a lettuce – but a tomato made by a person within the context of other people and a creative space. In continuing to explore what influences practice, chapter six focuses on the everyday bodily aspects of practice; its enactment, as well as aspects of sovereignty and governance.

## **Chapter six**

### **Embodiment, enacting, and harvesting**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

Moving on from the material space of the garden discussed previously in chapter five, this chapter explores the sensory and performative aspects of food gardening and how they influence harvest. I explore how the interactions of residents with materials (wood, soil, water) and space (layout and building) have a primary effect on food production. This has been largely ignored in research that often favours quantitative assumption related to food production alone. For example, the need to move volumes of soil onto site provides both a bodily engagement with resources but also a communal narrative, something residents clearly enunciate, focusing less on the productive potential of these resources. Similarly, the building of raised beds might provide an area to grow food but also act as props justifying residents' desires to hang out and reclaim space. The method of participation reveals the relevance of these moments when residents' bodily and spatial actions influence and become relative to their desire to produce differing volumes of food. The findings show that food harvests needs only to be present in enough quantities to frame these social moments of occupying or hanging out in the garden. This means a single vegetable, or in some cases nothing more than the acknowledgement of the intended process of gardening. The conclusion of this chapter is that food emerges contextualised and bracketed by the garden and the wider silhouette of the estate, but is never sought in enough volume to contest the daily routines of food shopping.

Therefore, throughout this chapter there is a focus on the sensory interactions within the material space of the garden, specifically the tactile and ephemeral interactions of gardeners – “what they feel or hear. Movement and process, along with frequency and melody” (Merrifield, 2006, p.75). This chapter therefore, acknowledges the influencing method of hermeneutic phenomenology, where the direct experience of researcher with participant and practice brings compassion, and empathy. The knowledge and practice of gardeners is seen as expert, balanced by a need for academic translation. While the sensual and bodily aspect of communal growing has been explored by Turner (2011), and DeLind (2006), there has been little research in

understanding how this related and affects food production or urban agriculture concepts. While Lefebvre (1991b, p.405) acknowledges that, “The whole of (social) space proceeds from the body”, urban agriculture literature is characterised largely by disembodied research absent of gardeners. In short, I am concerned with that which is nearest to us; people in a spatial context involved in practice and performance, where we purposely explore “the minutiae of practice; a detailing of the performative” within a specific context (Crouch, 2003, p.1947). This chapter therefore explores the ‘small’ actions of people; the performative consisting of a “trialogue of timing, the body, and the event” as residents go about producing space for food production in and around their homes (Dewsbury, 2000, p.475).

Chapter four explored the tension and synergies of spatial production as residents seize the opportunity for transformation through food gardening, placing them at the core of space production where nothing happens without the gardeners. Chapter five discussed how food practice amalgamates place-making, people and harvest contextualising food through these pathways.

I want to remind the reader that I never researched the gardens absent of gardeners; it was always a coproduced moment, a journey of mutual discovery, requiring me to research as a sensitive participant and observer of other people’s lives. I will also remind the reader that the three empirical chapters are structured in two parts. The first section presents results and analysis followed by a second section of discussion related to the research literature and theoretical background. Quotes from residents are cited using their name, interview number, and their estate. So for example, [Cindy\_01\_De Beauvoir gardeners] refers to Cindy, her first interview, from De Beauvoir Gardeners.

## **6.2 Second one: Results and analysis**

### **6.2.1 Performance**

In general, this thesis details multiple moments of performance; it pervades everything from the hanging-out, talking, digging to creativity as discussed above in chapter five. In this section, I want to detail some of the specific moments of performance that, I argue, demonstrate further how the act of growing food and the bodies of growers become linked, enriching and influencing the notion of food harvests. These are sensory such as the olfactory or haptic, or sitting and gazing

within the garden. As Hetherington (2003, p. 1934 - 1935) writes, “touch in our culture assumes a form of knowledge that is often more proximal than distal ...proximal knowledge is performative rather than representational. Its nonrepresentational quality is also context-specific, fragmentary, and often mundane ... approached but never attained”.

Simon describes how gardening makes possible proximal knowledge through multiple sensory connections that would otherwise have remained separate:

“If you've got a [communal] garden you're got some sense of reason, some motivation ... It connects people ... combining two things into one ... it's a good reason for dragging the deckchair out ...would I bother dragging a deckchair out to a bare patch of grass like? Probably not, probably feel a bit of a fool! [People would ask] what's he doing there? [laughs]” [Simon\_01\_St John's community kitchen garden].

For Simon, his public performance is validated through the actions of food growing and the sovereignty it brings to an otherwise bare piece of grass. It is a context specific action where both context and action are generated by the gardeners, whereby they gain knowledge of their environments. Simon and I talk below an 11-storey adjacent tower block in a triangle of land, fenced off from four other irregular grassed areas. In chapter four, Simon commented that the landscape was a “blank nothing”, yet now we are eating a tomato in the garden, looking out over the New North Road. Simon states further, “It's bizarre in a way. You wouldn't expect to eat a tomato sitting ... grow a tomato right next to a main road. If I had thought of that five years ago I wouldn't have imagined ... it was really possible” [Simon\_02\_ St John's community kitchen garden]. Through eating the food he has grown within the urban context, Simon is able to access a memory about the previous mundane and invisible landscape, potentially moving forward to other new possibilities. As de Certeau writes, “This glass of pale, cool, dry wine marshals my entire life in the Champagne. People may think I am drinking: I am remembering” (Certeau et al., 1998, p.188).

While I have argued that the actual harvest itself is best understood within the context of the narrative of the garden, Simon's performative moments of food do

travel beyond the boundary of the estate. He states, “It’s a bit like a performance in a way ... you do get people all the time coming past and asking advice and giving advice or just chatting ... telling us about their gardens” [Simon\_01\_St John’s community kitchen garden]. As Lesley confirms the same commenting this is because, “it’s such an unusual thing to see, someone actually gardening on a communal piece of land” [Lesley\_01\_De Beauvoir gardeners]. I would argue that this is also relevant to the results in chapter four, whereby residents were similarly influenced by seeing other examples of neighbouring community food gardens.

Graeme comments on the transformative quality of performance in public space stating that it is:

“transforming the politics on the estate, the actual use of outdoor space on the estate, the fact that every time I work outdoors ... I end up in conversation with someone ... people on and off the estate. I had a conversation with a Vietnamese woman about being bombed by the Americans, exiled in China, escaping to Hong Kong, her whole life ya know, while I was digging. It’s things like that I find really interesting” [Graeme\_01\_St John’s community kitchen garden].

Graeme demonstrates that food growing gives the estate boundary permeability; food, presented by a public grower creates a flow of knowledge and social interaction through and out of the garden. The growing of a single vegetable gets imbued with the distant history of the American bombing of Vietnam; a whole life of another person interweaved with the ecology of the garden and Graeme’s own narrative of new social interaction.

Being in the garden with residents means I need to reflect not just on my analysis of tactile experiences, the tomato for example, but also the feeling and emotion of being in the garden with residents; the quieter moments of looking, and non-verbal communication. Seeing emotion as data is challenging but rewarding; reflecting on Simon’s journey from a blankspace to relaxing in a foodscape is measurable at 20-metres from his flat to the garden. Yet, the emotional journey spans 17 years; from 1993 to 2010, Simon stated he communicated very little with his neighbours.



Keith, like Simon also has reticence about spending time in the grassed and manicured open space of the estate, commenting

“you wouldn’t go and stand there and eat your sandwich, read your paper, you wouldn’t, people would think you were crazy ... it’s not a done thing, a normal thing, a normal person, so called normal would do ... in an area that’s designated for it maybe it’s more acceptable” [Keith\_01\_Greening Brownfield].

As we can see from the results, Keith and Simon exemplify the keep off the grass mentality, the feeling of being crazy or foolish to even sit on grassed spaces around estates never mind spend time growing food in them. The appropriation of space for growing therefore represents an immense social transformation as well as a material one. Their acts of growing transform space through use not previously designated through material form without social function.

In July, Neil and I walk around Haberdasher estate; he narrates part of his life story through his new food-growing actions. On an upper balcony, Neil pauses and points at a sun filled corner of a wide walkway, passionately talking about a mundane tarmac floor almost invisibly marked (figure 19). He comments, “You see where the things are marked out on the floor. They used to be the pram sheds ... Along here you had four over there you had two. You can see where the asphalt is marked. We will have a greenhouse up here” [Neil\_02\_Haberdasher estate]. Figure 19 shows the corner Neil is looking at; if Neil were absent then this corner would have little meaning, seem mundane and unimportant.

As Certeau writes on such absences,

“The places people live in are like the presences of diverse absences. What can be seen designates what is no longer there: “you see, here there used to be . . . ,” but it can no longer be seen. Demonstratives indicate the invisible identities of the visible: it is the very definition of a place” (Certeau, 1984, p.108).



**Figure 19: Haberdasher estate, showing the outline of the demolished pram shed**

I observe space through Neil’s eyes and participate in his memory, history, and an act of place remaking. I would argue that the importance is not to try and humble the failed acts of architecture but to respect the lived experience of residents who combine memory, desire and imagination to gain a spatial sovereignty around their immediate environment. The walking and talking with residents requires following the rhythm of the walker and gardener, allowing them to set the pace. Pace however, is not about speed but about following the paths of gardeners’ practice as they circulate through social, cultural, and material spaces, through a “pottering around out in a communal outdoor space” [Graeme\_01\_St John’s community kitchen garden].

The auditory also plays a part in this experience. While building raised beds on Brownfield estate, the sound of hammering, reverberates within the ball court and across the face of the flats. Food growing provided a new soundscape for architecture and as Schafer (Schafer, 1993, p.78) explains, such actions as the “stonemasons’ hammering” give a dynamic to sound waves. He contrasts this discrete and interrupted building sounds with the “flat line” of modern soundscapes where the peaks and troughs of differing sound waves have been erased and are now a single continuous unmodulated line; homogeneous, horizontal and unchanging, analogous with the flat lining of architectural space.

I was also part of the performance; dragging soil, drinking tea, talking about the weather, slipping into the general consciousness of the gardening group. For example, on the 14th August 2010, a reporter visited Brownfield estate, writing a story for East End Life, a local council newspaper. The accompanying photograph shows 14 gardeners grouped together in the middle of the garden, including me, top right back row hold my daughter (figure 20).



**Figure 20: Greening Brownfield East End Life newspaper story**

Source: East End Life, 2010, p.1

I am holding my daughter Cassia, I am one of seven men, a “gardener”, part of the community body. It provides data in the sense of showing how the idea of garden becomes represented in the media, part of the discourse on inner city generation, through flowers, vegetables and plants. The text reads, the “1960s ... original design by architect Erno Goldfinger” transformed through “the residents and their imagination” into “oases” (East End Life, 2010, p.1). The image reflects this idea of people making space, with the group surrounded by old tyres, some gardeners holding a plank of wood.

### 6.2.2 Making marks, walking and routes

This section looks specifically at how maps, wayfinders, and routes are created through community food gardens, including garden maps and desire line making through walking. For me, walking is at once physical but also personal, journeying from volunteer to participant and researcher and back. I therefore explore how the gardening contributes to the urban form through these path-making acts, naming of

space via food production, where, “viewing the city as a walker or nomad ... recreates the sense that the city is still being created through the laying down of new paths via” local edible landscapes (Tomkins, 2012b). My first visit to Brownfield estate is initially as a Capital Growth volunteer site inspector<sup>20</sup> on the 28th May 2010. The estate’s main housing blocks are named ‘Balfron’, ‘Glenkerry’, and ‘Carradale’ Their etymology can be traced, each being an east coast Scottish town some 1000km away, named by those that designed this landscape. By contrast, the residents have created a chalked sign on a blackboard lent against the entrance that announces the presence of the garden as “Greening Brownfield”.



**Figure 21: Greening Brownfield chalk sign outside the garden in a moment of rain**

The chalk sign carries the signature of those that made the space within its hand-drawn aesthetic. The sign is partly effaced from a moment of rain (figure 21). Above the blackboard on the building sits the old metal sign for Carradale House; having decayed since the late 1960s it now reads Ca\_\_adale Hous\_. Both these signs indicate that space is in transition, being made and remade but also degenerating; some objects reacting quicker than others. It is a DIY sign and yet it is not secondary

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<sup>20</sup> In all I visited 36 sites as a Capital Growth volunteer, three of which became primary sites.

to the Ca\_\_adale Hous\_ sign. Viewed through a temporal lens both are now seen as impermanent, subject to change; architectural space becomes relational, its everydayness exposed.

Similarly, in April, 2010, I meet Natasha over tea in the community office on De Beauvoir estate. I comment to Natasha that I got lost; “Yes there’s no way in ... there’s no identity at all, no way, and it symbolises crime and horror and misery really” [Natasha\_01\_De Beauvoir gardeners]. We talk about where the garden might go on the estate and I want to show her the 1966 architectural plans of the estate, retrieved from the local history library<sup>21</sup> (figure 22). Two words jump out from the architect’s plans, ‘grass’ and ‘paving’; each one rubber stamped with a tree icon in the middle. She points and exclaims at the abstract landscape, “look, they never intended anything for these spaces ... which means we can use them for what we want” [Natasha\_01\_De Beauvoir gardeners]. A gap has opened up for Natasha between abstraction and her everyday life. Her response to the plans is emphatic, as she perceives what Merrifield (2006, p.138) calls “the crack in the edifice” as she states “we can use them for what we want” [Natasha\_01\_De Beauvoir gardeners].

By comparison, the De Beauvoir gardeners group has also drawn an ‘expert’ plan of the estate in the form of a flow chart of the potential garden idea (figure 23). Words and phrases jump out of this map, ‘community (spirit)’, ‘nothing’, ‘involvement’, and in large letters ‘fun’. In the same way that a designer might start with a sketch, a concept, residents are beginning with a simple idea, a critique of their most familiar landscape, articulated to friends and neighbours. While it lacks the rubber stamp of authority, it is a specific drawing, whose rich detail and emotion jars with the generic architectural descriptions encapsulated in words like ‘paving’ or ‘grass’.

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<sup>21</sup> Hackney Archives and Local History Centre, 43 De Beauvoir Road, Hackney, N1 5SQ

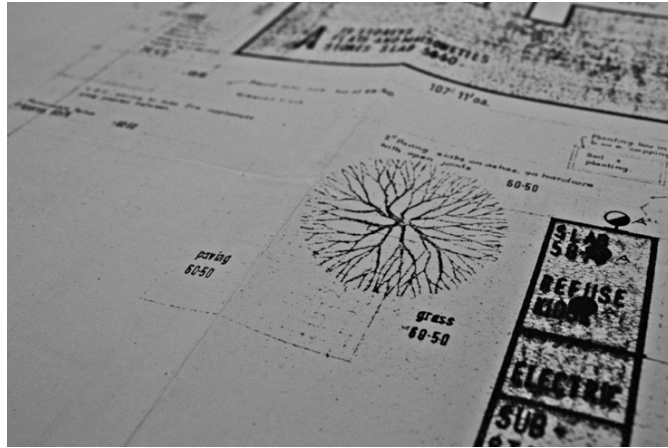


Figure 22: Photograph of architectural plans, 1966, De Beauvoir estate<sup>22</sup>

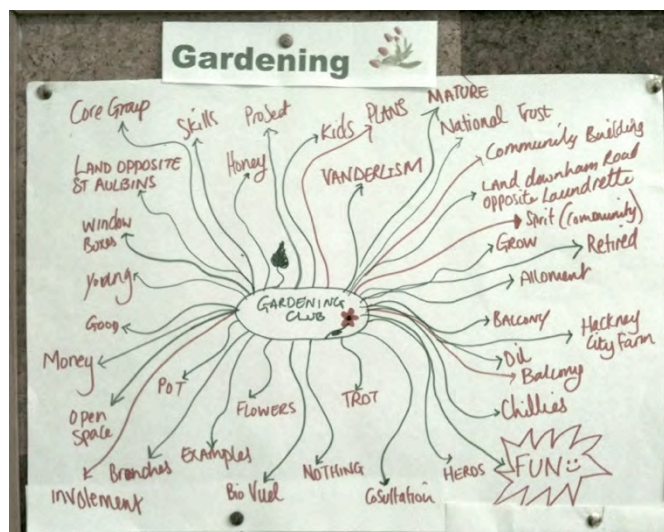


Figure 23: Food garden flow, De Beauvoir gardeners

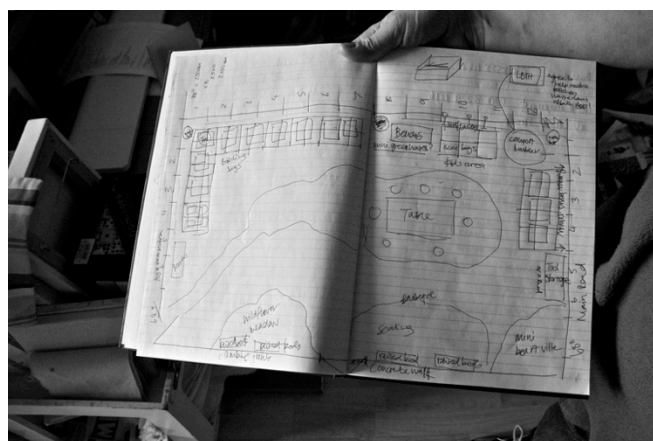


Figure 24: Anna's garden sketch, Greening Brownfield

<sup>22</sup> Source: Courtesy of London Borough of Hackney archives department. Stock number: P11882

Greening Brownfield resident Anna has a rough sketch of the garden that she holds up in the back of a notebook (figure 24), a layer in the estate's spatial narrative. In the RIBA library I am able to find documents by Goldfinger, architect of Anna's estate, showing the architect's intentions for the estate. I would argue that these documents do not remain unchanged by the actions of residents; they are challenged and become a palimpsest themselves developing a transparency, if only momentarily. Yet there is no feedback loop and future researchers are unlikely to find copies of Anna's rough sketches in the RIBA library, assuming Anna herself keeps them. Reflecting on my involvement, I felt that recording some of these artefacts of nonhistory was an important part of the research process, hence the numerous images I used throughout the thesis.

While garden groups do invariably produce some form of drawing there is also a tendency to place readymade objects to determine the layout, characterised as "whack a lot of bags in, get on with it, see what happens" [Anna\_01\_Greening Brownfield]. This point is reflected by Alison, who describes how "a lot of what I've done with this has been done completely blindly" [Alison\_06\_Dirty Hands]. Alison states she had "kind of a plan" but is more of a "doer" and feels "lucky" and I would argue that Alison 'draws' her plan directly onto the tarmac using the actual materials of the community food gardens.

During research, getting lost was an occupational hazard I encountered often. Reflecting on my sense of being lost, and finding no way through, shows how estates are not very permeable, limiting momentary exchanges and detours, favouring repeated functional routes. For example, standing at the estates, I exit the world of the A-to-Z map entering a planned territory but one less charted. On Brownfield estate I used a street-side estate map for directions but I quickly get lost discovering that its metallic permanence hides several major changes such as the demolition of walkways and blocked paths. The gap between the official wayfinder and ground continually opened up and swallowed me.

Community food gardens generate new ways of navigating, new desire lines that do not leave maps, diagrams or names. As Gillian comments "I think that's what's nice about the whole project, makes me go to spaces I wouldn't have before.

Rediscovering bits of the landscape around ... I don't have to take that route to get

anywhere so there's no reason to go. But it's nice to find these spaces"

[Gillian\_Greening Brownfield\_01]. Such comments as "your routine cuts you off from people" or "I've never walked around the estate" are not uncommon reflections are how routine sets routes across the estate. Anna comments on this: "Ruth walked with me [to the garden] from Balfron Tower the other day, she said it was so much quicker ... [However] 'I can't get through, I don't have that fob'. So ... the estate is set up in some way to exclude" [Anna\_01\_Greening Brownfield]. Anna continues:

"I've started walking in a different way ... I come in the little shop way ... and walk through past the garden just to see how [it is]. Part of me wants to see ... what's going on, but part of me thinks if I'm looking, people might think twice about destroying it"  
[Anna\_01\_Greening Brownfield].

Through gardening Anna is creating a yet unwritten map around her estate from flat to garden, generating new paths and therefore new space. Carradale House sits across the estate as a barrier, meaning that unless you have a key to its lobby in the middle of the block you need to walk to the edge of the estate and round to see the garden (or in fact find the garden).

Journeying in and of itself for some becomes intrinsic to practice as Gordon explains: "it's not about gardening ... walking is so important because it's all part of the health aspect ... Can you interview me in a year and see if I'm jaded and want to give up! [laughs] or if I'm more excited by garlic and tomatoes?"

[Gordon\_01\_Lansbury gardeners ]. These interactions demonstrate how space is produced through practice. The food garden invites multiple collaborations within the boundary of the estate; entwining walking, naming, drawing both onto the garden surface and of the garden.

### 6.2.3 Material resources: soil, wood and water

The importation of soil, wood and water are vital to create gardens. I want to explore the actions and processes that these materials create rather than their material state as functioning objects in order to give emphasis to an embodied process rather than a disembodied object. Therefore, while clearly there is a quantitative discussion on the area of soil required to produce a particular tonnage of food (Tomkins, 2006, Edmondson et al., 2012), the qualitative everyday aspect of resources has been little



discussed. For instance, how they contribute to the architectural space by creating moments in time, altering the contours, silhouette, and spacing around them, or how they create momentary rhythms linking to bodies to a changing pace of the city, providing stories.

As Anna comments; “wasn't it funny when the twelve tonnes of soil turned up and we all got rained on ... you have some commonality with each other rather than ‘you can't park here and you can't do that and this isn't acceptable’” [Anna\_01\_Greening Brownfield]. We can also see from Anna above that soil produces a common narrative, a sensory interaction, and enjoyment, it is a spatial generator. Neil comments on the olfactory of growing as 15 tonnes of pungent compost are delivered. Neil takes a deep breath, “smell that, good isn't it?” commenting that not all residents were happy about these sensory interactions.

Dragging heavy soil bags, digging and building are performative; the remaking of space gets wiped on clothes, or mixed with sweat. These interactions often disappears once performed, as Eleanor states:

Eleanor: “you do it for the pleasure rather than the economic reasons”.

Mikey: “What's the pleasure”?

Eleanor: “Somehow finding it quite pleasurable getting back to basics, soil under fingernails ... its quite a visceral thing I suppose.

It's great ... and you feel like you have achieved something”

[Eleanor\_01\_Greening Brownfield].

With the addition of soil to the space of the estate, the architecture becomes momentarily malleable, tactile, embodied with the experience of gardeners; it gets a soft edge that can literally be pushed under fingernails and into bodies. Participating with residents, I feel this sense of being in a place that generates frisson, emotion and physicality, still resonant a few years after participation. In contrast, architecture emphasises space, enduring and resistant, a façade of finality that obscures its own transformative moments of building so as to control the very essence of spatial transformation. Rojas (1993, p.53) comments on such moments, “The enacted environment is made up of individual actions that are ephemeral but nevertheless part of a persistent process”. Food is the catalyst, the connective agent that enables

the community food gardens to have integrity; residents are drawn back to the material space of the garden because it is embedded with their memories and sensory interactions giving them spatial sovereignty. Gordon discusses this, “One of the great things about this project, from a social point of view, is it seems to have succeeded on autopilot. Nobody said, ‘you’ll have lots of fun. You’re going to do this, you’re going to do that’. We just put the soil down. It just started to happen”

[Gordon\_01\_Lansbury gardeners ]. The ‘started to happen’ is not the determined act of growing in the agricultural sense but food as a generator of the social relations and new spaces.

Soil requires containment and on a hot August afternoon [2010], I am helping to build extra beds from scaffold planks with Simon and Graeme [St John’s community kitchen garden]. The wood needs lifting over a tall metal fence. Figure 25 (upper image 1) shows each of the thirteen, two-metre planks pushed through the fence, and left resting on a middle horizontal railing, the bottom part touching the ground.

The actions throw shapes into the air, create silhouettes, new scenic moments whose actions wear new tracks in the ground. Against the profile of the linear architecture these planks seem divergent, a distraction, but only in relation to the highly organised ideals of walls, fences, and towers that effuse a strictly demarcated sense of purpose. Figure 25 (middle image 2, lower image 3) follows the narrative as they are laid on the grass, ready for cutting while an area of grass is cleared.

In emphasising these actions, I am not seeking to elevate them to a higher cultural plan of art but to bring consideration to how “the processes of genesis and growth that give rise to forms in the world we inhabit are more important than the forms themselves” (Ingold, 2008, p.2). In other words, while the boxes that will be created are vital in terms of their contribution to a potential aim to grow food, they are also part of a continual process of making and bringing into being that is little discussed. Such images help emphasis the actions of spatial sovereignty with food sovereignty.

As Ingold (1993, p.152) qualifies, landscape should not be seen as an “external backdrop to human activities [or a] particular cognitive or symbolic ordering of space”, contending that research should bring to “bear the knowledge born of immediate experience, by privileging the understandings that people derive from their lived, everyday involvement in the world”.



**Figure 25: Building a raised bed, St John's estate.**

Image 1 (upper image): Metal railing and wood, Image 2 (middle image): marking wood, Image 3 (lower image): site ready for raised bed.

Soil and wood combined create the basic unit for gardens, the raised bed, essential for gardening on hard surfaces. All gardens had some form of wooden raised beds

that, by comparison to the tonne bags are expensive and time consuming. They have solidity about them unlike the tonne bags that sag and mutate over time from exposure to the weather and use. I felt this expressed a feeling of relaxing into the environment; they change in relationship to the internal weight of soil over time. By contrast, the raised beds provide opportunity to pause and sit as we walk around the gardens, creating an opportunity for reverie. If the tonne bags bring a spatial sigh, a sense of breathing out and softness to architecture, then the raised beds provide punctuation. This becomes the grammar to enunciate a space of food for growers, it is never written or abstracted only walked and performed. This is part of what de Certeau calls “spatial syntaxes”, an “alphabet of spatial indication ... the beginning of a story the rest of which is written by footsteps” (Certeau, 1984, pp.115-116).

Sustaining the plants requires water. Access to water however, is more than just sustaining the plants. It also sustains multiple interactions for gardeners, some with each other, others with the landscape. As Anna states, “someone will write the regs and rules, someone will get the key ... but it’s how we do it ... how we’re being with each other while we do it ... I haven’t watered my plants for a week ... they’re OK ... they’re much more forgiving than the interrelationships of humans I think” [Anna\_Greening Brownfield\_01]. Working at food gardening enables nurturing social relations because of the constant (yet forgiving) demands of food gardening. Alison talks about the almost ritual action of watering how it’s not about the efficiency of feeding the plants but provides an opportunity for her to be in the space:

“When one of the volunteers suggested us having this irrigation system I just thought what’s the flipping point ... what’s going to be the point of us being here, if it’s just going to water itself? ... I love doing the watering ... a lot of the time Phoenix is with me [young daughter], she puts me under pressure to do it quickly and ‘how long you gonna be?’ ... and when I have my day off on Monday I love just taking my time and taking about 2 hours” [Alison\_07\_Dirty Hands].

On their own, these actions feel inconsequential, yet through participation, I document the incremental action of a subtle creating of spatial sovereignty. Watering

is a constant and, as with Alison, is not limited to feeding plants. While irrigation systems would be more efficient in human terms, producing better crops, and recognising a more sustainable resource use, no gardens invest in them.

The act of watering itself seemed therapeutic for some residents, an excuse to spend time in the space of the garden, or a generator of a brief everyday creative happenstance. Watering is also a ludic moment, where the fluidity of water recognises play, “an important but largely neglected aspect of people’s experience of urban society and urban space” (Stevens, 2007, p.1). For example, one hot afternoon in late July [2010] I am with Neil watering his climbing vegetables. The soil bags are small and water soon bursts from the bags, running across the dry tarmac. Neil and I both pause for a moment, it is an instance recorded as silence as we watch the water flowing out without talking (figure 26). Neil’s line making, like the routes and paths across the estate discussed above, are spatially significant because its child-like playfulness only happens due to the food-growing project - nothing else would make Neil and I stand out in the forecourt pouring water.



**Figure 26: Pouring water, Haberdasher estate**

#### 6.2.4 The harvest

Residents are emphatic that it has to be food, 'it is concrete'; its taste, a high, a 'wow, wow, wow', a 'real basis thing'. Simon, in chapter five (5.2.4), extends the discussion further where the act of eating does not become an end but connects to the act of him looking out across the city, enabling him to set up recursion and "claiming something back" from the city. In this section I want to consider that act of harvesting vegetables, which typically happens towards the end of the season, and specifically refers to the act of picking vegetables or eating the vegetables, some of which have already been discussed in chapter five. Food production is key to urban agriculture, and an understanding of the everyday within the community garden means that harvests (vegetables, and some fruit in this case) are relational and contextual to people and the situations. I want to argue that it is in this connectedness that we can begin to understand how food journeys around the garden and the extent to which it might move outside the boundary of communal space. Overall, within research there was little data available on volume that might enable a direct link to urban agriculture, yet through participation and interviews I was able to see the significance of the act of growing and eating. This data is therefore directed at exploring the potential contradictory nature of community food gardens vis-a-vis urban agriculture as well as evaluating how an understanding of the everyday helps position community food gardening within urban agriculture.



**Figure 27: Lee on his balcony, Haberdasher estate**

Lee lives on the first floor above one of the main food-growing sites on Haberdasher estate. While he does not have a growing bag he feels he is directly part of the



community food garden as the runner beans from the ground floor plots climb up onto a satellite dish above his balcony creating a canopy (figure 27). As we talk, people garden below us and Lee breaks for conversation with other gardeners. They talk about the need to tie the beans to the building, watering, and the how the plants have grown over the week. The story is at once the food, the material space, and simultaneously the social exchange it validates between the soil and those that live together; food is not abstracted from the actions of those that grow but related to the everyday situation of communal growing.

My interest here, specific to research questions, was in considering the importance attached to food-growing as a socio-spatial action in order to help explore food as a contextualised process. For example, I ask Lee about the yield in order to try and understand further the value of the vegetable harvest:

“But the cucumber has really blown me away ... it starts there, there’s the top if it, but it was there [points lower] ... a few days back it was only like that [hand gestures a smaller plant]. This one was the only one I thought I had. Then I looked there and thought, Oh my god ... look the way it clings on, the way it ties on, pulls itself up, there’s another one growing [cucumber], so I can see three growing now, just there. So I think that’s a really amazing plant. I never knew that cucumber was such an aggressive plant for such a mild vegetable” [Lee\_01\_Haberdasher estate].

The needs of Lee to grow food are not determined solely by a discourse on agricultural productivity. Lee’s practice enables an exploration of the floor and walls of his flat through the food; the architecture comes alive as Lee searches through the vine for the fruit, adding randomness to the linear architecture. The garden produces an architecture of surprise, as Lee is required to find missing (edible) spatial fragments; the planned rectilinear now twists and turns, concealing itself in a game of hide and seek.

Lefebvre explores this relationship, writing, “The street contains functions that were overlooked by Le Corbusier: the informative function, the symbolic function, the ludic function. The street is a place to play and learn. The street is disorder ... this disorder is alive. It informs. It surprises” (Lefebvre, 2003, pp.18-19). Lee’s

neighbour Neil similarly repeats this idea of discovery and surprise. In asking Neil about food, I am exploring what motivates him to sustain his interest through to harvest. Neil replies

“The vegetable growing is more useful, more exciting [than ornamental]. When it’s underground its more interesting, this stuff you can’t see growing. Like when you pull up a parsnip it’s more of shock what comes out! ... Ya know, I want to go look at how my beetroots going right now, I’m curious” [Neil\_02\_ Haberdasher estate].

Like Lee, Neil wants the story of vegetable, the surprise twist in the narrative as you pull something out of the sedentary built space. A once planned and predicted space, whose pram sheds, communal laundry, bike sheds and underground car parks now lie derelict, becomes a curiosity, a revelation full of play and wonder.

For example, on the 9<sup>th</sup> September 2010, towards the end of the growing season<sup>23</sup>, I am gardening with June and Mary on Lansbury estate. Potatoes are pulled from the ground. June recalls planting them the previous autumn, attending every week except when it snows. She remarks “they were completely unexpected those potatoes” [June\_01\_Lansbury gardeners ]. June’s regularity, and congenial nature means she easily grows friendships amongst the diverse group of gardens. She remarks on the age and racial mix of the group, “We’re such a nice group, a diverse group as well isn’t it? I mean, look at that young boy, look and mine and Mary’s age, it’s different isn’t it. We just have a chat don’t we!” [June\_01\_Lansbury gardeners ]. Cultivation of food cultivates friendships amongst the gardeners and without the narrative of food-gardening, there would be no chatting.

In August, a cucumber is sliced and placed on a plate, handed around ritual-like (figure 28). The cucumber signifies that communal urban agriculture is happening in London’s community food gardens, but undoubtedly not something of agricultural consequence giving researchers a thin, yet still evident link to the agro-food discourse of feeding cities. With its simple display on a plate the food grown is

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<sup>23</sup> Overall, practice has seasonality; it begins in early March and ends as plants die off in September.



shown to be embodied with the performance and emotion of gardeners, a sensual entwining of memory, time, and space. In other words, food is not a detachable object but is intrinsically and continually part of the production of space, a segment of the built form that just happens to be edible. Its consumption by gardeners expresses an ongoing synergy between basic biology, practice, and the space of production.



**Figure 28: Cucumber on a plate, Lansbury estate**

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of July 2010, Neil and I break from gardening for tea in Neil's 10th floor flat. Viewing the estate from above one can survey the garden, an inversion of practice, an unravelling from the entanglement below (figure 29). It is this view that would enable a urban agriculture to be conceived as more 'productive' if the estate was covered in growing beds yet it is not the definitive gaze; from up high, without participation, one would not hear the stories that entangle the notion of agriculture with that of gardening in the city. Neil's sudden decision to go 'right now' for example creates a performance contained within the boundary of the estate amongst neighbours and vegetables. While it is easy to be disparaging about Neil's small handful of carrots, dismissing practice outside of volume ignores the contextual and contingent centred on what food-growing actually means to growers within the space of their everyday life.



**Figure 29: Neil's 10<sup>th</sup> floor view, Haberdasher estate**

In terms of harvests changing over time there was no discernable difference in harvest between established and lesser so gardens. Any distinction seemed to be between more experienced gardeners and the neophyte. Yet in the extracts below I want to report that in some case residents were beginning to think outside the boundary both in terms of shopping but also selling food. For example, Alison talks of how the garden changed her eating habits in the summer stating, that she enjoyed the flavour of the food she harvested: “The flavour of things I ate last year ... this is how I want to eat ... I didn't want to go to the supermarket and buy their crappy old stuff ... I wanted my nice stuff” [Alison\_05\_Dirty Hands]. Simon discusses that in the future, even a small harvest such as ten kilos leaving the garden for a nearby shop would be important, so that, “customers of the shop could seriously walk past [the garden] and see their stuff growing ... you go to Tesco and you don't know where it's come from. It might say the farm these days but you're not going to actually walk past it. So I suppose that's sort of interesting” [Simon\_02\_St John's community kitchen garden].

One day after gardening I meet Angela who holds out a Tesco shopping bag, half full of salad from the garden. I felt that the juxtaposition of salad within her Tesco supermarket bag resonated with my questioning the relationship of community food gardens to urban agriculture and wider industrial agriculture. Angela comments, “there's no way ... I'm going to be self-sufficient but to be able come out here, pick my salad and herbs and make a salad which is almost entirely from my own patch I really, really, really, enjoy it ... I'm doing something good” [Angela\_03\_St John's community kitchen garden]. I would argue that gardens produce enough food on

occasions to create a sense of self-sufficiency that relates an understanding of self-sufficiency as occasional self-reliance where harvest, practice, and eating create a brief independence and autonomy. Therefore, the space and rhythm of the garden are not to be confused with the existing space or rhythm of hunger and food supplies; agriculture, transport, and purchasing sit external to the new community space that forms in the garden and their interchange is brief and unsynchronised if anything.

#### 6.2.5 The influence of community on harvest

“Human embodiment retains the trace of a longing for communal solidarity, of intense collective experience and action, and of the need for physical proximity and intimacy with concrete others (Gardiner, 2000, p.16).

Community is a dominant theme within practice and as Glover writes “community gardens are less about gardening than they are about community” (Glover, 2004, p.143). Yet, while we can argue community is an “affirmative term, rather than a pejorative one” implying “togetherness ... co-operation ... teamwork”, it can also be ill defined and too simplistic, presenting a veneer of positive and untroubled entity (Macfarlane, 2009, p.139). Certainly, within the gardens researched, community refers to the participants within the garden and not the needs of all estate residents. This opens up a conflict within communal gardens, where a lack of understanding about what constitutes community with the garden relative to the wider community. This means that claims for community gardens as food security, which aims to support the whole community such as Baker (2004), cannot be substantiated unless that wider community is understood.

There is also the issue of the priority within the conjoined term community food garden where in fact, it is not (food) gardening that has priority but community where gardening represents a commitment to a form of ongoing cohesive practice.

For example, Eleanor had been involved in various public space projects on the estate over a two or three year period. She was keen to emphasise that the purpose of starting the garden was about community cohesion:

“I suppose my interests in pushing it forward initially wasn’t particularly having food from it but that’s obviously a nice by-

product ... I'm quite sort of keen that people don't forget that ... the original intention ... was meant to be to do with community cohesiveness" [Eleanor\_01\_Greening Brownfield].

To qualify, when we talk about 'community' gardening, the cohesiveness refers to a small group of residents, less than ten in most cases, and sometimes as low as three from estates that have hundreds, and in the case of De Beauvoir estate, thousands of residents. Unsurprisingly conflict emerges from other residents regarding food gardening, delaying some garden projects, changing their focus, or stalling them. These conflicts are sometimes threatening and occasionally violent. For example, the use of the word 'allotment', traditionally conceived as a landscape of sheds and plots, causes particular disagreement. Eleanor comments, "it's interesting that word allotment, I've started always using the phrase community gardens now because it's very knee jerk reactions that people have to it [an allotment]" [Eleanor\_01\_Greening Brownfield].

On De Beauvoir estate, at a meeting to debate the garden project, those against the project started throwing chairs and railing against the 'allotment' project. On St John's estate, gardeners received threats that the mini allotments would be destroyed; consequently the name of the project changed to 'community kitchen garden'.

As Angela says:

"I'd already had ... a list of names of people who didn't want these things [mini allotments] on the estate anywhere. They were against it ... and all these old dears from the estate came en masse ... and were shouting at us ... Oi! I want a word with you ... you're not doing it on my estate, aaaarrrrgghhh! ... And one lady said she'd set fire to anything we did" [Angela\_01\_St John's community kitchen garden].

Residents – both gardeners and non-gardeners – were aware of the potential for misrecognition and I felt that much of the conflict that arose with community garden proposals was a sense of confusing them as something else, for example allotment gardening. In other words, conflict arose out of them being confused with other

spaces for food production, rather than other residents objecting to local food production *per se*. There was generally an assumption reported that the landscape being proposed would match the “anarchic image of a diverse jumble of buildings and lack of presentation” influencing those against the mini-allotment landscapes (Crouch, 1988, p.187). Therefore, conflict arises from the potentially unsettling nature of practice where the everyday exposes “the most stable plans to unforeseen forces that inevitably disrupt them” (Till, 2009, p.46).

In this sense we can begin to draw the community garden apart from the historic model of the allotment where “social participation is an obligatory feature of the collective model, for the allotment ... it is discretionary” (Richard Wiltshire and Geoghegan, 2012, p.342). Community food gardens arise as a contradictory space; they present both an obligation to communicate, yet simultaneously threatening a privatisation of space, a removal of the social because they require explicit participation. Within such conflict, the broader concept of the community garden can be become enforced on those that take part not because it has meaning but precisely because it is not precise but an avoidance of engagement with the core subject of food.

Gordon notes that there is a differing approach to communal gardening, individual plots, and allotments and the effect on food:

“The Bangladeshi ladies ... they grow to the max. So there’s a ... feeling amongst other members of the [garden] group that they should be limited or reasonably limited [within the community food garden] ... I suppose it happened by accident because the [grow] bags were empty for a couple of months in the beginning. And they said ‘can we have those two bags’ ... we said yes, but now there is more of a demand it would seem better to even things out. Some of the Lansbury gardeners are on a waiting list for an allotment and want to switch to a full production model”  
[Gordon\_03\_Lansbury gardeners ].

Gordon, who incidentally does have an allotment, is aware that the allotment can provide a substantial amount of food, a ‘full production model’. On the other hand the community garden has smaller plots where the weight of production falls on

maximum social production. Conflict arises between the social needs and the productive potential within the community food garden where Gordon is suggesting that the proper space for food production is the allotment.

As with Neil earlier, who imagines how many gardeners can occupy an empty space by dividing it with tonne bags, so Gordon is describing that growing ‘to the max ... should be limited’, so that a common spatiality can be privileged to accommodate more people. As Gordon continues, “I always regard the project as being successful not necessarily for an individual or any one person, it’s the cumulative effect of people getting together with a common cause, interests ... community base ... places where people come together and do things” [Gordon\_03\_Lansbury gardeners ]. I would argue that the separation between community food-growing and individual plots, in some instances, is a false one because of this ‘cumulative effect’. The enclosed space of Lansbury estate food garden or proximity of neighbouring beds on Haberdasher estate means that the individual plots form an unbroken social space of separate growing areas, a macro form of a continuous productive urban landscape (Viljoen et al., 2005).

Lee describes the social pleasure from community being less specific about the constitution of community, more the softer edge that links out into a wider community but also inwards to personal histories. He states, “it does make ya [talk to people] it’s lovely ... it’s something I’m not used to ... I’ve lived here all my life really Mikey, and in the 80s I doubt I saw much of the community” [Lee\_01\_Haberdasher estate]. Lee moves between the current moment, a wide social history of the estate, and work. Food-narratives seem to enable gardeners to reflect and value other experiences that remained unconnected.

As discussed in chapter 4 (4.3.4), there is a sense of gardens generating an emotional connectedness across spatialities rather than separating out social experiences. As Lefebvre (1991b) notes, everywhere, people are realising that spatial relations are also social relations, meaning that while community gardens stress a specific site what is being sought are communal relations, a return to the idea of the neighbour linked through soil based practice (Cockayne, 2012)

### **6.3 Summary**

In the above results I have explored the aspect of everyday practice that in some cases leaves little in the way of artefacts or traces. From the new routes and signs, how material resources create multiple and momentary new spaces, and how the harvest connects bodies and architecture. The new routes and signs show the edges of practice, the furthest point at which food grown in the garden has context. It is a temporal scale entwining creative, social, and material spaces. The estate's architectural space gains curiosity, surprises, the unexpected as residents search its vegetative veneer for stories; a seasonal ecology as the climbing plants create a narrative from growth to death in September. In presenting the results I have therefore described a context, from the hand in the soil, to the wider acts of flâneuring around the estate that food inhabits. In the following discussion I want to argue that this perspective, and the everyday performance of practice, are what gives community food its context and character regarding harvest.

### **6.4 Section two: Discussion**

#### **6.4.1 A tangle rather than a totality**

The results demonstrate that a gap exists between the official wayfinders of landscape and the everyday life of walking, naming, and drawings of residents. As Crouch (2010, p.131) writes, research on the everyday of community gardening should not “seek to essentialise or privilege, but acknowledge; to let breathe, to explain the entanglements in living, doing, thinking and feeling”. The need to recognise actual lived experience on the ground opens up a tension that has been explored by several urban agriculture writers. Premat for example, discusses how official Cuban urban agriculture discourse excludes home gardening from figures favouring larger geographical scale growing (Premat, 2005). Eberhard (1989) and Thornton (2006) both point out that mapping potential productive space without accessing social data will result in making disproportionate claims about urban agriculture. For example, Burger et al. (2009, p.26) notes that South African households have space to grow food, yet, experiential research shows a better contribution to household economy would be to build a rentable shack on growing spaces because even good quality food harvests “represents less than 1% of the monthly [household] budget ... at a minimum subsistence level”. Consequently,

research that assumes or predicts harvests reliant on quantitative data built around the numeric, volumetric, or the assumption of food gardening equals food security, misses the detail of contradiction and explanation. Detail is explored not to state food growing will not happen but to add a caveat that influencing facts reveal “the heterogeneous rather than a deeper homogeneity” as a tangle rather than a totality (Weinstein and Weinstein, 1991, p.161).

Participation is able to add a rich story to the circuitous acts of gardeners; recording the desire to walk new routes means understanding a wide concern of urban agriculture where residents not only inhabit the garden, but also create a broader landscape through naming, journeying, and emotionally mapping the surrounding environs. Examining performance therefore, states the need to examine urban agriculture’s scale beyond the geographic or sedentary but also bodily, nomadic, and polyrhythmic dipping in and out of intensity. If Mougeot can state that urban agriculture is erasing western “compartmentalization of spaces and times” (Mougeot, 2005), then I would argue that the results confirm and detail how we can expand this statement to include the compartmentalisation of bodies, individually and collectively.

The bodily wandering is the spatiality of the pack-donkey, much feared by Le Corbusier (a significant influence on Goldfinger, Brownfield estate architect) who wrote: “Man walks in a straight line because he has a goal and knows where he is going. He has made up his mind to reach some particular place, and he goes straight to it. The pack-donkey meanders along, meditates a little in his scatterbrained and distracted fashion” (Corbusier, 1987, p.11-12). I would argue that from the results, le Corbusier might walk in straight lines but gardeners do not. Put simply, the architect assumes a destination while residents are journeying. As Lefebvre comments this abstract thinking represents, “a moral discourse on straight lines, on right angles and straightness in general” (Lefebvre, 1991b, p. 361). This extends to the soundscape of the garden construction as discussed above, similarly architectural space flat-lines, to which the gardeners add variants and pitch. The analogy is commented on by Schafer (1993, p.78) who writes, as; “flat-surfaced buildings proliferated in space, so did their acoustic counterparts in time”.



The results show that the creation of culture and cultivation are day-to-day manifestations and start with what is available. As Williams comments, “Culture is ordinary: that is where we must start ... the making of a society is the finding of common meanings and directions ... under the pressures of experience, contact, and discovery, writing themselves into the land” (Williams, 2002 [1958], p.93). This ‘writing into the land’ I would argue requires an acceptance and encouragement of the spatial and creative contribution of building (as a verb) as part of food based spatial production. In terms of hermeneutics, this is closer to the sights of Gadamer, who writes of a fusion of horizons rather than a separation: “there is no such thing as these distinct horizons ... old and new are always combining into something of living value, without either being explicitly foregrounded” (Gadamer, 2004, p.305).

Gadamer describes the importance of the researcher’s “own horizons” as “an opinion and a possibility that one brings into play and puts at risk” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 390). As described in chapter three, I approached the research agnostically, placing ‘at risk’ assumptions about food production in order to create sensitivity to practice in the field. By doing so I have been able to follow food discursively, unconcerned that it may take me away from the garden towards other social and sensory interactions. In doing so my horizons became the walks of residents, or the olfactory of soil, or the sudden inquisitive impulse of Neil “to go look at how my beetroots are going right now, I’m curious” [Neil\_02\_Haberdasher estate]. As Rakatansky writes; “architecture that ignores the everyday ... sets itself up ... to be ignored in the everyday, or you could say, to be ignored everyday” (Rakatansky, 1995) cited in (Till, 2009, p.228). Food combined with architecture brings space into view, gives it urgency, makes it visible and part of the lived experience of residents.

#### 6.4.2 Temporality of food

Jeremy Till approaches the idea of temporality by writing that rather than start with architecture as space,

“in order to better objectify it ... I start with time, because time is the medium that most clearly upsets any notions of static idealised perfection in architecture so that when I get to “space,” it is space that is redolent with social possibilities” (Till, 2009, p.66).

Longitudinal time based research is almost entirely absent from community garden literature. Gough (2007) offers us a longitudinal examination of the archaeology of London community peace gardens over a 20 year period, valuing them in terms of heritage and politics. Through these we see that gardening is both ephemeral, lasting only as long as the growers performs gardening. Specifically, with regard to the garden, Balmori and Morton (1993, p.1) state, “The truth is that all gardens are transitory – more like our lives, less like architecture: we build them to give an impression of permanence”. Kingsley and Townsend call for “the need for further research into the ‘time’ and ‘space’ aspects of community gardens” because social relations and practice change over time (Kingsley and Townsend, 2006, p.525). Importantly, they note that time will influence how the communities form, consolidate, and mature shifting their emphasis.

I would argue the results demonstrate an understanding of community food gardens and their position within urban agriculture as fluctuating and not something that we can grasp as a static concept. Following Kingsley and Townsend above, I argue it is important to take account of the unfolding story over time, not just years as they discuss but also the moments of practice; how aesthetics or social interaction might be important at certain points but lessen as practice or seasonality shift or how practice is direct with hands in soil or indirect with contemplating or gazing. Over time, gardeners create priorities for themselves that then drift, get assumed, or forgotten. While this appears random, it is part of the everyday character of creating communal practice largely divorced from governance models. As food grows it accrues meaning subtly over time with little external reference; for instance, acts of walking or creating new routes into and out of the garden or the process of assembling garden materials, interacting with water or the olfactory of soil that fades over time.

Therefore, we are looking not just at physical space, but also as a shifting temporal and contingent narrative; food has a rhythm as well as a space, echoing urban agriculture as “food and fuel grown with the daily rhythm of the city or town”, the aspect of rhythm has been little explored (Smit et al., 1996, p.142). Lefebvre comments on rhythm,

“Rhythm appears as regulated time, governed by rational laws, but in contact with what is least rational in human being: the lived, the carnal, the body. Rational, numerical, quantitative and qualitative rhythms superimpose themselves on the multiple natural rhythms of the body (respiration, the heart, hunger and thirst, etc.)” (Lefebvre, 2004, p.9).

Therefore rhythm is also bodily and momentary where gardeners might ‘jump-cut’ to certain actions, plateau or flat-line, or briefly emphasise issues. There is tension in an understanding of rhythm between the solidity of architecture, and the temporal slowly shifting aspects of the everyday lives of residents. The former is recorded in history books and libraries; the latter rests bodily with the memory of residents and is little valued even by the residents themselves. In comparing this ontology, I want to refer to Highmore’s “theory of distraction”, particularly the idea of distraction as an everyday practice and the subsequent effect it has on food growing. Highmore writes that “Distraction as a scattering-outward of attention is not opposed to concentration as a mental ability or as a quantity of attention; it is opposed to concentration as a spatially bounded description of attention” (Highmore, 2011, pp.119-120).

Therefore, in approaching research through the everyday, I have been able to explore the momentary such as stopping to look, words, play, sudden changes in conversation. It might be expedient to consider these actions irrelevant or insubstantial, a distraction between the intention to grow and its potential outcome, the harvest of food. Through Highmore, we can reflect on these as a bodily scattering out, performed against the otherwise bounded space of the estate. In relationship to food growing, these mean seeing time as something that establishes a relationship to the potential food harvest but also something that brings constant flux and change and less so adherence to a plan. For example, St John’s estate changed the location for the garden based on a site that produced the least conflict. Its present location emphasises the narrative of its creation, one in which social negotiation was key. These become relatively fixed over time, while the gardener’s performance still offers opportunity to be spatially distracted; to engage in random conversation, moving materials around, or spending time watering all of which affect food.

Through participant observation and its associated interviews, the results explore the language of interaction with space and time and how other everyday connection and material space might subsequently influence my main concern of producing food. Transition over time adds depth to our understanding of the spatial practice of food-growing as well as its potential influence on food production as stated in the aims of the thesis. The results add grain and colour to an understanding of the rhythm and urban agriculture, exploring the shifting pattern of engagement within and to food production, sometimes connected directly to food and eating it, other times journeying around food-growing through the making, crossing and sharing of new paths.

However, this research and its data collection spans one season with interviews giving a back-view of a few more years. Time in this sense refers to both moments, as in participation within individual garden sessions, but also how these moments accrue to months and more. In the words of Merrifield, this aspect of time enables us “to reclaim our society as a lived project ... a project that can begin this afternoon” (Merrifield, 2006, p.120). The results demonstrate a need to see the time based process as commencing long before the garden starts, sometimes years. The influence of original architects, external advocates or land grabs for example, can be traced backwards and have a long-term effect on residents’ aspirations to control space. Further research should add the long view of food and market gardening from the 16<sup>th</sup> century as discussed in chapter two.

#### 6.4.3 Making space for bodies, performance and food

Performance, its tactility, momentariness, and sensuality affect food growing because they sequester, embody, and contextualise the harvest within the spatial practice of the gardener and the estate giving it a playful character. In this research I have aimed to record and reflect on the details “of unarticulated and half-articulated signs – the gaze that is a second too long, the gesture” that are only made available through participant observation (Thomas and James, 2006, p.785). Stevens (2007, p.1) comments on the playful nature of such things as something “‘unfunctional’, economically inefficient, impractical and socially unredemptive activities which are often unanticipated by designers, managers and other users. Play reveals the potential that public spaces offer”. Applied to food growing, Stevens’ quote means food harvests become something without a required measurable output, an

unconditional moment where gardeners are enraptured, exposing the gap between performance and abstract design.

In discussing performance within this discrete section, I want to look at how it directly affects relations with space (i.e. landscape as a primary resource), food harvests, as well as reflect on my own involvement and performance. Food creates opportunities in the garden through performance and transformation that would otherwise have been impossible or foolish, ‘hard to believe’ to quote Lee. These are important moments for gardeners because they compress multiple experiences into the food. It is as if the movements of the body, the conversation, the emotion of place, create ever increasing feedback loops imbuing the food symbolically with place, person, and practice. As Casey writes:

“Even if it is (just barely) imaginable that spaces exist without the contribution of lived bodies, it is not imaginable that dwelling places could exist independently of corporeal contributions. We deal with dwelling places only by the grace of our bodies, which are the ongoing vehicle of architectural implacement” (Casey, 1993, p. 132).

This research adds detail therefore to an understanding of cultivation that includes the corporeal enactment of cultivation contextualised within location and story. Food is an imbrication of senses, experiences, and context not just the pure biology of the five senses or in this case location and practice. As Highmore comments “We live a synaesthesia that hitches the metaphorical to the material (and vice versa) and makes it impossible to purify our experience into scientifically exact biological activity or, alternatively, into pure discursiveness” (Highmore, 2011, p.140).

I found participation particularly adept in capturing the many facets of practice and material space, journeying on these embodied and creative trajectories with residents. In trying to understand why this urban agriculture system reacts to the food production in the way it does, I would argue that participation brought together isolated moments and interaction, subtle turns and gestures to create a more inclusive understanding of often messy interconnections between people and existent space. As Highmore points out and in relationship to food, this is neither an exact science of space, agriculture, nor the pure biology of the daily calories. The environment that

the gardener constructs for food is a disrupted space in the sense that it does not seek consistency of form, continuity of discussion, or leaving an obvious trail of data that other researchers can follow. In other words, the space of the garden cannot be examined in any great depth without the actions of gardeners themselves, reflective of myself as gardener and researcher. The cooperation between those that shovel and those that are wheeling the soil into the garden, the grunts as we drag soil, the need for water, to rest, to negotiate on tight walkways that were never planned to take wheel barrows. Materials generate performative moments that are not just individual but neighbourly.

Everyday performance of those that make landscape is little recorded in research, art, or literature. Samuels discusses the need to know who makes landscape, from the key decision makers to the “thousands of lesser figures (who have) left the mark of their leadership ...even if their names are no longer known” (Samuels, 1979, p.67). In spending time with residents and participating in the creation of community food gardens, I have begun to attribute local residents and communities to the biography of ordinary landscapes of east London housing estates as a time based action that involves dirt, the spoken word and the tactility of hands on concrete and brick.

This is contrasted with the wealth of information available in libraries and online on those who were employed to design the housing estates of Lansbury estate, Brownfield estate, and De Beauvoir estate for example. I was able to look through the designs and master plans, all rubber stamped, versioned, and dated. I was able to read regeneration plans, conservation strategies, and best practice documents (Tower Hamlets council, 2010, Hobhouse, 1994). However, what is totally absent is the narrative of the lived experience of the estates, the contribution of the everyday actions of residents on space over several decades. As Simon Richards writes, “Place-making involves ... points of interest for all the five senses; providing clues for the triggering of memory, daydreams and desire” (Richards, 2003, p.195). Through the results, I would argue that understanding this process means understanding more than physical artefacts but understanding the imaginative and sensory interactions of residents.

As DeLind remarks regarding local food production where, “*bodies are place holders*. They keep in corporeal and cognitive ways dynamic records of the

interactions, relationships, and histories of any given place” (Delind, 2006, p,134). From the blueprint, to the bulldozer, to the built, we have a language for construction as new yet the interactions, between the body, the social, and the physical, lacks recognition. DeLind (2006), comments further that food systems discourse should not narrow their attention to economics or the rational neglecting to understanding how emotional and sensual involvement retain embodied relations of place and food. For example, I could measure the increased breathing or heart rate to indicate how bodies numerically react differently to practice but how do you measure looks and smiles? I would argue that an understanding of community food growing lies partly in metrics but more in its connectedness, in what it generates in terms of space as memory, material, and performance.

#### 6.4.4 Contextualising food harvest

This section explores how food harvest becomes contextualised by, associated with and saturated in memories of practice. In urban agriculture literature, food requirements appear as antecedent to the daily meal, whose problems can be solved through a plurality of urban agriculture forms. While community gardens are linked to food growing implicitly by residents, they are also already problematised by and responsive to spatial and social factors that act as precursor to this primary purpose of urban agriculture. Specifically, I am arguing that we should look beyond the idea that food growing is a gateway practice to social, spatial, and bodily engagements in a linear fashion. Rather the results show that these factors generate a need for spatial engagement that food is able to satisfy, which subsequently lead to greater social capital as spirals and cycles obscured by object based research.

While food-growing is an intrinsically pragmatic action, requiring physical space it is also emotional and sensory, exhibiting a desire by people to invest in each other and open themselves up bodily to public performance. It is a place of community, where neighbours create and care for a space for growing within the boundary of their homes. As Jackson writes, “the moment we introduce the house, the home into the picture, the garden becomes a difference thing ...house and garden form a definite unit: each needs the other, and gardening is a group undertaking” (Jackson, 1994, p.121). Jackson precisely draws together the elements of practice – the desire to grow food next to where residents dwell, as a group activity. Jackson is writing about the historical shift from a combined food garden and home to a sterile

landscape of grass or concrete that now surrounds most housing. This research explores this narrative in reverse, the transformation of sterile landscape to the new kitchen gardens of urban dwellings.

Importantly, it also explores the “group undertaking”; how individuals begin to form a common narrative amongst other personal expectations and desires something that Harrison describes as a “common of dwelling” (Harrison, 2007, p.637). However, as Ravetz notes, the planning of council housing largely ignored the “collective environment of the estate” placing emphasis on the object of housing itself (Ravetz, 2001, p.90). Through community practices, as discussed in 6.2.5, gardeners create ‘a common of dwelling’, a collective environment.

Tasting food grown within cities is part of the material landscape in which it is harvested, however, as our gardeners explain, it is blended within the body, the social and momentary. The bucolic landscapes of the ‘traditional’ farm are more redolent of these relationships, yet residents, through the act of growing, eating, and performing are clearly attaching importance to situating themselves bodily, looking across and linking to the immediate loci as material food landscapes. As Okely notes, “if they have worked the landscape, those who have produced its fruits know they are also consuming the local landscape as they ingest”(Okely, 2001, p. 108). Okely goes on to make an important distinction between an act of surveillance and looking. The latter “embraces the whole body” as a “means to understand and resonate with the world” (Okely, 2001, p. 104).

DeLind explores the need to see food as having a bodily connection, writing that “Without engagement or some other embedded memory, food easily assumes the role of a “thing” – something quite separate from the living system that produced it and resides within it. (Delind, 2006, p.125). Extending DeLind I argue that garden food is engaged, embedded, and not easily separable from the context of making it; in developing this literature I argue that the results show why specifically food production quickly reaches a limit in the garden. For example, considering Neil, who, mid-way through discussing his experience of growing feels the urge to immediately look at his beetroots, or Lee who traces the lines of his cucumber as it clings to the building discovering a conjoined space of architecture and the edible. All aspects of food growing, from the dragging of soil, construction of beds, and



general gardening place the corporal as central to action; performance, in its most basic sense. Therefore, food is best understood contextually rather than abstractly; directly experienced in relationship to people and the making of space, reinserting “the biographical and bodily meaning of landscape” (Okely, 2001, p.99).

The conceptual design dominates because it requires these details of experience through the everyday to be disengaged. To understand them is not to objectify them, because this would require a disembodied food harvest; rather, research should follow the food and its continuing story. It is not a weakness of research but a situation of the current state of community food gardens that there is little food to follow.

#### 6.4.5 Scaling up: Making space for food

This chapter has discussed food gardening at an intimate scale, focusing on the loci of bodies, the social space and time of community, and the harvest. Yet the global issues of food and urban agriculture discussed in the literature review speaks to a bigger scale of food crisis and feeding millions on a daily basis. How do these instances of practice enable us to understand how larger structural food production might be addressed? This is often assumed to mean to lifting and copying of instances as objects to be duplicated across landscape. Yet, as Marston (2000, p.220) clarifies “scale is not necessarily a preordained hierarchical framework for ordering the world – local, regional, national and global. It is instead a contingent outcome of the tensions that exist between structural forces and the practices of human agents”. In this case, the structural forces of shopping and planning and the everyday practice of gardening.

I would argue that the results in this thesis present a close examination of people developing a necessary sense of place through the manipulations of materials, enactments and performances, wandering and communality because of food. This making space for food does not have the direct “buy-one-get-one-free” discourse of shopping; it is more incidental, nascent, and entangled. Importantly, the actual production of food remains elusive, not so much in word or intention, but in action.

The space of food described here is not direct, its sovereignty or dwelling emerges from allowing residents to get on with making space with all its neighbourly, kindred, vernacular or folk trappings. This is because the garden is a place of

expression for residents, a place to choose to rest and gaze, engage in conversation, or meditatively water where “the body manifests sensuous, inarticulate desires and impulses that cannot be fully colonized by rationalized systems” (Gardiner, 2000, p.16). Food itself emerges connected to these actions, where time is emphasised upsetting “any notions of static idealised perfection in architecture” (Till, 2009, p.66). Lansbury gardeners are very productive using only a few square metres of garden space in terms of social interaction, which is interweaved with food gardening.

Scale therefore is important beyond a discussion of bigger is better. Small scale seems important for social relations to emerge and several gardeners commented on the need to start small and then increase. I would argue that residents conceive of gardens being small and manageable because they are primarily being motivated by social proximity and in actuality most gardens easily facilitate conversation and exchange while gardening happens.

Therefore, in returning to scale, it is evident that a food space that is anchored in community cannot be copied and moved to multiple potential harvests; we need a different approach. As Smith (1993, p.73) writes, “differentiation of geographical scales establishes and is established through the geographical structure of social interactions”. I would argue that the results demonstrate the need to begin with social interaction and build concepts of geographical scale out of them, showing that space generated from the ground up, from the body, and community will best reflect the concerns of residents. Concomitantly, the food produced will also follow the same path. Graeme for example, exchanges his early interest in the agricultural scale of urban agriculture for the emergent social interaction, or Neil, who utilises the memories of his entire life spent on Haberdasher estate, to recreate a new edible landscape. Gordon talks of the soils unexpected arrival on Lansbury estate as sparking social practice before any gardening practice commenced.

Food gardening’s essential corporeal and quotidian nature brings forth concerns, which attends to the crisis of space in planned estates, namely, the sensory, the creative, the primacy of construction and cultivation. The intricacies of context demonstrate the soft edge of practice from the hand in the soil, to wandering around the estate. This detail is in contrast with the view from Neil’s 10<sup>th</sup> floor flat looking

down on the courtyard garden. Lost are the conversations with residents, the surprise of pulling vegetables from the landscape. To look above it, extinguishes and misinterprets practice because it cannot take account of a peopled landscape, where links now exist between residents, a one-to-one space they inhabit through food. This does not discount the need to strategically plan for food, what Gordon terms ‘the full production model’ but questions how analogous differing systems of local food production are. Community food gardens accumulated across the site(s) might produce a urban agriculture experience matching definitions; however urban agriculture policy and concepts imposed will never produce community food gardens because you cannot assign abstract, i.e. economic value to a feeling, an emotion or the sensory. DeLind (Delind, 2006) and Turner (Turner, 2011) offer a way forward suggesting that such experiences embedded issues more strongly with growers. However, I would like to loop such interactions back to demonstrate that these experiences give harvest a meaning situated, not just bodily but also spatially.

What I have argued in this thesis is the everyday community food garden does not scale up to meet the conceptual; it is not a gap to be bridged. As de Certeau writes of the view from the 110th floor of the World Trade Centre

“Is the immense texturology spread out before one's eyes anything more than a representation, an optical artifact? It is the analogue of the facsimile produced, through a projection that is a way of keeping aloof, by the space planner urbanist ... whose condition of possibility is an oblivion and a misunderstanding of practices ... [a] disentangle from the murky intertwining daily behaviors”  
(Certeau, 1984, pp.92-93).

It is through these murky intertwining and daily behaviours that food gains value. To understand them is not to objectify but perceive multiple moments unfolding. The task is to move beyond the duality of de Certeau because ultimately what is required is balancing both strategic and tactical practices. Currently, the conceptual is an imposition on these gardens because historically “a misunderstanding of practices” from the “murky” everyday; a disentanglement resulting in demolition, as discussed in chapter two using examples from Dickens (1970 [1848]) and Thick (1998).

As shown in this chapter, several gardens were able to welcome other community members, although this usually means dividing space and therefore impacts negatively on food production. This implies that scaling happens as an inwards division of space to embrace social practices rather than an outwards duplication.

In considering scaling and therefore sustainability I would also argue that the gardens as small examples are not able to consider resource use such as land access, water, and soil on any strategic level. Currently, communities access these resources incrementally, as a generator of social story, rather than food harvest. I would argue that if community food gardens continue to be initiated through the process discussed through the three empirical chapters, then any attempt at scaling up needs to address the relationship between a need for spatial sovereignty (local autonomy) and equitable use of resources. For instance, the spaces investigated here are brief and ill supported, if not contested by, the wider community. The escape may be intense and real for those that take part but it is not representative of the everyday life of those that do not take part. If food security needs to address all the food requirements of all community members then similarly spatial sovereignty in community food gardens needs to find some mechanism to be more than a minority display of a potential other future and address the resource use of all potential urban agriculture practitioners towards an agreed understanding of the urgency to feed cities.

## **6.5 Conclusion**

Chapter six has explored the everyday of gardeners, how they interact bodily with materials and space and its influence on food's journey as something tangible, sensory and emotional. As I demonstrated, the material space of the community food garden is not direct in the sense that an increased growing space equals greater efficiency for instance. It is a space where the practice of food gardening emerges out of the criss-crossing paths of desire, use, and community; it is an amalgamated set of interactions rather than a directly conceived space. I argue that these interactions, which often do not leave traces, significantly contribute to the direction of practice and the subjective value placed on food harvests. This chapter therefore explored not what is produced by the food gardens as an already existent

geographical object but what is the nature of the intransitive processes residents engage with during gardening practice.

Going further, this means using this continuing understanding of practice to ask why connections are made and unmade and why the embedded factors might influence food production. I argue that the results show that a connectedness to urban agriculture within practice should not be seen as constant, but one that might connect and disconnect throughout differing stages of the garden's story; in other words a patterning rather than a consolidation.

Chapter six has demonstrated a response to Turner (2011) who calls for future research to examine how embodied practice extends food outside a garden's boundary. I would argue that the results show that gardening produces new routes and paths for gardeners around the estate as part of the garden; food as part of the continual production of social space, generating an experience close to the body as well as wider experience of a collective landscape, and beyond.

To this I would add the subtleties of the everyday actions of gardeners, the momentary arrangements of materials for example, the smells, or the sounds of building, or the conversations with passers-by bring richness to the experience of growing that is indelible to gardeners yet also extends the boundary of the space provided by architecture, reflective of its surfaces suggesting a "different ontology, one best described using notions such as sound waves, sonority, vibration, echoes, motion" (Bhatti et al., 2009, p.65). While spatial sovereignty can be gained through the construction of raised beds, the direct engagement of the body and consumption of practice (harvest) offer a weightier connectedness because ultimately the purpose of practice is to create a product to sustain the body.

By contrast, the view from the 10<sup>th</sup> floor flat across the estate represents a strategic view where one could grasp the estate as an efficient farmed entity, a combined urban and agricultural project, yet one precisely divorced of the entwined performances through which everyday growing is sustained. Yet, such efficiency therefore, finds little purchase where communal practice favours, not a spatial consolidation but its fracturing across landscapes and within place-making, so as to increase social production, happenstance, and circulation.

Chapter seven will now present a summary of findings and the conclusions of this thesis together with a reflection on my participation with gardeners, before closing remarks are offered.

## Chapter seven

### Conclusions

#### 7.1 Section one: Aims and questions, summary, and reflecting

##### 7.1.1 Thesis aims and questions

Section one begins by restating my aims and questions, followed by a summary of findings, and a reflection on my position within the research. Section two is given over to a detailed discussion of conclusions and their relationship to literature and concepts, closing with a section of further work.

This thesis explored six community food gardens on London housing estates as an example of urban agriculture towards an understanding of the following three aims:

1. To gain an understanding of the everyday of communal growing to examine the role of the variable harvests within the garden.
2. To use an increased understanding of community food garden practice to define communal food production in the context of urban agriculture and the broader narrative of food supply systems.
3. To better understand the spatial effects of cultivation and construction within community food gardens and the recursive relationship to the built environment.

This thesis also examined the following five questions:

1. How do differing spatial practices initiate and motivate the emergence of the community food garden and how do they interact with the stated aim of food production?
2. How does the everyday performance of gardeners interact with and produce space in relation to the already built environment and what effect does this have on harvest?
3. What significance does the everyday and dwelling bring to an understanding of community food gardens as something that produces a variable harvest?

4. How can we utilise an increased understanding of the everyday practices of growers to extend the conceptualisation of urban agriculture with the UK?
5. How does an increased understanding of food growing practice as embodied and enacted help in contextualising harvest within ideas of food security and sovereignty?

#### 7.1.2 Summary

This thesis has presented an in depth participant observation of community food gardens on six London social housing estates, following the phenomena of food growing from the view point of the grower. Community food gardening represent a specific form of the more generic term, community garden, where food growing is stated as a defining purpose by residents, yet not one that produces a consistent outcome in terms of harvest. In order to understand this the gap between intention to grow and harvest, I used participant observation, with sensitivity to hermeneutic phenomenology and constructivist grounded theory, to suspend ‘agnostically’ an assumption of food harvest as a central driver until I had experienced this through participation. I have demonstrated that through participation, research can stay close to phenomenon and trace its multiple paths from those initial discussions across tea and spoons, to the imaginations of residents and sympathetic designers, and the contemplative performance between building, growing, eating, and dwelling.

Via this methodology I was able to expand the area of research to understand the social process through which gardens are formed, how their internal practice is sustained. I have explored food-gardening as a lived experience accounting for how spatial factors affect harvest and variations in yields. It revealed how the existing built space, discourses on spatial transformation, and performative practices have a dynamic affect on food and I conclude that food harvest, as a core phenomenon, does not serve alone as a basis for understanding the initiation, practice, and outcomes of community food gardens as a form of urban agriculture.

This thesis has demonstrated the potential for a relative and qualitative understanding of urban agriculture food harvests that takes account of the everyday situation of practice. Throughout a process of spatial production, food takes on meaning and subjectivity that profoundly affects harvest, in turn affecting the gap between expectations of practice and outcomes. I therefore conclude that the



significance of food harvests is embedded in the recursive relationship between grower, practice and the built environment that establishes harvests not just as products of space but also reproductive of space. Within the dialectical tension between them, food will emerge in less or more quantities, dependant on how these relationships come to dominate spatial practices.

I conclude that food harvest exhibits a ‘thirding’ of the space as something bodily, contextual, and abstract. This can be explored through a literal reading of the thesis title as “making space for food”, in that it is related to the body of the gardener and the community, where harvest is grown in a physical location of sociocultural production. This is firstly, a space of individual people, but also, secondly, a collective making of space and time for each other where food become contextualised. A third reading emerges that expresses the possibility of harvest becoming relational to the abstract spaces of shopping and consumption. I would argue that because food becomes embodied and contextualised with place and community during the first two stages, a relationship to this latter stage is not sought. The former (body and community) only need to experience the process of growing or perhaps an exemplar harvest, the latter requires volume, which is precisely why community gardeners do not pursue it.

This thesis therefore concludes that these community food gardens do not currently play a major role within urban agriculture as something that might provide a consolidated reliable harvest, as an expectation for feeding cities. However, I have demonstrated the need to understand urban agriculture within the Global North, as a practice that needs a sense of spatial sovereignty through cultivation, construction, and community as a precursor to growing, whose development may in turn allow for greater food production.

This chapter begins with an account that reflects on and positions myself as a researcher within the research project, followed by the conclusions of the thesis and a discussion of further work.

### 7.1.3 Reflexivity and positionality

This thesis has demonstrated that through participation, research can stay close to the phenomenon and provide a contextualised account of the everyday lived experience contributing to greater detail regarding the factors that influence food harvest.

In this section I position myself within the research project offering “a turning back on oneself, a process of self-reference” (Davies, 1999, p.4), offering an account of my personal and academic influence within the process of research. For example, as already mentioned, I was concerned I might create the object of my own research by influencing the practice too heavily thus slipping into action research? I wondered if I talked too much to residents about my research thoughts therefore influencing any responses they might give me during an interview or in my field notes. I felt the latter most keenly because community food gardens are such a social process and talking is a prerequisite. Residents would ask me about the other gardens, or how the research was going for example, and I needed to be guarded about my response in case I would merely be recording an echo of my own opinion in either field notes or interviews.

Residents risk a great deal socially through placing themselves in the forefront of practice; these landscapes have been a place to pass through, ignore, and in some cases fear. Bodily, residents dress down for these events, wearing old clothes, getting dirty, engaging in social interaction previously avoided. Participation means sharing these moments, becoming part of a gang, feeling the camaraderie, gaining an understanding of success and failure, spending time getting rained on, simply smiling at each other. Analysis means gaining a deeper understanding of these moments in relation to questions and academic research. This required me moving beyond simply quoting residents but to “play with the texts – to get lost in deep conversation with them ... to invite the reader to enter the world that the texts would disclose and open up in front of themselves” contextualised by the identified literature (Sharkey, 2001, p.12).

The depth of my involvement was clearly not one of deep ethnography in terms of living on the estates during the research period or spending much time beyond gardening with residents. I know that residents spent increased time together outside of gardening and that this social aspect was key, something I was excluded from for personal and organisational reasons. One issue that concerned me therefore was my position as a research/gardener/friend and whether this would enable me to gather enough in depth data to achieve the aim of understanding 'factors that influence' food harvest through an understanding of motivations, responses, and compromises.

However, I would be cautious of drawing too heavy a line between researcher and researched based on time spent. Across the gardens, residents themselves spent a differing amount of time on the project, with some just turning up to garden (a few hours a week), others being involved behind the scenes (and not gardening). I was always keen to turn up to practical sessions, take part in planning meetings, or social events. Perhaps I was over enthusiastic as on two occasions the only attendees were myself and one other resident.

While my preference was to take a 'passive' stance towards the garden project, getting my hands dirty and talking, under the above circumstances I clearly contributed a great deal to projects on occasions. I operated as an advocate, especially where there was tension or conflict in the creation of gardens. As Clarke writes: "researchers are typically seen as advocates of underdog positions precisely because the intervention of social science research as a representational event itself gives greater visibility and voice to the underdog position" (Clarke, 2005, p.15). My mere presence on the De Beauvoir estate for example would set me aside within the community as a support of the nascent gardening club. I did not set out to study a controversial area of research, yet there was evidently crisis and conflict.

On Brownfield estate, there was an eclectic mix of residents, professionals, and artists contributing to practice. Two of the gardeners were artists in residence, involved to some extent in a creative art practice that involved co-creation through participation. Their presence caused some tension between residents, who mistrusted the artists as 'free loaders', while resident Eleanor engaged with the project on similar terms to her day job as an architect but was welcomed. Reflecting on this, there is no hard line between the academic and the researched. Clarke discusses the porous nature of relationships writing, "positionalities and hierarchies are constructed not only by academics ... but also and increasingly by those being researched" (Clarke, 2005, p.14). The world is not neatly compartmentalised into academic, and residents. People are crossing social, professional, or creative boundaries all the time bringing emotions with them and leaving others behind. Lee, for example, whose gardening practice helped him imagine that he was an agricultural worker in a previous life, or Alison who wanted to play the role of problem solver with her "flippin' field of dreams". Also, several gardeners had academic qualifications including two with PhDs. In some ways the actual practice of gardening presents a role playing

opportunity for residents themselves, an excuse, as Simon and Keith show to be someone somewhere you would otherwise have been barred from being.

Gardening is hard work and any help is appreciated and formal training was not the order of the day in community gardens where most were not trained gardeners but autodidacts. Adopting a heuristic approach as a researcher requires going out into the field, and collecting data in situ mutually.

However, it should also be noted that residents themselves were very much in the process of gaining an understanding of the situation in which they were involved. They too were trying to make sense of their world, and sometimes residents would describe their own practice in a way that mirrored my own thoughts. In this situation it was difficult to play the part of the agnostic and I felt it better to follow through the discussion with empathy rather than avoid it.

Understanding my position helped explore further the complexities of making space, the influence of discourse, and the everyday. My journey from Capital Growth volunteer, to researcher, gardening and participant within the everyday, follows the route many gardeners take as their involvement with the discourse of others enables a spatially transformative moment to open up permitting quotidian practices to ignite. Food is more than sustenance, more than growing or eating, and only through spending time within a landscape with people, watching traffic and sunshine move past, drifting in and out of conversation, the sharing of spoons and spades, and watching a "crack in the edifice" emerge with a surreptitious edge can we start (not finish) to appreciate.

## **7.2 Section two: Conclusions**

### **7.2.1 Introduction**

To achieve the aims and answer the research questions this thesis explored the everyday practices of community food gardens on six London social housing estates, over a growing season, as an example of urban agriculture in the context of the UK. In presenting conclusions, I want to restate my acknowledgement in the opening section regarding the increasing unease concerning food supplies to escalating global urbanism. This thesis is presented as an investigation into this issue, where urban agriculture is advanced as a potential local food producing concept and practice to

alleviate food supply anxiety. However, our understanding of the issues and actual practice on the ground do not necessarily synchronise. This research has explored the gap between the stated intention to grow food and the harvest of practice in order to understand the influencing factors that produce variations of harvest within community food gardens. Research has previously explored the quantitative potential for urban agriculture systems, valuing resources such as landscape literally in terms of economics and yields. Absent from this, is the qualitative aspects of practice, exploring the social, sensory, and cultural aspects of growing, so that we might begin to understand how such elusive aspects such as conversation, imagination, and creativity contribute to influencing growing and harvest. Moreover, through Lefebvre, I have explored communal gardens as something that is spatial productive and I have taken into account how the process of making a space for food interacts with other spatial practices.

The results show that a desire for communal food gardening stems from and initiated through multiple processes of garden formation, rather than a singular aim of growing food. An important contribution of this thesis is in revealing the narrative of that formation and its interaction over time, something that previous research from Milbourne (2010) and Baker (2004) have touched on but not explored in any great depth. The results demonstrate that the everyday of community gardens are initiated when there are advocates, examples of predecessors, or transformative moments, which must also take account of residents' imagination. While residents alone may wish to instigate food growing, it is clear that much of the initial momentum to produce community food gardens is advocated top-down through institutions and already visible examples in other parts of the city (predecessors), also, but not exclusively top-down initiated. Practice also emerges from moments of spatial transformation and contestation, which expose space as mutable in the otherwise seamless built space of the city. Furthermore, the results demonstrated that there is a clear discourse on spatial change in NGOs literature that promotes food-growing projects, that has previously been under explored. It is across these situations that imaginations coalesce around the already available urban form of the community food garden.

This process produces community food garden spaces that are spatially entrapped, a factor gardeners constantly given attention and energy to, and cannot be separated

from, justifying the need for a theoretical approach from Lefebvre (Lefebvre, 1991b). Moreover, spatial entrapment is given extra weighting because growers choose only to garden within their estate meaning that practice cannot avoid entanglement with all the day-to-day and historical experiences that entails. Therefore, changing space becomes the shared concern that develops within praxis because of this entrapment, where communal identities form through acts or moments of spatial transition, either from direct experience, or secondarily through other residents, justifying the research approach based on dwelling and the everyday.

### 7.2.2 Harvest as embodied, contextual, abstract

In exploring this process from the viewpoint of gardeners, I follow practice through three interrelated stages, as the garden becomes something imagined, something perceivable and material, and as something lived, showing the relevance of Lefebvre's (1991b) triangulation of the perceived-material-everyday of spatial production (figure 4). In unpacking the differing spaces of food across this narrative, I argue the need to see community food garden harvest beyond a dominated and binary relationship to industrial agriculture systems, where food is valued only as yet another abstract product. Moreover, community food gardens are not in binary opposition to the already built environment (an amateur or dilettante response) but indicative of the ongoing enactment and coproduction of environments, whose process I have explored through Lefebvre.

This thesis confirms that food harvest is embodied and relational, becoming imbued with meaning through its interaction with everyday creative processes of people and space (Delind, 2006, Turner, 2011). A principle conclusion of this thesis is to extend this argument to show that food persists across three stages. I have called these stages bodily, contextual, and abstract. Bodily refers to the experience of the individual gardener, community to that of the group undertaking, and abstract refers to the ability of self-grown food to relate to and engage with commercial food systems. The latter use of abstract has a double meaning regarding food and space. As Merrifield comments, urban space and commercial food are both part of "anonymous globalization" whereby "abstract food ... helps produce and reproduce abstract space" (Merrifield, 2006, p.138), the historical process of which was explored in the literature review (2.1.5).

This conclusion is an important one for this thesis and responds to the first three questions which address spatial production, creative practices and the everyday and how they interact, affect, and produce variable harvests. It also address comments from Mougeot who question why certain urban agriculture practices “become an important source of food ... and others where this will be less true: why the differences? (Mougeot, 2005, p.267). I discuss these three stages below in detail. While I have categorised these stages, I would argue that there is imbrication and coupling between them rather than there being three separate positions.

Firstly, the results show that residents use food bodily, sensually and performatively as part of spatial practices. This begins as residents transform space within their imaginations towards an intention to grow. For others it is performative involving sitting in landscapes, reading, looking, and eating. Neither requires an agricultural yield in terms of efficient reliable harvesting, merely an exemplar to provide connection and justification for inhabiting the previously blank, disused, or invisible landscape providing spatial sovereignty. This food is sensual and emotional, embedded with individual stories, memories of childhood reverberating within the body.

Secondly, harvest is produced linked to community and others people with a bounded space. While it is bodily, it is also contextualised through its public and community setting where harvest becomes part of a “common of dwelling” (Harrison, 2007, p.637). As Anna confirmed community provided “a common purpose. Sometimes you could put a load of seeds in together and they might not grow [but] you've done it together and wasn't it nice” [Anna\_01\_Greening Brownfield]. These situations do not require volume, if food at all in some cases confirming and extending the work of Holland (Holland, 2004). This explains why community food gardens low (or non-existent) yields does not mean people consider gardens as failures. Food creates continuity, entwining itself with the space of buildings. As we saw with Lee, whose cucumber creates a narrative of spatial exploration in search for a single cucumber. The sovereignty of this food, its widest territory, is the peripatetic residents, inscribing new spatial routes across the estate, the conversational interaction between passers-by taking stories beyond the estate, and the auditory or olfactory of practice that produces sensory interactions within material space.

Thirdly, there is the prospect for community food gardens to produce ‘abstract food’, that is, a harvest that is potentially removable from the context of growing, and exist with, complement or even compete with commercial food systems. In short, this means that harvest might be able to structurally alter a relationship with food systems and exist outside that of the garden itself. However, unsurprisingly, such harvest is little evident within the community food garden because the embodied experiences of residents’ means the deep contextualisation of harvest becomes indispensable to its manifestation and consumption.

The social process of community food gardens therefore, does not seek volume or weight, instead narratives provide exemplars, something votive, without actual applied use in the sense of daily cooking and feeding. Food-growing is symbolic, required to make something happen between people in a particular space. This is why only a single cucumber sliced on a plate, or a handful of potatoes from a season’s gardening suffice; it is a recurrence of the memories of practice already embodied in the gardener; people are not so much eating, they are celebrating the experience of social practice and spatial production. Food growing as a performance and practice is essential, yet malleable and contingent; there is only contradiction when the assumption of yield, read as prediction of harvest matching actual harvest, obscures processual explorations that account for people, landscape and everyday lives.

The distinction of the conclusions related to food harvest help refute the potential binary opposition between urban agriculture and industrial agriculture; the former as local farming, the latter as distant production, where urban agriculture is subsumed and only evaluated and given meaning relevant to the latter’s market based consumptions. I would also argue that this thirding could be used to understanding other urban agriculture systems, where for example, the bodily and contextual (in this case communal) stages would offer less resistance to volume production and a therefore more decisive engagement with commercial food systems. The conclusion follows Soja, discussed earlier in chapter two (2.2.1) emphasising Lefebvre’s triangulation where there is an avoidance of binaries and instead we search to “disorder, deconstruct, and tentatively reconstitute in a different form the entire dialectical sequence and logic” (Soja, 2000, pp.20-21). Through participation, I have



experienced the chaos of food gardening that hesitantly brings together new ongoing relationships that are material, sensory and social.

I drew on Highmore in order to understand the harvest as an everyday actions and not compartmentalise and separate practices out, instead, look at modes of connection and disconnection as we travel through our lived experiences as a “patterning of desire” (Highmore, 2011, p.2). As the results show, community food gardens generate spaces for conversation where before there was silence creating a different pattern of desire with regard to engagement with other residents. Likewise, the need to consume food is a constant bodily requirement, which connects with the routine of shopping, cafes, and industrial agriculture but is largely disconnected from local landscapes, neighbours, and everyday creative acts. Community food garden harvests exhibits a patterning formation producing a variegated harvest in response to social situations rather than a consolidated space and harvest associated with monocultural industrial agriculture. The variants of community food gardens outputs are only an issue when valued directly against the outputs of industrial agriculture. Where industrial agriculture jump cuts food seamlessly into urban environments omitting the complexities of production, community food gardens need to be valued intrinsically as producers of landscape, memory, and social relationships. Urban agriculture concepts break the seamless and almost illusionary space of industrial agriculture by confronting residents with practices as a situated phenomena that “engenders a sense of belonging that generates landscape as a place of dwelling and doing in the body politic of the community” (Olwig, 2008, p.81). Concluding that community food garden harvest representing a patterning rather than a consolidation of engagement with growing can be applied to question four regarding the use of the everyday in extending the conceptualisation of urban agriculture in the UK context.

### 7.2.3 Making space for food

An important finding of the research was the near invisibility to residents prior to the formation of community food gardens of potential growing landscape, both open grassed areas and the potential use of hard standing. I would conclude from this that the abstract and conceived spaces of estates are revealed as a domineering effect on the everyday lives of residents, specifically in relation to route-making (navigation around), daily performance (feeling foolish sitting out in spaces), and potential for them to be acted upon. These blankscapes have existed for decades for some

residents and therefore I would argue that community food gardens as an alternative landscape provider will not provide immediate results. They will need time and space to develop, using sensitive methodologies to participate and analysis without imposition. This thesis offers such an example with the hope that others may follow in the coming years.

In addressing the aims of this thesis, I have shown the need to understand harvest as having multiple values precipitated through interactions with architectural space, non-gardeners, creative place-making, and everyday stories. As demonstrated in the results, residents seek to define spatial production and practice using more prosaic terms as “gardeners” or “dirty hands” or “greening”. These actions, together with sign making, amateur building, wanderings and so forth, are intrinsic to growing to which conceptualisations of practice within industrial agriculture and professional architecture will have little resonance. This disjuncture between the prosaic and the planned was explored historically in the literature review where a conjoined abstract space of architecture and food provision via commercial shopping came to dominate urban space subsuming the more chaotic and self-made practice that food-growing instigates.

The analysis shows that this historically rooted process of self-making landscapes for food growing, captures residents’ desires. This is because social housing has largely been planned and maintained historically to deny the such everyday actions, confirming Till’s assertion that “an architecture that ignores the everyday will be ignored every day” (Till, 2009, p.139). It provides evidence of how food gardening can contribute greatly to our understanding of the built environment one that is ongoing rather than complete. Daily food issues or crisis are transferrable to the more secure and immediate food spaces of the city (shops, cafes, social security) while the desire to dwell is grounded within the less immediate space between estate landscape, practice, and home.

Practice is centred on the narrative of residents’ primary action as spatial creators, whose phenomenology and everyday practices escape an understanding through exactitude or abstraction. The subsequent human stories within the everyday life of the garden, that have been presented in this thesis, give detail to this conclusion by presenting data on the sensory interactions between people and spatial creative

practices. This represents a major contribution to an understanding of the gentle interaction between people, place and practice, and the way it can affect harvest.

#### 7.2.4 Scaling

There is the need to offer caution to those developing new design and planning concepts for urban agriculture (Lim and Liu, 2010, Steel, 2008), to understand the schism between urban residents' experience of space against conceptualisations of space. In some ways the poetry and romanticism of de Certeau's pedestrian comes in play here, as discussed in chapter six, contrasting the 10<sup>th</sup> floor view from Neil's flat across Haberdasher estate with the messy interaction of lived experience. The temptation with having this planner's view as a definitive gaze is to duplicate the small fragmented community food gardens across the estate to achieve a "full production model", answering Pearson et al. who notes the "gap in institutional knowledge around how to 'scale-up' the findings from UA [urban agriculture] case studies" (Pearson et al., 2010, p.12). Through a greater understanding of the everyday of community food gardens, we cannot rely on moving geographic examples of this form of urban agriculture linearly across cities hoping they will provide more food. This is because community food gardens primarily meet the social needs of communities and food-harvest might evolve to be more efficient if that's the concern of the particular community. From this I conclude that the social process of community food gardens produce scaling not as an external multiplication of food production but as an inwards division of space, which gets divided to accommodate increased social interaction. While this might be seen as a specific regarding these example, I would argue that there is validity in the conclusion where community rather than market defines the garden. Community needs to meet the social needs of those that define and take part in that community and will therefore divide and share resources inwards to accomadation new members, while market orientated practice need to expands outwards and colonise spaces.

#### 7.2.5 Borders, brackets, and borrowing

In exploring the spatial production and bodies, this thesis builds on but also diverges from the research of Turner (2011). Turner emphasises the role of embodied practices within community gardens, stating that further research should examine the permeability between the internal practices of the garden and how they might extend

beyond the garden. Bodies produce a space for food, and recursively food becomes embodied and reproductive of the space of production. The results confirm the notion, as stated by Turner, that everyday gardening practice is “bracketed off”, meaning that direct engagement with broader environmental concerns such as grow your own or climate change are curtailed. Part of this bracketing is self-imposed as community gardening is always already spatially entrapped prior to engaging in growing. Entrapment is heightened because these residents do not seek other spaces apart from those on their own estates. The work extends the work of Turner by demonstrating that the garden edges are permeable through an exchange within the local environment of conversation, soundscape, route making, and borrowing of the estate silhouette. I conclude that the food harvest produces a dynamic interaction with local space beyond the garden which is, (1) social in terms of conversations, (2) sensory such as auditory, olfactory, or gazing (3) route making around the estate, (4) scenic moments when new or temporary spatial arrangement of materials and people, create a new skyline or silhouette. They also (5) produce new social relations through exemplars. The importance of this is to extend the patterning of food harvest as one that gains extra sovereignty through the wider perceived space of the estate. Participation therefore, realises an extension of the notion of bracketing heightened through a sensitivity to hermeneutic phenomenology.

In further extending an understanding of how the garden interacts with the broader material landscape I also drew on the work of Schmelzkopf (1995), who stated that gardens ‘borrow’ from the surrounding architecture. I argued this conceptualisation sets up a foreground/background duality, where gardens are given a hybrid ‘third space’ distinction, but one that still requires the existence of separate other spaces. I conclude that the creation of a garden and its practice might borrow from surrounding landscape, but also existing built space borrows from the garden and its practice. This research therefore confirms my earlier assertion that through a close examination of community food garden practice we can demonstrate that built space is a “continuously co-authored space, an architecture *et al.*” (Tomkins, 2012a, p.425).

#### 7.2.6 Dwelling and the everyday

The use of the everyday linked to dwelling permeates throughout the conclusions and represents a key conceptual contribution of the thesis providing a qualitative

understanding of the variability of food production within community food gardens. It offers a methodological lens through which research gained greater understanding of the temporal and modal interactions that food-growing generates. The conclusions justify the use of dwelling, as used by Casey (1996, 1993), in providing a phenomenological understanding of food as something that is not confined to a single point or location but has movement across places. Through such a dwelling perspective we can witness food growing as something that travels and connects (patterning) rather than being stationary and abstract, which leads to the conclusion that food harvest has different values, as it becomes contextualised by spatial practices. Importantly, growers need to contest the design aspirations of post war planning, maintenance, and regeneration before it can find solace in the everyday of gardening. Therefore, these actions of residents, who reproduce space through gardening, are as political as the congenital intentions of government and architects who sought to contrive social housing spaces in the first instance (Darling, 2007).

#### 7.2.7 Urban agriculture literature

Within the literature review chapter, I began by discussing the more international definitions of urban agriculture; the industry, its location within or around cities, and its aim to supply food or goods back to the immediate locality, seeking a local agricultural based solution to quotidian food needs (Redwood, 2009). However, as I have demonstrated, food growing does not have a linear momentum from statement of intention and problem (daily food), to practice (growing food), to solution (feeding). From my analysis I conclude that the interaction between urban agriculture and community food gardening is not fixed or cemented in position, but one of patterning offering connectedness but also malleability, and contingency. Through this analysis, I would offer caution in building theory around strict interpretations regarding community food gardens, closing this space around already formed concepts, but let it breathe and allow everyday practice to develop creatively whilst also reiterating and researching a strategic urgency to feed cities through a plurality of urban agriculture.

Community food gardens by their nature, do at times function similar to the generic purpose of the community garden, yet I would stand by the argument that an intention to grow food, even if that does not materialise, means these gardens should be viewed as examples of urban agriculture. Food changes everything because

residents would not involve themselves with a phenomenon such as food production, with all its primacy, contradiction, and potential failures if the meaning of that engagement were not social embedded in the relationships it produces. In other words, an understanding of communal practices must begin within the voice of a community and the social space it produces not from an abstract idea of industrial agriculture, market consumption, or harvest quantification.

In urban agriculture literature, this conclusion can be used to extend the “spaciousness” concept proposed by Bohn and Viljoen, who call for a more “sensual, qualitative measure for the spatial success of open urban space” within food-growing sites “judged as appropriately sized” rather than merely being voluminous, and quantifiable (Viljoen et al., 2005, p. 110). Extending this notion is possible because the results provide empirical evidence to demonstrate that such sensual experiences as conversation, gazing, or walking, that are fundamental to community food gardens, work in the reverse for quantifiable readings of community food gardens that might mandate only spatial arrangements, volume, or technical assistance. Gardeners clearly provide a sensory and social aspect to the environment through route making, conversation and soundscapes. Furthermore, I would conclude that community food gardens provide a form of embodied connectedness, offering an extension of Bohn and Viljoen’s urban agriculture planning concept, the continuous productive urban landscape (Viljoen et al., 2005). Social and spatial continuity begins from the body rather than starting within an abstract concept of planned material space. Communal growing is by its nature connective, emanating from the actions, interactions, and sensations of the body. Starting with those who inhabit space mean that when we subsequently arrive at strategic planning for urban agriculture, our understanding of space is already deeply embedded with social meaning.

The results confirm some of the arguments found in research from the Global South justifying its use in the literature review. Specifically the work of Lynch (1992) who stresses the social and cultural value of urban agriculture produce exceeds in actual value as food and Thornton (2006) who reported on the essential role of social security systems vis-à-vis food access. The results can also be applied to Mudimu (1996) who demonstrates the spatial contest between growers and planners, between abstract and commerce, as a function of everyday life. Furthermore, the research

confirms the work of Zavisca (2003), who explored the post-Soviet dacha (allotment) arguing that research should examine motivation and meaning beyond market engagement accepting the “ambiguous discourse” within practice (Zavisca, 2003, p.810). This research found embracing ambiguities, partly explored through sensitivity to constructivist grounded theory, a useful method in accepting contradictory positions rather than eliminating data that does not confirm to preset conceptualisations. In this way I was able to participate with a great sense of freedom and empathy with residents rather than become frustrated at the lack of directed growing. As urban agriculture increasingly gains a voice in the UK, I would therefore recommend that researchers look more specifically at such case studies from the Global South rather than accept the broader headline statement that urban agriculture is already feeding cities.

I also discussed the qualitative and connective approaches such as Perez-Vazquez (2002) who argue for including non-material social needs, while Lovell (2010) takes account of cultural functions including the visual function. Mbiba contends that urban agriculture in the Global North is a tool for urban regeneration and social inclusion beyond “mere concerns for food” (Mbiba, 2003, p.20). This research builds on these more qualitative aspects, confirming and extending an understanding of the cultural and social aspects of practices particularly in context of the Global North in relation to food harvest. Importantly, this thesis contributes to an understanding of the interrelationship between the cultural functions and food production showing that urban agriculture practices do not so much produce associated functions but that these functions (non-material and non-food based or social needs) in fact drive or even ignite practice that may then produce a space for food.

The understanding of the food harvest consequently needs to be accounted for within these processes, where social discourse, from which the garden emerges, is as important as the material garden itself. I argue that this creates an orientation for urban agriculture research generally, not just within a community setting, whereby data gathering should proceed through those who practice, imbued with reverie and community, so that the cultural or sociological functions become embodied and empathetic.

This should not contradict urban agriculture discourse provided that the current growth of interest in community food gardens is balanced equally within the development of a plurality of urban agriculture, incorporative of efficient food producing spaces and the distracted communal practices. I would argue that this is the future challenge of organisations such as Capital Growth in having supported the development of over 2000 communal urban agriculture projects to resisting merely scaling-up the everyday communal garden, but to develop urban agriculture practices which favour consolidated and economic food harvests.

#### 7.2.8 Spatial sovereignty

In this conclusion I argue that I have been able to capture residents' excitement regarding the social and cultural value of place-making and its influence on food, not as a contradiction, but as an essential nonhistory of spatial production, a performance, and its sensory narrative. Seeing community food gardens as cultural generators of space is important because only when residents achieve some form of spatial sovereignty can we begin to address food sovereignty and therefore food security and I would argue that the ordering of these factors is stated correctly. Put bluntly, one cannot have food unless one first of all has space and control over that space. This section therefore addresses question five regarding how an increased understanding of the everyday of community food gardens relates to food security and sovereignty.

Spatial sovereignty, within food sovereignty expresses the dissimilarity between architectural discourse and everyday life in that people do not arrive with a grand plan – “there is no script for social and cultural life. People have to work it out as they go along” (Hallam and Ingold, 2007, p.1). The discourse of the built environment repeats a motif of creative coherence, readymade for us (along with readymade food), to which the minuscule, incremental, and abrasive daily acts of food self-provision (gardening amongst others) are merely attritions to be corrected either through maintenance regimes or later via ‘regeneration’. The self-made terrain of an everyday estate garden does not easily negotiate with the discourse of professional ideas about planned space, especially due to its limited access to time and social resources. Remaining on the fringe of potential urban agriculture systems means community food gardens retain creative autonomy and dilettante performances, yet having variable if negligible yields; to emerge into a more



productive space of food, and therefore more abstract, means losing spatial sovereignty or else facing criticism for its amateur construction, and prosaic naming.

While food needs to be constantly present to validate the persistent engagement in producing space it does not need to resolve itself as a stable harvest, if there is a harvest at all. This thesis therefore concludes that these community food gardens would not currently play a major role within urban agriculture systems in terms of food alone but do contribute to residents' sense of spatial sovereignty through cultivation, construction and community, an necessary precondition for food production. I also conclude that food production itself within the community food garden should be treated as epiphenomena at times, secondary to other phenomena, such as spatial sovereignty, social and sensory interaction, creativity, and performative actions that can emerge as having greater significance within practices. This is not to say that community food gardens cannot produce food, just that the harvest is compressed within social, spatial, and temporal process that adds contingency to this particular form of urban agriculture.

As stated in the open section of this chapter, this thesis concludes that community food gardens offer only a minor contribution to the necessary aim of feeding cities through local food production. However, community food gardens do offer a major contribution to an understanding of urban agriculture as an everyday practice that requires spatial sovereignty as a necessary precursor for practice to action any form of food growing, however small. The patterning of its harvest may change over time as it begins to address other issues beyond the process of spatial transformation. Moving beyond this stage will need to be actioned through both community and policy engagement, where the latter will be required to develop guidelines of land use and tenure to enable communal growers to securely move from innovating land change to pioneering food production. This thesis has presented a narrative of this process of innovation showing how nascent food gardens are imagined, emerge and coalesce into a working form. Further work is required on the long term development of gardens to increase an understanding of the factors that influence food growing beyond these initial early stages.

### 7.2.9 Further work, limitations

As with everyday life, research is ongoing and never complete and therefore, while this research has been able to capture a brief time in the lives of the gardeners, further work would be useful to examine how and if the focus on harvest changes as the gardens mature. Such longitudinal research was called for by Kingsley and Townsend (Kingsley and Townsend, 2006, p.525) who note the shifting priorities of social relations and practice change over time. Such comments begin to explore the continuous narrative of community food gardens and rather than mark an absence of data for this research project. I would argue that it should inform the direction of further work in addressing whether food becomes an increasing focus or whether the current practice represents a plateauing.

Some areas of research remained unexplored, such as demographic, gender, tenure, or race of participant; in essence a more ethnographic understanding of practice to compliment the more phenomenological and everyday details of this research. I was unable to research gender for example, due to the snow balling method of bringing primary sites into research. It would also have fought with my approach to not pursue comparative case studies. However, there were clear gender divisions across case studies, such as De Beauvoir estate being all female and Haberdasher estate being almost entirely male gardeners. I sensed that communities of gardeners emerged in much the same as a other community do, where we find solace with like-minded and socially similar people, with Lansbury estate contradicting this and presenting a wide mixture of age, race, and gender.

The research is clearly limited by the number of residents interviewed on the six gardens. At the time, the research didn't seem restricted by this as over the fieldwork period (March – September, 2010) I had little spare time for researching more sites. Having more sites would also have meant spending less time residents and therefore watering down the rich data I did gain. Within the six gardens researched I did notice that gardening did continue throughout the autumn and winter and I feel one of the limitations of this study is that it does not cover an entire year.

Like the gardeners, I was also entrapped in the garden, and further work could extend this research to include the relationships between the garden, the home, and the shop. This would extend the concept of hermetic dwelling (Casey, 1993) to look

at the dynamic between differing spatial practices to examine if other factors in everyday life also affect harvest.

Further work should examine the differing values of food harvests – embodied, contextual, and abstract – within other urban agriculture situations to explore how robust this triptych is in relation to practices that have differing social, cultural, and economic focus. This can be linked to the spatial situation of practice and consider how issues such as conflict with existing design (particular heavily prescribed), as well as other members of a community (office or education based) might influence the formation, practice, and harvest of growing. I would assume for example, that a urban agriculture practice based around social enterprise might span across food that has a communal and abstract (economic) emphasis, being less distracted by the intrinsically embodied food harvest. Considering a relationship between urban agriculture and community food gardening is more than a debate on nomenclature; much of the nuances of small-scale food-growing have escaped the urban agriculture radar because, as I argue in this thesis, there is too much attention paid to the final objects as dictated through security of food at the expense of the ongoing social process which needs a nuanced discussion involving sovereignty, over space, bodies and performance.

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## 7.4 Initial site visits

Visits made to 34 community food gardens as part of Capital Growth volunteering work, 2010

CG No.	Name	Organisation	Borough	Plot address	project sector
1	358 Edible Golden Lane	Golden Gardeners	City of London	EC1Y OTN	Community group
2	364 Garden of Aden	Hackney Homes	Hackney	N16 7LA	H/A
3	365 Smalley Road Estate Community Allotment Project	Hackney Homes	Hackney	N16 7LA	H/A
4	361 Haberdasher Tenants and Residents Association Gardening Club project	SAME	Hackney	N1	Community Group
5	201 St John's Estate Community Kitchen Garden	St John's Estate Tenants and Residents Association	Hackney	E5 9NS	H/A
6	399 Somerford and Shacklewell Micro Allotment Project	Tenants & residents A (SSTRA)	Hackney	N16 7TU	N/A
7	396 Robin Hood Community Garden	Robin Hood User Group	Hackney	E5 9HQ	N/A
8	366 Aspland and Marcon Food Growing Project	Hackney Homes	Hackney	E8 1NA	N/A
9	349 Clare Allotments	Clare Tenants and Residents Association	Lewisham	SE4	H/A
10	55 Newham City Farm	Community Links	Newham	E6 5LT	city farm
11	297 Bepton Community Centre	East Potential	Newham	E6 5NG	community group
12	308 St. John's Community Centre	East Potential	Newham	E16 2JG	community group
13	357 Gallions Grows	Gallions Primary School	Newham	E6 6WG	education
14	472 Go Green!	St. Joachim's Roman Catholic Primary School	Newham	E16 3DT	education
15	22 Not named	Dirty Hands Project	Newham	E13	community group
16	271 Play, Sow and Grow	Community Links	Newham	E15 2RN	community group
17	301 Katherine Road Centre	East Potential	Newham	E7 8PN	community group
18	317 grow it 'eat it!	woodgrange infant school	Newham	E7 0NJ	education
19	321 Let's get growing	Sandringham Primary School	Newham	E7 8ED	education
20	408 Just Food	Just Homes	Newham	E7 8QP	N/A
21	379 Off shoot- provisional name!	London Borough of Newham	Newham	E16 1ED	city farm
22	123 Camberwell Farmers' Garden	Brandon TRA	Southwark	SE5	community group
23	142 Not named	Styles House Tenants' and Residents' Association	Southwark	SE1 8DF	H/A
24	367 The Hamlet 'Panhandle' Project	Hamlet Residents' Association	Southwark	SE5 8AW	H/A
25	371 Hummingbird project	Hyde Housing	Southwark	SE15	H/A
26	457 Purbrook	Purbrook Estate growing space	Southwark	SE1 3DA	H/A
27	391 Peckham Park Gardening Project	Peckham Park Youth Project	Southwark	SE15 6SX	religious
28	264 Bow Locks Community Garden	Thames21	Tower Hamlets	E3 3DU	community group
29	388 Urban Food	Newlon Fusion (John Scurr Community Centre)	Tower Hamlets	E14 7JQ	community group
30	334 Greening Brownfield	Bow Arts Trust	Tower Hamlets	E14	H/A
31	377 Kobi Nazrul garden project	Kobi Nazrul Primary School	Tower Hamlets	E1 1JP	education
32	238 Hermitage community garden	Hermitage Primary school	Tower Hamlets	E1W 2PT	education
33	248 Sensory Garden Project	Lawdale Primary School, TowerHamlets, London	Tower Hamlets	E2 6LS	education
34	353 Besford & Dimmont Greens	Estmanco (Besford & Dimmont) Ltd	Tower Hamlets	E2 9BJ	other

## 7.5 Interview database.

This shows the six estates, interview dates (sound file and date column), duration (minutes), gender, and location the interview took place.

Code	Estate	Sound file and date	Duration (minutes)	Male	Female	Location
	<b>St Johns</b>	<b>Total interviews 8</b>	<b>8.00</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	
SJ1	Simon	SJ_S01_04/08/10	12.00			Garden
SJ2	Simon	SJ_S02_02/09/10	13.00			Garden
SJ3	Simon	SJ_S03_02/09/10	15.00			Garden
SJ4	Simon	SJ_S04_09/09/10	6.00			Garden
SJ5	Angela	SJ_A01_26/07/10	1.00			Home
SJ6	Angela	SJ_A02_26/07/10	20.00			Home
SJ7	Angela	SJ_A03_26/07/10	24.00			Home
SJ8	Graeme	SJ_G_04/08/10	23.00			Café
	<b>Lansbury</b>	<b>Total interviews 3</b>	<b>3.00</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	
LB1	Louise	LB_L_29/07/10	43.00			Home
LB2	Gordon	LB_G03_29/07/10	40.00			Home
LB3	June	LB_J_09/09/10	9.00			Garden
	<b>Haberdasher</b>	<b>Total interviews 6</b>	<b>6.00</b>	<b>2</b>		
HD1	Neil	HD_N01_16/07/10	5.00			Garden
HD2	Neil	HD_N02_16/07/10	22.00			Garden
HD3	Neil	HD_N03_16/07/10	16.00			Garden
HD4	Neil	HD_N04_16/07/10	2.00			Garden
HD5	Lee	HD_L01_16/07/10	17.00			Balcony
HD6	Lee	HD_L02_16/07/10	2.00			Balcony
	<b>Dirty Hands</b>	<b>Total interviews 7</b>	<b>7.00</b>		<b>1</b>	
DH1	Alison	DH_A01_23/07/10	1.00			Garden
DH2	Alison	DH_A02_23/07/10	2.00			Garden
DH3	Alison	DH_A03_23/07/10	2.00			Garden
DH4	Alison	DH_A04_23/07/10	4.00			Garden
DH5	Alison	DH_A05_23/07/10	15.00			Garden
DH6	Alison	DH_A06_23/07/10	16.00			Garden
DH7	Alison	DH_A07_23/07/10	21.00			Garden
	<b>De Beauvoir</b>	<b>Total interviews 6</b>	<b>6.00</b>		<b>3</b>	
DBE1	Natasha	DBE_N01_27/05/10	23.00			Community Hall
DBE2	Natasha	DBE_N02_27/05/10	24.00			Community Hall
DBE3	Natasha	DBE_N03_27/05/10	1.00			Community Hall
DBE4	Lesley	DBE_L01_20/05/10	28.00			Canal
DBE5	Lesley	DBE_L02_20/05/10	5.00			Canal
DBE6	Cindy	DBE_C01_04/06/10	43.00			Community Hall
	<b>Brownfield</b>	<b>Total interviews 6</b>	<b>6.00</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	
BF1	Keith	BF_K_08/09/10	46.00			Home
BF2	Gillian	BF_G_30/07/10	24.00			Work
BF3	Eleanor	BF_E_16/09/10	53.00			Work
BF4	Anna	BF_A_20/09/10	34.00			Work
BF5	Jim	BF_J01_24/08/10	12.00			Home
BF6	Jim	BF_J02_24/08/10	44.00			Home
			Gender	7	10	
			Interviewees		17	
			Interviews		36.00	

## 7.6 Participant information sheet.

This Sheet was given out to each gardener prior to participation.

### About the Project

I am a PhD student at the University of Brighton and I am conducting research into the general area of self-grown food in cities. I am contacting you because I wish to interview you as part of this research. All the interviews will be used within my final thesis presentation, as academic lectures or articles for journals. You have the right to complete anonymity if you wish.

### Introduction to the project

While there has been a great deal of research on allotments, very little research has been done on the relationship between community food-growing groups, the land they secure for food-growing, and the attitude of the institutions that either own or maintain this land. Research of this type is important because many communities are looking to side step allotment waiting lists and colonise the empty space that immediately surround their dwellings. By exploring how a variety of contemporary food-growing projects are initiated, develop and sometimes flourish – often against the grain of the surrounding landscape design – it is hoped that the research will enable a better understanding of the hopes, aspirations and success of this vital and emerging community activity.

### About you

You have been asked to take part in this research because you have direct, specialist or relevant experience in the area of self-grown food and cities. The interview does not ask you for right and wrong answers and values your contribution equally, whether you are a professional or resident, respecting your day-to-day experience as if you were the expert. The research is looking for families and individuals that will commit to either single 20-30 minute interviews or multiple interviews over the growing season. The researcher wishes to spend as much time as possible with the food-growing groups, outside of the interview sessions, offering his time, skills in gardening or discussions about other food-growing groups. In this way, it is hoped that the process becomes mutual, with a sharing of experiences and knowledge.

### Your interview

All information you provide will be treated in strictest confidence. If you wish to remain anonymous, the information will be coded in such a way that it cannot be traced back to you. The only people with access to your original data will be my two supervisors (Professor Andrew Church and Andre Viljoen) and I. The interview can be done either on site, at home or in a comfortable public place. The interview will be recorded using a digital voice recorder unless you object, in which case long hand notes will be taken. You can pause the interview at any time, for any reason, and do not have to tell me why. We can then either restart the interview at a later time or you can withdraw from the study without giving a reason and without any negative consequences.

Contact Details and further questions please contact

**Researcher:** Mikey Tomkins (mikeytomkins@gmail.com) 0771 2553 252

Supervisors: Prof Andrew Church (A.Church@brighton.ac.uk). School of Architecture:  
Andre Viljoen (a.viljoen@brighton.ac.uk)

## 7.7 Consent form

Used in participation and read to each gardener.

### UNIVERSITY OF BRIGHTON

#### Participant Consent Form

From Urban Agriculture to Personal Agriculture: Why don't we grow food in cities?

Researcher: Mikey Tomkins

- ◆ I agree to take part in this research that examines the relationship of residents to potential food-growing opportunities.
- ◆ The researcher has explained to my satisfaction the purpose of the research and how it will be used.
- ◆ I am aware that I will be required to talk about my experience to the researcher and that this interview will be tape-recorded.
- ◆ I understand that any confidential information will be seen only by the researchers and will not be revealed to anyone else.
- ◆ I understand that I am free to withdraw from the investigation at any time.
- ◆ I am not happy to be identified by name in the research. (Please delete one)
- ◆ I am happy to be identified by name in the research. (Please delete one)
- ◆ I am happy that the research supervisors will listen to the taped interview. (Please delete one)
- ◆ I am not happy that the research supervisors will listen to the taped interview. (Please delete one)

Name (please print)

.....

Signed

.....

Date

.....

## **7.8 Summary description of estates, research period and data collection**

### **De Beauvoir estate**

De Beauvoir estate gardeners use the community name: De Beauvoir Gardeners.

Address: Downham Road, Hackney. Research period: 30th March -18th July 2010.

The built environment of De Beauvoir estate was commenced in 1969 and completed in 1971 (Baker, 2011). It was designed with a library, an avenue of shops, a café, and a school as well as wide-open areas leading to the Regents Canal. The estate itself is dominated by five 18-storey tower blocks (figure 5), with wide concrete public ‘squares’ covering several (now disused) underground car parks.

The estate is punctuated by grassed open space, some of which have been given over to private gardens. De Beauvoir was involved in noticeable conflict around the possible garden project, and it did not move beyond this during my research period.

Data collection: Six interviews from three female interviewees.

### **St John’s estate**

St John’s estate gardeners use the community name: St John’s Estate Community Kitchen Garden. Address: New North Road Hackney. Research period: 11 July – 30<sup>th</sup> September. St John’s community kitchen garden is a very public site, positioned on a main walk through from Old Street to Hoxton (figure 6). All the beds were made of wood and well painted with a hand carved wooden sign hanging over the entrance. The estate is a mixture of high-rise and low-rise buildings. The project was funded by Capital Growth after a resident became inspired by a nearby architect and resident instigated community food garden. Data collection: Eight interviews, two male and one female.

### **Haberdasher estate**

Haberdasher estate gardeners use the community name: Haberdasher Estate TRA<sup>24</sup> Gardening Club. Address: Haberdasher Street, Hackney. Research period: 27th May – September 9th 2010. Haberdasher estate established a food garden in 2009, and is accessible from the street (figure 7). This estate is small but accessible from all sides with a very publically accessible food garden surrounding and within the site. It is a

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<sup>24</sup> Tenants and Residents Association

relatively small estate with one 16-storey tower block at the edge of the estate consisting of 68 two-bedroom flats and built in 1966 (English Heritage, 2007). The estate has a large amount of disused communal facilities such as bike and pram sheds, and underground car parking. The garden was initiated through a relationship with a local trust and a design practice called MetaboliCity (Inhabitat, 2013). The group were also inspired by a successful neighbouring food garden established by architecture practice What-if, established in June 2007. A focus on food within a distinct area was produced through direct funding from Capital Growth, which only funds food growing. Data collection: Six interviews, two male gardeners.

### **Brownfield estate**

Brownfield estate gardeners use the community name: Greening Brownfield. Address: St Leonards Road, Tower Hamlets. Research period: 28th May – 17th September. The architecture of Brownfield estate is ‘brutalist’, built in the late 60s (figure 8)(Warburton, 2005) it is well documented and I was able to access a great deal of extant plans and drawings, as well as literature on the architect (Anon, 1968, Warburton, 2005, Goldfinger, 1983). The estate is grade II listed, designed by Erno Goldfinger, who famously lived in Balfron Tower for several months after its completion in order to understand how the tenant responded to the estate (Anon, 1968). The estate has few open green spaces including some large rising banks, shrubs, and trees. Underneath the estate are extensive underused car parks. There is a community centre and pub. The food gardening itself takes place on the disused tennis court on the outer edge of the estate. The project was supported by Capital Growth. Data collection: Six interviews, two male, three female.

### **Lansbury estate**

Lansbury estate gardeners use the community name: Lansbury Gardeners. Address: Hind Grove Community Centre, Tower Hamlets. Research period: 28th May – 17th September. The garden is located behind fences that surround the estates community hall (figure 9). The buildings are chiefly characterised by a small number of houses, shops, and schools hurriedly built as part of the Festival of Britain in 1951. These are still evident but are now surrounded by a greatly enlarged and much more compact estate built in the 80s. Overall, there are large squares placed amongst the buildings, all easily accessible if largely underused. Much of the estate is low rise

(four storey), with the exception of one six-storey block. The internal streets of the estate are paved with no car access and this adds to its sense of it being an internal world. There is some disused underground car parking on site. This project was initiated by a local housing provider Poplar HARCA, with funding provided by Well London. Data collection: Three interviews, two female, one male.

### **Brooks estate**

Brooks estate gardeners use the community name: Dirty Hands. Address: Valetta Grove, Newham. Research period: 17<sup>th</sup> June – 18th September. Dirty Hands is the least “estate” like out of all the sites, because the garden is sited on the edge of a park, occupying a disused ball-court, and the various parts of the estate are distributed amongst older terraces (figure 10). However, the key informant identifies clearly with being from the estate and it forms a large part of the narrative of the case study. The garden occupies a disused ball court next to Plaistow tube station and consists of three rows of one-metre long grow bags and some raised wooden beds. Dirty Hands is characterised by three large tower blocks and some low-rise terraces. The garden was inspired by another local community food garden, formed independently, with funding from Capital Growth applied for after instigation. Data collection: Seven interviews with one female interviewee.