

A Growing Chorus
Practising the Commons with a Housing Estate Gardening Group

by
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Abstract

A Growing Chorus is a practice-based and interdisciplinary study into the theory and practices of the commons to enquire whether these might incorporate nonhuman, as well as human, lives and activities. It is carried out through a durational and dialogical engagement with a housing estate in South London and the activities of a gardening group based there. It places this small-scale engagement in relationship to large-scale ecological crises.

A methodology based on Donna Haraway's 'situated knowledges' accommodates the perspective of the researcher as an artist resident at the site of research and 'full member' of the gardening group. It tests theory against practice on the ground, and combines a subjective viewpoint with different voices from the estate and gardens, archival material, art practices, science and theory. Approaches derived from dialogical art practice are deployed in the context of community gardening to establish a foundation of human solidarity from which the capacity of humans to recognise the role of nonhumans in their garden commons is explored.

Having examined the role of human perception in relation to ecologically destructive behaviours, and the limitations of the commons in a context of climate and ecological crisis, the study proposes an attunement to symbiotic relations through the garden and a noticing of the 'polyphony', after Anna Tsing, of human–nonhuman activities. Clarice Allgood's 'perceptual commons' and an attention to sound, drawing on acoustic ecology, provide an arena in which these might be recognised. Finally Pauline Oliveros's Deep Listening is tested as a means of changing habits of perception, enabling humans to perceive and participate in the polyphonic commons of the garden.

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A Growing Chorus:

Practising the Commons with a Housing Estate Gardening Group

Introduction

This research arises from gardening activities, initiated informally with my neighbours on a council-managed housing estate in South London where I have lived since 2011, that became the Glazebrook Growers gardening group. In this context I have carried out an interdisciplinary, practice-based study into the traditionally human-centred concept of the commons, to ask what capacity commoning practices might have to foster conditions in which many species may thrive, a question made urgent by mounting ecological emergencies. As an artist, I ask what role art practices, and particularly those associated with listening, might play in fostering a multispecies commons, and I set these within a context of other practices, including those of gardening and group organisation, through which our garden commons is realised on the ground. A small scale study carried out using mixed ethnographic and art methods, it is set within a larger debate to ask what contribution the commons might make in the context of climate and ecological breakdown.

Roots of the Research

Between summer 2013 and spring 2014, workers employed by Southwark Council dug out a swathe of informal planting by residents on Croxted Road Estate, which had been put in at various points in the past by people living in ground floor flats. One of those flats was mine.

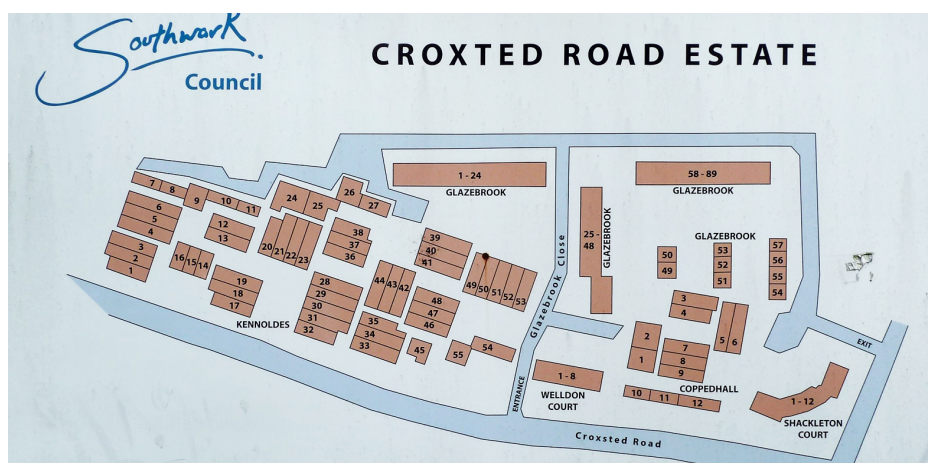


Figure 1: Street sign showing the layout of Croxted Road Estate.

I lived in a flat outside which previous residents had planted roses and a hydrangea in an area close to the kitchen door that was designated as ‘communal’ but unused by other residents. After arriving on the estate I added my own mix of flowers and vegetables to this, and soon discovered I had unwittingly stepped into a growing debate, between residents, Southwark Council and the estate Tenants and Residents Association (TRA), around which uses of the common areas of the estate were acceptable.



Figure 2, left: Flowers and vegetables growing behind my flat, summer 2012. Figure 3, right: A young neighbour waters a marigold, summer 2013.

In the meantime neighbours stopped to talk every time I tended the plants in this publicly accessible space between my flat and the adjacent roadway, and by the time the plants were dug out by council workers the task of watering them had come to be coveted by neighbours’ children, who would queue for a turn with the watering can. As events unfolded I witnessed both a strong attraction to my patch of plants and its many flying insect visitors,¹ and a lack of knowledge of and familiarity with them.²

Taken aback at first by the level of attention and feeling, both friendly and hostile, that a very small patch of plants had generated, I took it as an indicator that I had touched upon something with a particular charge. This seemed to have to do with the activity of tending plants and being in contact with living things that were not human, with doing so in a publicly visible space rather than a private garden, and with questions of land use and

¹ Various species of moths, butterflies, hoverflies and bumblebees were among the visitors.

² I witnessed this in myself as well as others. However, our levels of knowledge and previous experiences varied, and I will explore this and other differences in sections 1.4 and 1.7.

ownership. I chose to engage with this knot of concerns by organising with my neighbours to set up the Glazebrook Growers gardening group, and two years later by embarking on this project of doctoral research as a way of thinking through the issues at stake more explicitly. Over several years the Glazebrook Growers established resident-run growing spaces on the estate: a 'Kitchen Garden' for food growing, and a nearby 'Pleasure Garden' for relaxation.³ I focus on the Kitchen Garden in this study, and the activities undertaken there by the Glazebrook Growers, myself among them, constitute the main strand of practice on which the research is based.



Figure 4: The aftermath of council workers digging out my patch of planting. Here a neighbour and one of the workers obliged to carry out the clearance help to transfer the plants into donated pots. Photo: Andy Martinez

It will be clear by this point that my position in relation to the research was a particularly intimate one, in that I lived at the site of research, and the activities under consideration were my own and those of my neighbours. Writing about the role of art in a context of ecological crisis, playwright and activist Sarah Woods has noted that '[p]ersonal narratives are central to who we are and how we act' (Woods in Neal 2015: 12), and an awareness of my own position, with its responsibilities, potentials and hazards, became essential to my methodology as I moved into research. Wider histories and the contexts of human

³ Names first proposed by Paul Richens, an urban community gardener and teacher who supported our project from its inception. The name of the 'Pleasure Garden' evokes Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens, a famous site of commercial entertainment noted for illicit assignations and the mingling of different classes that once existed to the north of our borough, while the Kitchen Garden is often associated with an entirely different kind of estate: that of the large country house.

organisation, ecology and art practices are examined in the course of this thesis. Here, before setting out the research questions and the methodology I devised to address them, I pause to trace further roots of the research, summarising the situation within which I worked, and what I brought to it in terms of motivation, training and life experience.⁴



Figure 5, left: One of the blocks on Croxsted Road Estate, 2014, showing the plants to the rear of my ground floor flat. Figure 6, right: A neighbour's flat after her plants were removed.

Well before I embarked on formal research it struck me that the situation that was developing around my home and patch of growing held potential. There was an immediately practical, communal potential in terms of people coming together to grow food and flowers; but there was also, I sensed, something less easy to pinpoint, to do with an ongoing process of investigating how we might live. My ability to notice and willingness to follow that initially imprecise sense were due in part to my training and experiences as an artist. Identifying and attending to a 'gut feeling', a point of intrigue that seems to indicate something deeper, and then exploring it past the point and timescale many people would consider reasonable, is a common approach in art practice. Having worked in this way

⁴ These details are necessarily highly edited, a descriptive sketch to begin to situate myself and the research before I unpack the specific themes I chose to examine.

before enabled me to approach events as they unfolded on Croxted Road Estate with both curiosity and a certain seriousness of commitment.⁵

Predating my art training was an interest in ‘nature’,⁶ particularly plant life, that went back to my childhood, when I set out to learn the names of the wild plants that grew near my home. Later, as an adult, I attempted to grow flowers and vegetables whenever I had access to outdoor spaces.⁷ This love of seeing things grow did not translate into a wish to escape the city, however. Instead I held a vision of a different version of the city, and of London in particular, where I have lived since 1992, that had at its heart a sense of potential abundance, generosity and joy. I loved living among people, and the encounters generated by such a huge and varied city, but felt the boxing of life into individual households and commercial transactions was stultifying, and I sought ways to go beyond these boundaries. Moreover I longed for more contact with other species of all sorts, plant, insect, animal. These often frustrated loves and longings, and a curiosity about what they might generate in quite specific, practical terms, were an important drive underlying this study.

I have begun to relate my background in art practice to my capacity to give attention with openness and curiosity, and I will return to this relationship both in this introduction and through the course of the thesis, particularly in Chapter Three. First I acknowledge that other life and work experiences also contributed both to my ability to listen attentively and, importantly, to a knowledge that very small groups of people can make transformative change.

Before coming to Croxted Road Estate I had worked as a Spanish-English interpreter, often for NHS patients and health workers, and as a Family Learning tutor, leading art workshops in North Westminster in London with learners of different generations and from very varied backgrounds. Both of these jobs relied on, and strengthened, an ability to give highly focused attention to one or more people and what they were communicating, overtly or

⁵ Aided, once I embarked on this more formal stage of research, by a funded studentship from Loughborough University. Exploratory projects without precise outcomes or goals that can be identified in advance do not often bring in an income, and I was fortunate in gaining this financial support.

⁶ Alongside ‘community’, ‘nature’ is a term I will be calling into question, particularly in Chapter 2.

⁷ For example, while living as part of a housing co-op in Ladbroke Grove I grew surprising amounts of rocket, French beans, chillies and nasturtiums on a patch consisting mostly of rubble.

otherwise, and to respond with respect, accuracy and imagination.⁸ As a neighbour, and then as a researcher working among my neighbours on Croxted Road Estate I found myself drawing on similar modes of concentration.⁹

While I worked as an interpreter and tutor I also completed an art foundation and degree, became part of a housing cooperative and worked with various carnival groups. These three experiences taught me that small, particularly self-organised, groups can have powerful effects.

During my art degree around the turn of the millennium it became clear that both students and staff were facing a deterioration in the conditions of our study and employment, and I took part in a student occupation of our college to protest against this. Our success was only in delaying the imposition of some of these conditions, but I learnt another lesson that felt transformational.¹⁰ I had witnessed how a student body that had believed itself powerless could quickly be galvanised: our powerlessness had been to some extent a choice, one that could be turned around when imagination, courage and collective organisation were deployed. Later I joined a housing cooperative that was small enough to be self-run by its members without the need for paid staff, and we managed our housing so that rents were easily affordable by those of us working in the arts and the NHS. This was a quieter lesson in the steady effort – companionable and fraught, joyful and tedious – needed to sustain cooperation, and I witnessed the transformational effect that a humane organisation of housing could have in the lives of people on low and modest incomes. Finally I come to the London-based carnival groups with whom I have celebrated, worked and performed since 1995. With them I have seen how individual exuberance can interweave with collective expressions of joy, each strengthened by the other, and how city spaces can be used differently when activated by music, dance and play. Playing with others, in public, has

⁸ It is perhaps indicative of the relatively low value attached to these capacities that neither job was well paid or secure, and both the NHS interpreting department and the Family Learning department I worked for were subject to drastic cuts during the 2000s and 2010s. This thesis, by contrast, will highlight the contribution of attentiveness and listening, particularly in challenging destructive human behaviours.

⁹ Initially this took the form of careful attention during casual interactions. Later Pauline Oliveros's meditative practice of Deep Listening, explored in Chapter Three, built on this experience, providing a different means of exploring attentiveness through listening, both individual and collective.

¹⁰ More than a decade before the Occupy movement that began in 2011, the student occupation of Camberwell College of Art in the spring of 1999, sparked in part by a similar occupation at Goldsmiths College nearby, gained little attention in the media, but was an intense learning experience for those involved.

enabled those collaborating with the groups to imagine and rehearse other possible ways of being.¹¹ The lessons of self-organisation, collective power, play, and the positive potential of disruption, drawn from these different life experiences, informed my actions in establishing the Glazebrook Growers, and the directions I selected for my research. I came out of this period of my life with a conviction that setting up ongoing communication and collaboration with those around me held deeply political potential.¹² By taking the first step of talking to each other with some shared interest, whatever that interest was, we acquired power that we lacked alone.

I have sketched out some motivations behind my wish to attend to the situation on Croxted Road Estate. My capacity to do so was bound up with the fact that I live there, enabling me to develop the methodology I set out below. It also gave me an extended experience of groups and situations that attract the label 'community'. Later I will unpack the risks and potential of this term, both generally and in relation to art practice. Here, at the outset, I note that friction and dissensus characterised my relations with others as well as cooperation and conviviality. Indeed the former to some extent generated the latter. Some residents previously unengaged in estate matters were galvanised into action by the violence of measures taken to put a stop to informal resident growing, and I came to see the period of disagreement out of which the Growers emerged as creative, even necessary. Below I give a brief outline of how this was so.

I have described how in 2012 I began gardening outside my flat, and some of the reactions that followed. Over the subsequent year it gradually became clear that the estate's TRA committee was particularly hostile both to the informal 'messy' growing behind some residents' flats and to attempts to establish a more formalised framework for resident-led gardening.¹³ They worked with Southwark Council to ensure that planting carried out by residents next to our ground floor balconies (fig. 5), some dating back to the 1960s, was dug

¹¹ Theatre maker and activist Lucy Neal says that play enables us to imagine different futures and 'extends the range of possibilities we can draw upon'; in this it is 'serious' and enables us to withstand fear as we confront a planetary-scale emergency (Neal 2015: 6–7).

¹² This lesson was brought home by a converse and demoralizing experience, when I worked for an ostensibly progressive organisation that proved to be both hierarchical and patriarchal. I was struck by the extent to which the perpetuation of this culture relied on opacity and an absence of communication.

¹³ My own planting was at one point likened to theft, taking what was not mine. On another occasion, at an estate TRA meeting, I challenged the personal way in which an ex-TRA committee member was objecting to my proposals, directing criticism at me rather than the proposals, and received the response, 'It is personal.'

out (figs. 4&6). A particular idea about the best way to enact care for a place – in this case through neatness – was enforced with council backing in a way that felt brutal to some. The shock of this for many residents, and surprise at the hostility expressed towards me at TRA meetings as I worked to establish a secure footing for resident gardening on the estate, prompted a supportive reaction and, with time, a greater involvement of residents in both the TRA and the Glazebrook Growers. As residents interested in growing became involved in both bodies relations shifted, and the Glazebrook Growers were able to establish highly cooperative relations with a later iteration of the Tenants and Resident Association. This became key to our ongoing activities.

The detail of this initial conflictual situation is not the focus of this study; I raise it in order to make the point that a group of people constituting a ‘community’, such as residents on an estate, are likely to have many different attitudes towards any given issue.¹⁴ Expectations of cosy consensus miss the point; working in such contexts brings with it the responsibility to engage with nuance and complication. Therein lies the work.¹⁵ This often requires a degree of courage and, vitally, depends on devoting sufficient time and attentiveness to gauge what a particular situation or set of relationships, as opposed to funding or commissioning body, seems to call for.¹⁶ My residence on Croxted Road Estate was crucial in enabling this to happen.

Research questions

How might a commons incorporate both human and nonhuman lives and activities?

What practices could support such a commons?

As I engaged with the situation on Croxted Road Estate it became clear that we needed a way to think about the spaces around us other than through the lens of private property, and when I moved into formal research I found in the commons a tested and longstanding

¹⁴ A seemingly obvious point, but one that is insufficiently acknowledged in some art practice as I illustrate in Chapter One.

¹⁵ My use of the term ‘community-based work’ in this thesis is qualified by this premise.

¹⁶ What is called for may not be an artist – or not the particular artist that one happens to be – as I argue in section 1.6 in relation to Anna Francis’s *Community Maker*.

alternative. I also became increasingly interested in how our human activities in the Kitchen Garden revealed something of our attitudes and relationships both to each other and to other species. A wider context of ecological crisis, interrelated with social inequality, led me to consider the potential of our garden and group as small scale sites in which to think about these broader questions. My research therefore takes the idea of the commons as a starting point from which to examine the question of human-nonhuman relationships, as well as ways in which relationships between humans are organised.

The commons has been defined as ‘a way to approach the collective side of ownership’ (Hyde 2010: 13), and as ‘a self-organised system by which communities manage resources [...] with minimal or no reliance on the Market or State’ (Bollier 2014: 175). Rooted as it is in varied practices with many centuries of history, definitions often rely on examples of practical application for clarity. Historically the concept is linked to collective arrangements governing access to land (Neeson 1993; Ostrom 1990; Rowley 1981), while more recently it has been recuperated as a ‘language’, or set of ideas and practices (Gilbert 2014: 164), with which to speak about alternatives to market capitalism in managing resources that range from land and water to knowledge and computer software (Linebaugh 2008; Hyde 2010; Bollier 2014).

I use the commons as an approach because it allows for an emphasis on collective action rather than on shared identity. A commons is realised by bringing people together around a collective resource to be created or defended (Gilbert 2014: 165). The resource itself may be called a commons, but in this thesis I place the emphasis on the process of commoning, the ongoing actions by which a commons is performed (Linebaugh 2008: 279). The group of people involved in the Growers’ activities, mostly neighbours from the estate, came from different backgrounds, nationalities and life experiences. Some shared a religion, similar occupation or ethnicity with others, but no one element of fixed identity united the group. Instead a shared interest in growing things and spending time together, in combination with our place of residence, performed this function. The commons is valuable as a framework precisely because the emphasis on action and working together, enabled by the shared interest motivating the group’s activities, allows for heterogeneity. The group’s shared

interest can act as the basis for an egalitarian set of relationships between humans,¹⁷ establishing a basis of solidarity from which the question of human-nonhuman relationships can be addressed.

The category of resource upon which the commons depends, and to which nonhumans are generally consigned, is vulnerable to exploitation, as I will demonstrate in Chapter Two. The fact that the commons is both valuable as a support to human collective action and problematic with regard to the nonhuman opens it up as a topic warranting further enquiry.

My use of the terms 'human' and 'nonhuman' follows that of feminist philosopher Donna Haraway,¹⁸ who guided my methodological approach, philosopher and sociologist Bruno Latour¹⁹ and anthropologist Anna Tsing. Each has demonstrated ways in which to exist as a human is to be part of a collective undertaking, a proposition I adopt in this study. While Haraway is also known for the term 'critter',²⁰ I have chosen to adopt 'nonhuman' since it is used with a broadly shared meaning by these three theorists, who are significant to this study. I follow them in using the term 'nonhuman' to encompass systems and abiotic things as well as living organisms. When used in relation to the Glazebrook Growers and our gardening practices, however, I am generally referring to living organisms, particularly plants and microbes, but also invertebrates, birds and small mammals.

My second research question asks what practices could support a human-nonhuman commons and I have moved across disciplines in addressing it. I see the contribution of art practice as significant both in terms of providing a repertoire of art methods on which to draw and in encouraging an openness of enquiry that can accommodate and incorporate research outside the field of art. Dialogical art practice as defined by Grant Kester provides the broad umbrella under which I situate my approach as an artist (Kester 2004), and I look

¹⁷ This is not to presuppose that commons-type arrangements inevitably produce egalitarian relations between humans, and I consider the exploitative potential of commoning in Chapter One.

¹⁸ Haraway, who originally trained as a biologist, is a scholar of science studies and Professor Emerita of the History of Consciousness Department at the University of California, Santa Cruz.

¹⁹ The contribution and limitations of Latour's Actor-Network Theory (ANT) method of description in the context of the garden are explored in section 2.4.

²⁰ The main difference between the terms 'critter' and 'nonhuman' is that the former can encompass human beings. Haraway says of 'critters' in her book *Staying With the Trouble* that the term 'refers promiscuously to microbes, plants, animals, humans and nonhumans, and sometimes even to machines' (Haraway 2016: 169n).

at this further in the following sections and through the thesis, with a particular focus in section 1.6. The art methods on which I draw include aesthetic enquiry, acoustic ecology and Deep Listening,²¹ and these come to the fore in my final chapter.

The increasing tendency towards the dialogical in art practice, particularly in the last twenty years, has coincided with an intensified engagement with ecological concerns. Some of the examples of practice I will use to situate my own, for instance Fritz Haeg's *Edible Estates* (2005–ongoing) and Jessie Brennan's *Inside The Green Backyard (Opportunity Area)* (2015–2016), can be seen as operating in the overlap between the two broad strands of dialogical and ecological engagement, and I also situate my own practice within this intersection. I elaborate further on this below, in relation to my methodology and in the Review of Literature and Practice, and in sections 1.6 and 2.5 of the main thesis.

From the outset I built the research as a resident at the site of research, a neighbour to participants, and as a gardener, and regarded these roles on an equal footing with that of artist.²² The practices examined therefore encompass those of gardening and the processes by which we came to organise ourselves and make decisions as a group; indeed these form the context within which the contribution of art practice is examined. Attention to group organisation and the recuperation of 'community' as action rather than fixity, as ongoing 'commoning', involves making explicit the often undervalued work that goes into collectivity (section 1.7). In examining the on-the-ground practices of the Glazebrook Growers and the relations that they foster, I draw on the knowledge of gardeners, sociologists, ethnographers, historians of the commons, and an institutional analysis of the commons (Ostrom 1990), as well as reflections on symbiosis drawn from evolutionary microbiology (Margulis 1998).

My approach to the research questions derives from my multiple positions in relation to the other people and organisms assembled in the gardening group and gardens. To communicate my different positions I use the first person singular, 'I', to communicate my

²¹ A set of meditative and sometimes collaborative listening practices devised by composer Pauline Oliveros. These are described and explored more fully in Chapter Three.

²² I did not feel it necessary to define the Glazebrook Growers as an art project in order to deploy an artist's skills and experience in its service. In section 1.6 I will look at other artists' practices to explain why I exercise caution in this regard.

individual voice as a researcher, resident and artist, and the first person plural, 'we', in describing activities undertaken with other members of the Glazebrook Growers.

Methodology

To recognise the contribution of arts-based research, philosopher Mark Johnson holds that we must conceive of knowledge as 'a process for intelligently transforming experience' rather than a 'fixed body of propositional claims', and it is this conception of knowledge that I enlist in this thesis. The commons is the theme guiding this research, approached through a 'situated' methodology that draws on 'noticing' and 'listening', and the definition of these terms is set out below. The practice on which this research is based takes a dialogical approach, using a long duration enabled by my residence at the site of research.

Working with the premise that 'the only way to find a larger vision is to be somewhere in particular' (Haraway 1988: 590), this study operates through a close engagement with the small site of Croxted Road Estate and the gardening activities carried out there. Both practice-based and art-based, it is key to the contribution of the thesis that theory and practice have been continually tested against one another, generating new knowledge through their interaction. The structure of the thesis reflects a process of discovery, as the Growers' organisational and gardening activities and my research fed into each other, leading me from attention to the formation of our group and gardens, to the commons and then to a focus on perception and listening. Some areas of theory that seemed to provide a potential foundation for my enquiry at an early stage – anarchist thought, an ethic of care, Actor-Network Theory²³ – became less central as I engaged, over time, with the developing situation on the ground. Conversely, my research into areas of history, science and theory profoundly influenced my view of the Growers' activities and thus my practical engagement with the group during the research period.

²³ Each of these areas influenced my thought even as I moved them to one side. Anarchists Murray Bookchin and Colin Ward were of interest to me in relation to processes of self-organisation (Bookchin 1980, 1990; Crouch & Ward [1988] 1997; Ward 1979, 2002), and the Ethic of Care proposed by Carol Gilligan and Joan Tronto helped me to think about the different, often conflicting, attitudes to taking care of place that I encountered (Gilligan 1982; Tronto 1987, 1994). In section 2.4 I explore in more detail my attempt to enlist Bruno Latour and John Law's Actor-Network Theory in order to illustrate how friction between theory and practice has informed this study.

Three figures key to the development of this research are Donna Haraway, Anna Tsing and composer Pauline Oliveros. Together they enabled me to move between theory and practice, with each, over time, qualifying and making sense of the other. As I will explain, Haraway's 'situated knowledges' gave an overarching approach, and Tsing's concepts of 'noticing' and 'polyphony' in research helped me to take Haraway's approach and think about how it might be enacted in specific, practical engagements. Oliveros in turn provided methods for noticing which I was able to use myself and in company with other participants in the garden. The unifying thread to which each of these three give a twist, is my investigation of the garden as a human-nonhuman, or multispecies, commons.

The relationships I established as a neighbour and estate resident generated the garden-based practices I examine in this study. When the practices became the object of research, existing relationships were complicated with a different dynamic, as I asked for permission to observe our activities together, and to record conversations. My residence at the site of research enabled the development of an attentive relationship to these changing dynamics, which relied on an extended timescale and an embedded perspective; I could allow events and relationships to unfold at their own pace. In sharing a neighbourhood and a pre-existing project I also had a certain common interest with my fellow gardeners and research participants. This is not to say our interests converged entirely, as my methodology seeks to acknowledge, but I could draw on a relationship of trust and structures for communication that predated my embarking on formal research.

Donna Haraway's concept of 'situated knowledges' (Haraway 1988) provides an approach, or attitude, that allows me to take account of my embedded position in the activities under study. Haraway proposes a 'situated' mode of research that acknowledges the traces of time, place and subject that it carries (Brenna in Engelstad & Gerrard 2005: 30). The particularity of Haraway's approach is that she simultaneously maintains the contingency of all knowledge claims and 'a no-nonsense commitment to faithful accounts of a "real" world', insisting that partiality can be the route to a kind of objectivity (Haraway 1988: 579). Haraway calls this contradictory project 'a necessary multiple desire' and I use it to inform my own multi-stranded project and to negotiate my position in relation to the research (Haraway 1988: 579).

I realise a situated methodology in my research through a suite of methods, combining on the one hand the subjective and reflexive, in practices drawn from art, gardening and ethnography, with, on the other, accounts of the world drawn from science, theory, and historical archives. In ethnographic terms, I am a ‘fully integrated member’²⁴ of the gardening group under study (Ellis & Bochner 2000: 740). Ethnographic and autoethnographic approaches, through observation, recorded conversations and reflexive journaling combine my perspective with the voices of others living on the estate, while primary archival research and secondary source reading provide wider historical and theoretical contexts for our activities. With this combination I acknowledge my ‘partial sight and limited voice’, while looking for ‘the connections and unexpected openings situated knowledges make possible’ (Haraway 1988: 590).

Mindful of feminist philosopher Sandra Harding’s²⁵ observation of the ‘unlabelled use’ of, and failure to acknowledge, feminist theory when it is deployed in other disciplines (Harding 2004: 199), I note that major figures in my argument, principally Haraway, Tsing, and Marxist autonomist Sylvia Federici,²⁶ draw on feminist lineages of thought that have in turn enabled the arguments I make over the following chapters.²⁷ Haraway’s situatedness has been described as giving a ‘consequential twist’ to standpoint-feminist²⁸ claims in that it privileges not only marginalised human viewpoints but also nonhumans as ‘vantage points for knowledges of the world’ (Brenna 2005: 30). In this Haraway opens the way to thinking about different human and nonhuman vantage points for knowledge in the garden

²⁴ A term used in ethnography to denote researchers who are ‘full members with complete identification and acceptance’ of the group they are studying. I combine this with autoethnographic methods, such as the reflexive journaling listed under ‘Methods’, that display ‘multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural’ (Ellis & Bochner 2000: 739–740).

²⁵ Harding’s work has encompassed research methodology and science studies as well as feminist and postcolonial theory.

²⁶ I draw on Federici’s work and that of several historians and activists in sections 2.1 and 2.2, to reveal the extent to which the health of the commons has been bound up with the wellbeing and independence of women, and has been defended by them.

²⁷ An exploration of how to ‘reconcile the pressures for diversity and difference with those for integration and commonality’ has been an important feminist project in recent decades, which through Haraway and Tsing helps me to address the question of how a commons might accommodate not just diverse humans, but different species (Audi [1995] 1999: 307).

²⁸ In Harding’s words, standpoint feminism arises from the observation that ‘the daily activities and experiences of oppressed groups enable insights about how the society functions that are not available – or at least not easily available – from the perspective of dominant-group activity’ (Harding 2004: 194).

commons. Both Haraway and Tsing have used feminist thought to approach the politics of the Anthropocene, which informs my consideration of how humans perceive ourselves in relation to other species (section 2.3) (Haraway 2016; Haraway, Tsing & Mitman 2019; Tsing 2015, 2015a).

I draw on Anna Tsing in interpreting Haraway in practice, in a project that is on and of the ground. Tsing is an anthropologist who proposes ‘noticing’ in research as a mode of attending to complex assemblages incorporating the ‘lifeways’ of organisms,²⁹ human economies and capital flows (Tsing 2015: 23, 143). The detail and specificity of Tsing’s work connects it with practical directness to life as it is lived,³⁰ and helped me to translate into research the ideas I encountered in Haraway. The ‘arts of noticing’ that Tsing proposes fall within the fields of ethnographic research and natural history (Tsing 2015: 37). I include art and listening practices within the suite of methods I regard as forms of noticing, characterised by an attitude of open curiosity, and I see noticing as a tool in realising the situated research methodology I have undertaken.

Tsing uses noticing to ‘think about collaborative survival’ in a context of ‘capitalist ruins’, and describes the assemblages to which she attends³¹ in terms of ‘polyphony’ (Tsing 2015: 19, 23). I use Tsing’s idea of polyphony both in relation to the multiple sources and modes I use to situate my research, and in thinking about the different human and nonhuman lifeways that converge in the Kitchen Garden. I also use a more literal interpretation of polyphony when I move the research into the ‘perceptual commons’ (Allgood 2010) and engage with the garden and gardeners as an acoustic assemblage.

As this study advanced, the question of perception became increasingly important. The process of considering the implications for nonhumans of the human practices of gardening and commoning brought to the fore the perceptual frameworks through which humans categorise ourselves in relation to other species and systems. Both theory and embodied methods are used to question these frameworks. I use developments in evolutionary biology,

²⁹ Lifeways are the ways of being of organisms, including humans, as they are actually lived: ‘cart horses and hunter steeds share species but not lifeways’ (Tsing 2015: 23). Tsing shows how lifeways affect and are affected by history, resisting the separation of some organisms out into the category of ‘nature’.

³⁰ I explain this point in greater detail in section 2.7.

³¹ For example Tsing’s book *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, which I discuss in section 2.4, follows the matsutake mushroom through different livelihoods, ecologies and economies (Tsing 2015).

and particularly in the understanding of symbiotic relations (Margulis 1998), to challenge traditional hierarchies of living beings and to propose the garden as a symbiotic commons. The 'perceptual commons' (Allgood 2010) is proposed as an arena in which the recognition of a symbiotic 'living together' can work alongside human expression and intention.

This study engages with the perceptual commons first through the medium of sound, and I draw for my methods on a body of sound and listening practices that has been developed since the mid twentieth century by practitioners including Murray Schafer, Bernie Krause and Pauline Oliveros; these are the focus of sections 3.1, 3.3 and 3.4. I adopt Pauline Oliveros's Deep Listening techniques in group sessions held in the garden in which participants listen to and contribute to the soundscape of the garden. Through Oliveros I take Tsing's concepts of noticing and polyphony into the realm of art practice and find methods that I can share with my fellow gardeners in order to notice human-nonhuman assemblages in which the Glazebrook Growers participate. I contextualise this within contemporary practices of 'acoustic ecology', by Jana Winderen and Jez Riley French, and use the vocabulary developed by sound practitioners to analyse the Deep Listening sessions.

As noted above, I identify the practices set out in this study as dialogical in the sense proposed by art historian Grant Kester (Kester 2004). A dialogical aesthetic places an emphasis on processes of communication rather than an individual experience of 'liking', and dialogical art practice engages in collaborative, communicative processes, usually in contexts far removed from galleries and museums, 'to catalyze emancipatory insights *through dialogue*' (Kester 2004: 69, 112). Two examples used by Kester to illustrate this aesthetic are Suzanne Lacy's *The Roof is On Fire* (1994), and WochenKlausur's *Intervention to Aid Drug-Addicted Women* (1994), each of which worked to lay the ground for, and then host, conversations that would not otherwise have taken place.³² In the context of this research the dialogical aesthetic is therefore expressed not just through methods such as the meditative listening sessions that we undertook, which are easily identifiable as 'art'-based,

³² *The Roof is On Fire* was developed by Suzanne Lacy, Annice Jacoby and Chris Johnson with 220 teenagers from Oakland, California. A performance was devised during which the teenagers sat in parked cars on a rooftop garage and improvised conversations on themes affecting young people of colour, such as racial profiling, which were 'overheard' by an invited audience of journalists and local residents. WochenKlausur's *Intervention to Aid Drug-Addicted Women* gathered together politicians, journalists, activists and sex workers on pleasure boat cruises on Lake Zurich during which conversations around the situation faced by drug-addicted women who had turned to prostitution took place. Both these works formed part of longer collaborations focusing on the issues at stake (Kester 2004: 1–5).

but through a careful attention to the collaborative practices of gardening and group organization and how these affected my and my fellow gardeners' capacity to act, collaborate and perceive.³³

To continue to situate my engagement with the Glazebrook Growers in terms of art practice, I will consider the other traditions on which it draws, as well as the work of other artists, in the Review of Literature and Practice, below, and then through the course of the chapters. Here I first summarise some of the ways in which my own trajectory as an artist influenced the approach to research set out here.

My art practice started, conventionally enough, with an individual engagement with drawing and painting. Having embarked on a degree in Painting at Camberwell College of Art, I moved to a photography-based practice that used very long exposures and colour pinhole photography. The spaces and things I looked at with these photographs were sometimes intimate and domestic – a living room, a boiling kettle – and sometimes public – a city street, an urban sports centre.



Figure 7: *Crosstrainers*, 2001, a 48-hour colour pinhole exposure made in a London sports centre. The blurred figures resulted from multiple gym users occupying the same spaces during the long exposure.

³³ I set out my reasons for using the term 'dialogical', as opposed to other terms commonly used in this field such as 'participatory' or 'socially-engaged' art, or 'social practice', in section 1.6.

Around these I created unpredictable photographic images, in which human presence might be erased entirely, or else register only through a collective effort.³⁴ Figure 7 shows a 48-hour exposure made in a local gym, in which ghostly composite figures are created by one gym user after another taking up the same position on the running machines, cumulatively reflecting sufficient light to register on the slow-acting paper negatives that I used.

Later I began to use shorter exposure times of a few minutes (fig. 8), combined with simultaneous audio recordings, to register small domestic events such as a kettle boiling or the consumption of a meal. At this point I began to recognize the potential of sound to disrupt the swift judgements associated with an emphasis on the visual, territory to which my doctoral research later returned me.



Figure 8: *Boiling the Kettle*, 2003, a four-minute exposure, the length of which was dictated by the time the kettle took to boil. A sound recording documents the same few minutes; together they create a cinematic event with a single frame.

My interest in shared public spaces and usually unremarked moments of daily life evolved through the 2000s into an interest in social relations explored through live events, in other words towards a more dialogical practice. An experience of collective living and temporary

³⁴ For instance a 24-hour exposure of a public swimming pool made on a busy bank holiday weekend resulted in an image of a deserted, flat-calm pool. Both morning and afternoon sunlight could be seen, coming in at contradictory angles. Effects of this sort arose from the very extended time during which the negatives were exposed; the images were not manipulated digitally. I processed negatives and made prints myself by analogue means.

communities as a member of a shortlife housing cooperative from 2003 to 2011 accentuated this shift, and I began to organize social events and one-to-one encounters with neighbours, friends and members of other housing cooperatives. In contrast to the beginnings of the Glazebrook Growers, these were conceived from the outset as art-based interventions even when they also served practical purposes.

Elements of these earlier stages of practice were to reappear with the Glazebrook Growers: an engagement with shared spaces, and with my place of residence as a place of practice and research; an interest in slowness, long duration and sustained attention; and the use of sound and dialogical interactions.



Figure 9: An early meeting of the Glazebrook Growers, spring 2014, soon after we formalized ourselves as a group.

The Glazebrook Growers started as a series of conversations and interactions with the people living around me, and this process informed our actions and the gardens we made. At the first formal meeting of the Glazebrook Growers, in 2014, during which we constituted ourselves as a group, the assembled adults and children set three aims: to grow food, encourage wildlife, and build social connections. These shared aims of the group guided the project as a community garden. A more interrogatory approach to these aims guided my research, as I considered the questions of what kind of social connections we were establishing through our gardening project, and our relations to the set of beings we call 'wildlife'. To begin with I took the lead as we initiated a gardening group, and I brought to

our situation a background as an artist, which was important in shaping the project, both for developing the dialogical approach I describe above and in enhancing the value I attached to curiosity and reflection as modes of engaging with the different situations I encountered.³⁵ Others brought their own backgrounds, experiences and skills to the Growers, and these were also important in shaping the group and the gardens (see sections 1.2, 1.4).

As a result the Glazebrook Growers project sits within intersecting traditions. The gardening project as a whole sits in a tradition of community gardening, one in which artists have often played an important role (see McKay 2011, and section 1.2), while my practice within it draws on that of dialogical art. Tensions created by this intersection are explored in my consideration of artists working with ‘communities’ (section 1.6), particularly the temptation to justify artistic interventions by framing a community group as deprived or lacking. I have been explicit in rejecting this justification, drawing attention instead to the empowering potential of the context of the housing estate (sections 1.1 and 1.7), and to the varied skills and contributions of residents in creating the Glazebrook Growers and our gardens. It is perhaps worth noting however that it is at times mentally and emotionally exhausting to function in different roles simultaneously: as neighbour, community gardener and researcher, and as an artist working in the mode of ‘vulnerable receptivity’ characteristic of dialogical practice (Kester 2004: 13). This is exacerbated by working around one’s home. In this regard the long duration of the practice was important, allowing me to focus on different roles at different times.

Gardening can provide an unthreatening context in which humans can associate with each other while benefiting from immersion in green spaces, and historian of gardening Jenny Uglow states that in tending plants we can feel nurtured ourselves (Uglow 2004: 307).³⁶ It is often framed as a benevolent, nurturing activity, and in initiating gardens on Croxted Road Estate I was certainly seeking to nurture both my own sense of wellbeing and the health of my connections to those around me. However gardening always carries a political charge,

³⁵ My background in the arts also gave me experience of methods such as visual and verbal description through drawing, photography and writing, set out below under Methods.

³⁶ The benefits of both gardening and time spent in or near green spaces have been the subject of numerous studies in recent years, a majority of which confirm a positive connection. The results of a selection of these are summarised in a 2017 review of twenty-one papers looking at the health benefits of gardening (Soga, Gaston and Amaura 2017), and in a 2019 study reviewing 263 papers on the association of green space and mental health and wellbeing (Wendelboe-Nelson, Kelly, Kennedy and Cherrie 2019).

whether underlying or overt, in that it has to do with who has access to land, and to what ends. It can be a refuge, but, as I demonstrate in section 1.1, it can equally manifest contestation and conflict (Casid 2005; Kincaid 1999; McKay 2011).³⁷ Even on the small scale of Croxted Road Estate, the question of who could garden where became, for a time, highly charged, and acted to engage people in debate, whether in favour of or opposition to resident gardening.

Methods

Secondary material of a mainly qualitative nature has been the subject of extensive research and carries forward much of the argument through this study.

Primary archival research into the post Second World War context that determined the location and architectural design of the estate, carried out at the London Metropolitan Archive, informs section 1.1, and images and quotes from the archive are included.

Description has been an important method in establishing the context of the research and communicating the practices through which it was developed. This takes the form of descriptive passages in the text and verbal descriptions contributed by participants in the recorded conversations and listening sessions mentioned below. Visual description is provided by photographic images, either taken by me or contributed by others, and through drawings carried out by me while keeping a reflective journal. Where photos have been contributed by others this is indicated by an image credit in the caption. An audiovisual summary of practice (see below) brings together photographic, textual and sound-based description.

Gardening and group organisation are main strands of practice and inform all three chapters, and constitute also a form of commoning, as I will argue. In section 1.6 the processes of organisation and garden design that took place as the Glazebrook Growers formed as a group and made gardens are described in the main text with accompanying illustrations. In section 2.6 gardening methods as they touch upon human-nonhuman

³⁷ Writer and gardener Jamaica Kincaid disputes the idea that a garden is 'a place of rest and repose [...] in which to distance yourself from the painful responsibility with being a human being', while George McKay makes the case for a 'horti-countercultural politics' (McKay 2011).

relations are again described in the text and illustrations. Minutes of meetings of the Glazebrook Growers are quoted where they are relevant. Minutes are held in the Growers' archive and are not reproduced in full in this thesis.

Recorded conversations with older residents on the estate also inform and are quoted in sections 1.1 and 1.2, and are documented through sound recordings and accompanying transcripts in the volume of appendices with a memory stick accompanying this thesis. The conventions adopted in these transcripts and for the in-text references to this material are set out at the head of the printed appendices. The events at which these recordings were made were called 'Tea and Talk', and the conversations were held as tea parties in the Tenants and Residents Association hall, since similar events were familiar to and had been popular with older residents on the estate.

Deep Listening sessions, introducing gardening group members and associates to the meditative listening practices of Pauline Oliveros, were held on two occasions in the Kitchen Garden. They are evidenced through sound recordings and accompanying transcripts, which are contained in the appendices mentioned above. Reflection on individual and group Deep Listening practice, with specific reference to the material in these appendices, is given in section 3.4.

Reflective journals kept by me on paper and online inform all three chapters, and are documented through quotes and images reproduced in the main text and in the audiovisual Overview of Practice (see below). These journals were kept as part of a process of thinking through my research and I draw upon them only where they are relevant to my final research questions; they are not reproduced in full.

An audiovisual Overview of Practice in PDF form is appended to this thesis to make more easily accessible the varied practices, extended over time, I undertook with the Glazebrook Growers and that form the basis of this thesis. It uses a first-person narrative and includes images not accommodated in the main body of the thesis. Links to audio recordings hosted on SoundCloud give access to edited extracts from recorded conversations, Deep Listening sessions and sounds encountered in the garden.

Review of Literature and Practice

The accounts on which I draw in this thesis are mainly qualitative in nature, and I incorporate a more detailed review of the relevant literature and practice in the chapters. Here I give an overview of some of the sources that inform my argument and indicate points in the thesis where they receive more extended treatment.

The commons and long histories of commoning practices have provided a framework within which to think through the issues at stake in this doctoral research (sections 1.5, 2.1, 2.2). Scholars of the commons Peter Linebaugh and David Bollier describe these histories to contextualise current struggles to defend the shared spaces of the commons, while economist Elinor Ostrom's work on common-pool resource management draws on many still-existing commoning practices around the world, such as irrigation systems in Spain and fisheries in the Philippines, to reveal the commons as an ongoing lived reality in many local contexts (Ostrom 1990; Gilbert 2014: 165). Ostrom's work in distilling, from her own and others' fieldwork, the principles underlying long-enduring commoning practices gives me a lens through which to consider the practices of the Glazebrook Growers. Cultural critic Lewis Hyde also emphasizes the commons as performed when he defines it as a 'right of action', and I use his definition to look for a way of incorporating nonhumans into the human-centred idea of the commons, proposing that we consider the commons as an arena for nonhuman as well as human rights of action. Meanwhile the critique of the commons offered by feminist scholar Sylvia Federici sheds light on the limitations of the commons (Federici [2004] 2014; Caffentzis & Federici 2014), and the dangers they can pose to those, both human and nonhuman, who find themselves in the category of 'common resource' in this era of late capitalism.

Donna Haraway, who has guided my methodology, is generous in her acknowledgement of the influence of other thinkers, and I follow her to the work of Lynn Margulis, as well as that of Bruno Latour and Anna Tsing. I draw on Margulis's work on symbiosis and symbiogenesis in proposing an alternative conceptualisation of human-nonhuman relations as a 'symbiotic commons' (section 2.4). I test Bruno Latour's Actor-Network Theory in my search for a way of approaching human-nonhuman relations, and this informs my questioning of human habits of perception when we think about ourselves and other species.

In this thesis I use Haraway's view of being alive as a processual enterprise, reliant on a collective working together, in looking at human-nonhuman relations. 'To be one is always to *become with many*' (Haraway 2008: 4). I find in her approach, and in Tsing's conceptualisation of polyphony, mentioned above, useful counterparts to the commons-as-process as I look at the ways in which the gardening group and the gardens work. Haraway and Tsing engage with the entanglements of human and nonhuman life to ask how multispecies flourishing happens and might happen (Haraway 2008: 41, 157), and I follow them in examining specific sets of relationships to address this issue.

Having contributed to the field of Posthumanities with the landmark essay 'A Manifesto for Cyborgs' and more recent publications, (Braidotti 2018: 2; Haraway 1985, 1990, 2003, 2016), Donna Haraway has distanced herself from the term 'posthuman', for its association with 'the kind of human who goes off-planet for a final human trajectory' rather than engaging with complex responsibilities on earth (Franklin 2017: 2). Instead, she states, 'we are all compost, not posthuman' (Haraway 2015: 161), and I follow Haraway in looking at the compost bin, not as a metaphor, but as a place of human-nonhuman 'working, [...] making and unmaking' in section 3.5.

In 2018, the World Wildlife Fund's Living Planet Report described an 'astonishing decline in wildlife populations' (Gruten & Almond 2018: 4), and the IPCC³⁸ warned of the risks of longlasting and irreversible damage to human and natural systems as a result of human-caused climate change (IPCC 2018: 277). The ecological crises that were well-known when I embarked on this study in 2015 have been brought into ever-sharper focus by successive reports and papers (Barnosky et al 2011; IPCC 2014; Hallman et al 2017; World Wildlife Fund 2018; Brondizio et al 2019, among others) that describe in detail the entanglement of human and nonhuman survival. Recently this has been brought into heightened public consciousness by the actions of the Extinction Rebellion movement,³⁹ which occupied four areas of central London for two weeks in April 2019, demanding radical action on climate

³⁸ The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which assesses the science related to climate change for the United Nations.

³⁹ Co-founded by members of the activist group Rising Up!, Extinction Rebellion was set up in the UK to confront a lack of action in the face of catastrophic climate change. They define themselves as 'an international movement that uses non-violent civil disobedience in an attempt to halt mass extinction and minimize the risk of social collapse' (Extinction Rebellion website).

change and species extinctions. Human consumption and exploitation of the world's 'resources' are identified by scientists, activists and the IPCC as driving these crises, making an interrogation of the categories inherent to the commons of pressing relevance.

The larger context for this specific, small-scale engagement, is therefore one of ecological crises and late capitalism in which increasing disparity of human income and wealth⁴⁰ accompanies climate disruption (IPCC 2014, 2018) and accelerating species extinction (World Wildlife Fund 2016, 2018; IPBES 2019). The housing estate garden becomes a small-scale context in which to address concerns that link up and down the scale, from the symbiotic relations created by soil microbes in our vegetable beds to global climate change, and an ongoing 'planetary movement to "reclaim the commons"' (Linebaugh 2008: xiii). Commoning is performed around the planet and can be seen as a broad movement, but it is enacted through multiple smaller manifestations wherever it 'hits the ground'. Our highly localised context is used to consider what the commons, as performed by this particular group on a South London housing estate, might have to teach us about human-nonhuman relations.

In different fields, including art and activist practices, biology, psychology and the environmental humanities, human imagination and perception have been highlighted as key to changing human behaviour and finding ways to live that might allow for multispecies flourishing (Demos 2016; Margulis 1998; Mancuso 2015; Mayer 2019; Miles 2014; Neal 2015). Both plant biologist Stefano Mancuso and evolutionary biologist Lynn Margulis, mentioned above, see human perceptions of our position in relation to the nonhuman world as hopelessly skewed (sections 2.3, 2.4), and social psychologist Stephan Mayer has similarly identified 'vanity and a misjudged sense of invulnerability' as underlying the human misperceptions that have led to inaction in the face of the climate crisis (Mayer 2019: 2).

As questions of human perception gain importance, art practice comes into its own. Paul Allen, writing in a survey of art practice that embraces 'what it would actually be like to live and love in a world where we are rising to our global challenges' (Neal 2015), declares that 'science tells us things – but it is art that helps us take them on board at a deeper level' (Allen in Neal 2015: 26). In this thesis a link between the local and microbial on the one

⁴⁰ F. Cingano's 2014 working paper supplies data for OECD countries (Cingano 2014).

hand and on the other the vast global systems encompassed by the various terms Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene that have been used to describe our times (see section 2.3) is made in the realm of human perception. Different disciplines are enlisted, but the main cross-pollination occurs through the introduction of attitudes and methods borrowed from commoning and from art practice to the context of community gardening.

In 2004 Grant Kester's book *Conversation Pieces* identified the growing importance of the dialogical aesthetic, briefly described under Methodology, in the work of a variety of artists concerned with processes of dialogue and collaboration (Kester 2004). Kester described the dialogical not as a formal movement, but as an 'inclination' that had developed in the practice of artists since the 1970s, indebted to the performance art and happenings of the 1960s, and connecting performative interaction with a 'broader political and social world' (Kester 2004: 9–11). The phenomenon described by critic Lucy Lippard as the 'dematerialization of the art object' (Lippard 1973) manifested in some work as 'a relatively subtle movement' toward dialogue with the viewer⁴¹ and was then developed into 'more complex and reflexive' collaborative approaches by a range of artists including Suzanne Lacy, mentioned above, and Stephen Willats, whose intervention at Ocean Estate in London I consider in section 1.6. Younger generations of practitioners, including Ultra-red in Los Angeles, whose approach to listening informs my analysis of Pauline Oliveros in section 3.3, have made dialogue and interaction the foundation of their practice (Ultra-red 2012; Kester 2004: 53, 60–61). My own dialogical engagement evolved organically, independently from the art world, and I will consider some of the implications of this and contrasting practices, not least in terms of the repercussions for people with whom they engage, in sections 1.6 and 2.5.

The turn towards the dialogical has been accompanied by the increasing significance of long-term and durational engagements, that look at relations of antagonism as well as collaboration (Doherty 2015; O'Neill & Doherty 2011). Paul O'Neill and Claire Doherty surveyed such practices in their 2011 volume *Locating the Producers: Durational Approaches to Public Art*, among them the 'embedded long-term approach' of Grizedale Arts (O'Neill &

⁴¹ Such as Vito Acconci's performances and Dan Graham's videos of the 1960s and 1970s.

Doherty 2011: 115), an arts commissioning agency and residency programme located in the Lake District. While Grizedale is a quite different organization to the Glazebrook Growers in its scale, nature and rural context, the emphasis it places on extended timescales and on processes of research, debate and decision-making will provide me with useful points of comparison for my own and other durational practices (section 1.6).

My practice with the Glazebrook Growers is dialogical and durational, and these methodological approaches provide the foundation for an intervention in the field of ecology. Artists have responded to the pressing ecological concerns of recent decades with practices that have been categorized variously as ‘environmental aesthetics’, ‘eco-art’ and ‘eco-aesthetics’ (Berleant 1997, 2002, 2012; Weintraub 2012; Miles 2014).⁴² Art historian T. J. Demos traces a tradition of ‘environmental art’ back to the 1960s, and I will return to this in section 2.5; he goes on to identify the importance of ‘political ecology’ as a field in which questions of power and social justice as well as multispecies survival are at stake (Demos 2016). I follow Demos in my insistence that a consideration of the ecological must be built on a foundation of human solidarity, and this thesis, which begins with the commons as a means of human organisation and then asks how nonhuman lives might be recognised and incorporated, is structured to reflect this conviction.⁴³

Ecological interventions by contemporary artists often take a large scale perspective in order to make connections between different systems, human and nonhuman.

Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson’s *Polar Bears Out of Place* (2019–ongoing), and Subhankar Banerjee’s *Arctic Series* (2000–ongoing), examined in section 2.5, are two such examples. My focus with the Glazebrook Growers has, by contrast, been on a very small scale, in apparently unremarkable urban surroundings. As I have begun to argue, a close examination on this intimate scale can have implications on a much broader one. It is also the scale at which humans meet the embodied day-to-day experiences of our lives, and so it is where I

⁴² Various ecologically-engaged practices have been showcased in exhibitions such as ‘Groundworks’ (Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh 2005), ‘Radical Nature’ (Barbican Gallery, 2009), and ‘Rights of Nature’ (Nottingham Contemporary, 2015), but are also evident in practices outside the gallery. I explore those of several artists, including Fritz Haeg, Patricia Johanson, Joanna Rajkowska and Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson in sections 1.6 and 2.5 of the thesis.

⁴³ I see Demos’s treatment of these entwined human-nonhuman concerns as closely connected to Haraway’s idea of ‘multispecies flourishing’ (Haraway 2008: 41, 157).

have chosen to explore our human and multispecies relationships, and our perceptions of those relationships.

Chapter Outline

Chapter One addresses sites in which the Glazebrook Growers and my practice are situated: the cultures and histories associated with the housing estate, horticulture, and the commons, differing concepts of community, and durational and dialogical art practices as described by Grant Kester. In seeking a situated approach, this chapter gives voice to the archive, theory and human residents of the estate. The ‘ideological fluidity’ of horticulture is illustrated through its histories, establishing the importance of the emphasis I will place on cooperative human endeavour. I introduce the lens of the commons to propose the activities of the Growers as community expressed through action rather than pre-existing identity, and situate my practice in relation to other artists who have engaged in ‘community-based’ work and with housing estate residents. I carry out a detailed examination of the processes by which the Glazebrook Growers designed the Kitchen Garden and our organisational structure with reference to Elinor Ostrom’s work on common-pool resource management. Chapter One lays a ground of human solidarity from which the research operates as it goes on to seek the means of incorporating nonhumans in the commons.

Chapter Two considers the commons in relation to the ecological crises through which we are living and their connection to habits of human thought and perception. It interrogates the capacity of the commons to accommodate nonhumans in a capacity other than resource, and looks at examples of the Glazebrook Growers’ gardening practices in this light. Silvia Federici’s critique of the commons is used to highlight the limitations of the commons, and Lewis Hyde’s approach to the commons as a ‘right of action’ is proposed as a way of incorporating nonhumans into the commons. The work of Lynn Margulis on symbiosis is proposed as offering a perceptual model that challenges the traditional hierarchies used to categorise nonhumans, and Anna Tsing’s concept of ‘noticing’ is tested in relation to gardening practice and the opportunities it affords to recognise symbiotic relationships. The different approaches of artists in dealing with human-nonhuman relations are used to situate the practices explored with the Glazebrook Growers. This chapter moves the enquiry into the field of perception, which is taken up in Chapter Three.

Chapter Three examines the garden as a perceptual commons, following Clarice Allgood, in which nonhuman action can be recognised by human gardeners. This chapter focuses on sound, and the fields of soundscape and acoustic ecology, as providing an arena in which human-nonhuman relations become perceptible. It proposes ‘polyphony’ as described by Anna Tsing as a way of considering the interrelation of human and nonhuman activities. Pauline Oliveros’s practice of Deep Listening is explored as a means of perceiving human–nonhuman polyphony in the soundscape of the garden, through an analysis of two Deep Listening sessions carried out with members of the Glazebrook Growers. Oliveros’s practice promotes human soundmaking as well as listening, allowing for active human participation and intention within a polyphonic commons. Finally the compost bin is examined as a polyphonic commons, and preliminary suggestions are made for the extension of human perception by technological means, the better to perceive this human–nonhuman commons.

Chapter One: The Sites

1.0 Introduction

This chapter lays the ground for my enquiry into the incorporation of human and nonhuman lives and activities into a commons. It explains why I have chosen to work with the commons as a framework for collective action, and sets out the contexts in which the practices explored in this and subsequent chapters were realised.¹ In selecting gardening as a method, I propose that a greater familiarity with the nonhuman, in the small scale of a garden, can enable the beginning of a different relationship with the nonhuman world for many city-based humans. My focus, as I open my argument, is on the human.

In her 1997 essay 'One Place After Another', Miwon Kwon identifies three definitions of site in 'site-oriented' art practice: the 'phenomenological' site or place, with its particular physical and spatial conditions; the cultural framework within which the practice operates; and a field of knowledge or cultural debate, with which the practice engages. In this chapter I establish some of the sites across which this research operates in order to situate my perspective and the activities of the Glazebrook Growers. The construction of a situated approach, following Donna Haraway, on a basis of 'partial, locatable, critical knowledges', begins here (Haraway 1988: 584).

This chapter also lays the foundation for a political ecology, as defined by T. J. Demos, which insists that environmental concerns are 'inextricable from social, political, and economic forces' (Demos 2016: 7). In paying careful attention to particularities of place, the organisation of human cooperation, and the potential impacts of art practice in relation to both of these, it establishes a human solidarity upon which subsequent chapters will build their examination of human–nonhuman relations. This begins to answer my first research question, in that it describes how a commons that incorporates human lives and activities can be both collaborative and long-enduring. The oppressive potentials of environmental

¹ The material I draw on for this chapter includes personal reflection, oral and archived histories. Personal reflection and memories are supported with reference to Reflective Journal 1 (January–December 2016), and my archive of email correspondence for the period 2012–2016.

concerns, horticulture and the concept of ‘community’, explored below, make this a necessary first step before I extend my consideration to the nonhuman.

I begin by looking at the physical sites of estate and garden, and some of the cultures and histories associated with each. The attitudes and environment inherited from an era of Second World War and post-war housing bureaucracy have shaped Croxted Road Estate and affected the daily experience of living there, currently and in the past. I draw on the archives documenting this period² and on two ‘Tea and Talk’ sessions that I ran with older, long-term residents³ on the estate to build a fuller picture of the place that is home to the Glazebrook Growers, and the context in which we made our gardens.

The Tea and Talk sessions, planned as informal conversations between groups of older residents at which tea and cake were served, adopted the format and location of a regular ‘Tea Club’ that had been popular in the past, and looked to the memories of older residents to provide an insight into the relationship between personal experiences and wider histories over a longer period than my own residence on the estate. The intention underlying the sessions was to integrate into the research voices from outside the circle of those regularly involved in the gardens, whose experience of the estate gave a longer time perspective, since most Glazebrook Growers were more recent arrivals.⁴

Tea and Talk participants associated the moment when they were given housing on the estate with significant improvements in their living conditions. A positive history of social housing, and of Croxted Road Estate in particular, contributes to a view of council-managed housing estates, and the city more broadly, as holding the potential to enable co-operative collective action.

While our place of residence linked the Growers to a particular history of housing, our choice of gardening as an activity connected to wider horticultural traditions of both conflict and collaboration, and these are traced through section 1.2. By illustrating the

² The London Metropolitan Archives in Farringdon, London, provided much of the material relating to the origins of the estate.

³ Those who attended had lived on the estate since the 1960s and 1970s, with the exception of Cerys, a Glazebrook Grower friendly with one of the older residents, who came in a supportive role.

⁴ Two of those involved in setting up the Glazebrook Growers had been familiar with the estate since the 1960s and earlier, but only one, Patricia Kennedy, survived at the time of the Tea & Talk sessions. Names of participants have been changed.

ideological fluidity of horticulture as a method, and the ways in which it has been associated with histories of oppression, it underlines the importance of a framework for practice that fosters collaborative decision making. Section 1.3 focuses on the ecology of community gardening projects local to the Glazebrook Growers, and the histories of this movement.

I go on to examine ideas of ‘community’ in section 1.4, which questions the assumptions underlying the use of the term, and the uneven distribution of responsibility that it can represent. Looking at the potentially oppressive effect of appeals to community prompts me to seek a version of the communal that might work with a heterogeneous group of people such as the Glazebrook Growers.

This leads to the commons, which I consider as a form of community expressed through action rather than identity, and in section 1.5 I survey some of its histories and practices, and the recuperation of the commons as a form of activism. Commoning is presented as situated sets of practice that tend to produce egalitarian relations, and in which specific rights and restrictions are agreed collectively in response to particular conditions.

In section 1.6 I consider recent art practice and the durational approaches undertaken in engaging with questions of ecology and community. I situate my practice in the dialogical tradition described by Grant Kester. Paul O’Neill and Claire Doherty have asked how such projects are ‘initiated and sustained, and by whom’ (O’Neill and Doherty 2011: 4–5) and I consider these questions in relation to the history of community arts, more recent art practices that engage with the social sphere,⁵ and the Glazebrook Growers.

A garden requires sustained human attention to endure. ‘Take away the human and the garden disappears’ (Richens 2019). The final section of this chapter, 1.7, looks in more detail at the work of establishing and sustaining the gardening group, the advantages of durational practice, and how such work can draw on the ‘design principles’ that characterise long-enduring commons, as set out by economist Elinor Ostrom.

1.1 The Estate

Author and gardener Jamaica Kincaid states that ‘the world cannot be left out of the garden’

⁵ Under various names. For instance, while I term my practice dialogical, Anna Francis, whose *Community Maker* project I consider, uses the term social practice.

(Kincaid 1999: 82). This section looks first at some histories of the particular, small part of the world that is home to the Glazebrook Growers and our gardens, and then at ways we encounter the world through the garden.



Figure 10: Detail of a map showing bomb damage suffered in West Dulwich 1939–1945; darker colours indicate more severe damage, and circles the impact sites of V1 flying bombs. The estate now occupies an area just to the left of the railway line at the point where the railway converges with the lefthand border of the image. London Metropolitan Archive RM22/125.

The site in South London on which Croxted Road Estate now stands was devastated during the course of the Second World War.⁶ Eight houses on the site are described in a 1947 London County Council (LCC) report as having been cleared ‘by enemy action’ during the Second World War, with just the larger property of Croxted House, war-damaged but vacant, and a still-occupied cottage remaining (LCC 1947: 245). These were subsequently cleared to make way for the estate, so that homes at this location moved from private hands into council management. During the course of the war many hundreds of high-explosive bombs and incendiaries were dropped on Dulwich, followed by 35 V1 flying bombs and three

⁶ Until then it was occupied by Croxted House, a private property set in extensive grounds with a fish pond and a cottage, and an adjacent row of smaller houses along Croxted Road.

V2 rockets (Dulwich Society, undated).⁷ Designed in 1947, and built in the mid 1950s,⁸ the estate owes its location and generous green spaces to the destruction inflicted by war.



Figure 11: Croxted Road Estate, showing one of the 'Glazebrook' blocks on the left, a children's playground added in the 2000s at centre, and, at centre right, the small Tenants and Residents Association Hall, previously the estate laundry. Earlier play provision consisted of a single set of 'monkey bars' over a hard surface (App 2a/i) 00:07:55, p. 10).

In 1941 LCC Housing Chairman Thomas Dawson called for the preparation of new and varied architectural designs for council housing schemes in order to avoid 'appalling monotony in some widely bombed areas' (Dawson quoted in Pepper 2015: 75).⁹ Later, however, with so many homes destroyed, 'speed of housing delivery trumped almost every other consideration' (Pepper 2015: 76), and in 1945 the Architect's department was forced to cede oversight of housing.¹⁰ The development of new designs was shelved, and the LCC

⁷ The proximity of West Dulwich station, on one of the main rail routes connecting London to the south coast, is likely to have made the site on which the estate came to be built a particular target.

⁸ These first blocks contained around 114 flats. A later phase of the estate, consisting of 55 terraced houses and flats above garages, was added in the 1960s. Together with small bungalows originally designed for the elderly, dwellings on the estate now number 179.

⁹ Dawson made the point that council-designed housing had hitherto tended to be mixed in with other types of building, rather than the wide expanses now opened up by bombs, and the effect of the limited range of designs had been offset by this.

¹⁰ To LCC Director of Housing and Valuer, Cyril Walker.

reverted to pre-war standard plans of four and five-storey walk-up blocks of flats. The first blocks to go up on Croxted Road Estate, among them three named 'Glazebrook', coincide with this description. Four storeys high and brick built, with pitched roofs and balconies, they display a solid uniformity recognisable to anyone familiar with British council blocks of this and earlier eras.

Plans for Croxted Road Estate were drawn up by Camberwell Metropolitan Borough Council, while the LCC had overall control of the process from site clearance to building, and the power to require alterations to the plans submitted.¹¹ It is notable that although cost was an important factor,¹² the majority of the alterations requested by the LCC arise from a concern for the quality of life of the prospective tenants. In 1947 LCC approval of the plans submitted for Croxted Road Estate was made conditional on design alterations to make some bedrooms larger, to allow greater ventilation and levels of daylight within the flats, and to increase the distance between ground floor flats and the adjacent roadside (LCC 1947).

LCC housing documents of the late 1940s display a paternalistic attitude to tenants, leaving no doubt that they are a separate category of people from the council bureaucrats and architects whose plans and decisions are minuted in the archive. Historian of housing Alison Ravetz noted in the 1970s that 'the role of tenant is a peculiarly passive one',¹³ and that a quiet conformity had traditionally been expected of them (Ravetz 1974: 10). Nevertheless, in the case of Croxted Road Estate the concern shown in 1947 for the practicalities of council tenants' lives translated into homes that are still well liked by many of those who live in them. While the post-war blocks on Croxted Road Estate may be architecturally unremarkable, older residents Patricia and Irene commented during the 'Tea and Talk' conversations described above that their flats were 'a nice sort of place', and 'much more

¹¹ The sheer effort invested in public housing during this period is given physical illustration in the volumes of related minutes held at the London Metropolitan Archive. Each massive tome corresponds to just a few months' work by the Housing and Public Health Committee.

¹² For instance, the provision of lifts at Croxted Road Estate, when none of the blocks exceeded four storeys in height, was deemed disproportionately expensive.

¹³ Ravetz ascribed passivity to the role, not the tenants themselves. In the context of Quarry Hill, a 'model estate' built in the 1930s, and architecturally adventurous by comparison to Croxted Road Estate, she noted a 'mechanistic theory of planned housing' that expected quiet acquiescence from housing recipients (Ravetz 1974: 10).

modern' than previous accommodation (Apps 2b/(i): 00:00:53, p. 22).¹⁴ Elizabeth and her daughter Alison moved to the estate in 1972 from rented rooms in Peckham that they remembered as cramped and damp, with no bathroom, a cooker on the landing, and four flights of stairs to the outside toilet (App 2a/(i) 00:00:00, pp. 2–4). They came to live in another section of the estate, 'Kennoldes', which was built in the 1960s, and consists of two-storey terraced houses, as well as some flats above rows of garages (figure 12). The family was pleased to have much more space, their own kitchen and bathroom, clean and freshly decorated, and 'a bit of garden back and front' (App 2a/(i) 00:04:36, p. 7).¹⁵



Figure 12: Houses in the 1960s-built section of the estate called 'Kennoldes', with a communal green space in the foreground. Each has a small rear garden. There are also flats in this section, situated above garages. The variation in design wished for by LCC Chairman Thomas Dawson finally came to Croxted Road Estate twenty years after the war.

My own experience of living in one of the 1950s Glazebrook flats is of spaces that are pleasant and well lit, modest in scale but not cramped. Each stairwell gives access to eight flats, a number small enough to make it easy to get to know neighbours. This and two other

¹⁴ Jacque Evans, who moved to the estate from Peckham as a small girl in the mid 1950s, when the Glazebrook blocks were brand new, described her mother's visits to council offices to secure new housing, and commented on the improvement in living standards for her family following the move. Jacque helped to establish the Glazebrook Growers in 2014 and to survey residents' opinions on establishing a garden in 2015. She passed away unexpectedly in January 2016, and I lost the opportunity to ask her more about this period.

¹⁵ Their response was muted when I remarked favourably on the design of the houses in the 'Kennoldes', where they came to live. While they liked their new house on arrival, it proved colder than their previous accommodation, and they recalled wearing coats indoors during their first winter there (App 1a/(i) 00:06:33, pp. 8–9).

aspects of the design of the estate have been important to the Glazebrook Growers' project. First, the estate is set back from the two major roads that pass next to it, and so its residents, particularly children, are protected from fast-moving traffic.¹⁶ In combination with the communal green spaces in which blocks of flats are set, this has enabled minimally supervised play by children and 'unstructured social encounters' to take place. I explain the significance of these below. Second, the fact that many residents find their homes well-constructed and the estate an agreeable place to live has, I would venture,¹⁷ partially offset the increasing transience of residence that has affected council estates since the 1980s. Longer residence makes group cohesion easier to build, just as transience fragments bonds between neighbours.

The accounts of older residents and my own experience stand in contradiction to what Paula Smalley has called the 'failure narrative popularly attached to social housing' (Smalley 2015: 175).¹⁸ I draw on them here to build a contextual picture of the sites of this research while making it clear that my practice with the Growers was not an attempt to redeem a failing council estate. I experienced frustrations with the place, described below, and some of these arose from the estate and its management by the council, but others arose from current ways of living more broadly, and might have been experienced in a street of privately owned houses. Indeed, as I detail in the final section of this chapter, the estate provided support systems for group organisation that are less accessible elsewhere.

A major change that has occurred since the estate was built, and which underlies the transience to which I refer above, is the transfer of social housing into private hands. Croxted Road Estate was planned under the post-war Labour government, and built when the Conservatives had come to power in the 1950s, but, as historian Anne Power has noted, there was no major shift in housing policy with that change of government.¹⁹ By the 1980s this had changed, and the Conservative government was challenging the role of local

¹⁶ The roads on the estate itself are relatively narrow, have speed bumps and a speed restriction of 5mph. This is often violated, but there is limited scope for getting up speed before being forced to slow down again.

¹⁷ Based on day-to-day conversations with fellow residents over 2011–2019, and the Tea & Talk sessions.

¹⁸ Smalley's thesis considered how the misleading narratives of failure attached to council housing have arisen from the exclusion of residents from research and debate in this area.

¹⁹ With an acute shortage of housing and the imperative to provide new homes, the Conservatives at the time did not question the role of local authorities in housing provision (Power 1993: 189).

authorities as housing providers. The Right-to-Buy policy introduced with the 1980 Housing Act, under Margaret Thatcher's government, transformed housing estates across the UK by altering the way in which people were able to become residents. Council tenants acquired the right to buy the properties in which they lived, and this removed much social housing into private ownership,²⁰ a development that eventually led to my arrival on Croxted Road Estate, and to that of a large proportion of my neighbours. A majority of properties on the estate are now privately owned,²¹ although many are let out by their owners, so that they are again occupied by tenants, but through private landlords, resulting in less security of tenure. On Croxted Road Estate, as elsewhere, this has changed relations between residents, since now that estate properties have entered the housing market, they change hands more easily.

In January 2015, in order to carry out a survey of residents' attitudes to starting a community garden,²² I went from door to door across the whole estate and spoke to a significant proportion of residents. I found a reluctance to get involved on the part of some of those renting from private landlords, in several cases stemming from the likelihood that their residence on the estate would not be long term. Measures passed in the Housing and Planning Act 2016, forcing the sale of 'high value' council homes to fund Right-to-Buy for housing association tenants, are likely to exacerbate these conditions of transience and extend them from council-run estates to those managed by housing associations.

1.2 The Garden

Gardening and membership of an allotment site had played an important part in the lives of one family who took part in the Tea and Talk conversations. Elizabeth remembered her late husband raising plants in a makeshift greenhouse in their back garden, and her daughter Alison continued to care for the little garden even after moving out (App 2a/(i) 00:14:35, pp. 16–17). Where residents had no garden of their own, there was no officially sanctioned provision for resident growing, and some had planted up portions of the estate's communal areas. A number of ground floor flats like the one I came to live in had 'informal' planting of

²⁰ It also reduced the overall availability of social housing since it prohibited the reinvestment of the proceeds of sales into new council housing.

²¹ In April 2018, 109 properties were held by leaseholders or freeholders, and 69 were occupied by council tenants (Ecookit 2018).

²² On behalf of Croxted Road Estate Tenants and Residents Association.

various sorts occupying the zone between the back of the flat and the roadway, and it can be ventured that there is a relationship between the type of planting carried out and the housing policies in force when it was done. One flat had roses, bulbs and herbs outside, some of which had been planted decades earlier by the first Chairman of the estate TRA, when he was a tenant there and before Right-to-Buy was introduced (Evans 2014). This planting provided a display for passers-by as well as those living in the flat and could be seen as demonstrating a particular visual aesthetic based on an 'awareness of the impact of gardening practices on the local community' (Taylor 2008: 110). Lisa Taylor has studied the relationship between taste and class,²³ and associates this awareness with a working class aesthetic of gardening, in which respectability is secured through tidiness and pleasure is derived from the approval of others (Taylor 2008: 110–113). Other more recent planting, put in after tenants exercised their right to buy and the flats passed into private ownership, took the form of hedges, which provided more privacy for residents, and acted as a kind of boundary marker. Aesthetically they acted as a visual barrier, seeking to block rather than please the gaze. When flats were sold on, these hedges were often left uncut, so that both the desire to mark out ownership and the new transience of residents were given concrete expression.²⁴

My own tiny 'garden' patch to the rear of my flat was entirely open to the view of passers-by, and consisted in the first two years of the informal mix of planting described in the thesis Introduction.²⁵ The patch had an impact on relationships disproportionate to its size, since the combination of gardening and public visibility proved a stimulator of unexpected conversations, often initiated by curious children, but also by adults. Children wanted to know what I was doing, and to join in,²⁶ while adults were able to use the topic of gardening

²³ Lisa Taylor is a lecturer in Cultural and Media Studies.

²⁴ As noted in the thesis Introduction, all of this planting was removed by Southwark Council in 2014–15, although some was later reinstated by residents.

²⁵ Including runner beans, French beans, pot marigolds, beetroot, nasturtiums, courgettes, lobelia, rosemary, sage and hollyhocks. My preference for an informal style, with no bare earth between plants, places my gardening taste in the 'middle class' category according to Taylor's analysis (Taylor 2008: 124). The location and mix of flowers and vegetables make this assemblage perhaps less easy to categorise.

²⁶ Children were a lively and vital catalyst in the formation of the Glazebrook Growers. *The Child in the City* by anarchist writer Colin Ward helped me to pay more careful attention to the 'protest and exploration' at work in the play of children (Ward [1977] 1979: 96–97), and to see ways in which the adult world, with its exaggerated respect for cars and tidiness, ignored the interests of children.

to start conversations that would not easily have occurred without that area of shared interest. Karen Franck and Quintin Stevens²⁷ have noted the importance of ‘open persons’ (E. Goffman quoted in Franck & Stevens 2007: 6), often children or old people, in activating what they call ‘loose space’, public spaces in which there is room for exploration and ‘unstructured social encounters’, and where cities can ‘breathe’ through unregulated and spontaneous activity (Franck & Stevens 2007: 3). The location of this first planting, by a road and a footpath, happened to lend itself to such encounters, and by carrying out an unthreatening activity that demonstrated care for a space that was also public I became an ‘open person’ with whom spontaneous interactions could take place. This was the place at which I met a number of those who later joined the Glazebrook Growers. The sites at which we subsequently established our ‘official’ gardens, although fenced, were also characterised by their openness to adjacent thoroughfares of different sorts – a footpath, a road and a railway platform – which enabled many further spontaneous conversations to take place. However the move from informal planting to officially sanctioned community gardens took us out of the realm of loose space, and into the territory of self-organisation, which I examine, using the framework of the commons, in section 1.7.



Figure 13, left: In my first season at Glazebrook Close I planted vegetables outside my flat, including this satisfying harvest of beetroot. A courgette plant is visible in the background. Figure 14, right: Looking out from my balcony, May 2014. By this point, just before it was dug out, the mixed planting included foxgloves, chard, montbretia, roses, forget-me-nots, rosemary, tulips and a potted fig received as a gift, most of which are visible here.

²⁷ Karen Franck is a Professor of Architecture with a background in environmental psychology and Quintin Stevens is a lecturer in urban design.

In their openness my small patch²⁸ and the Kitchen and Pleasure Gardens at Croxted Road Estate diverged from some of the oldest gardening traditions. In both Islamic tradition and that of medieval Europe, the garden is a refuge in which recreation or contemplation are enabled by walled seclusion. The medieval ‘hortus conclusus’, a ‘hidden’ or walled garden, was designed with the prelapsarian Garden of Eden in mind (Herbert McAvoy: 8), and there is a long tradition of Islamic ‘four-fold’ gardens that seek to create small earthly paradises, with cool foliage and rills of water, on a pattern echoing the four cardinal directions (Clark [2004] 2010: 64).



Figure 15, left: 16th-century French painting of a walled garden or ‘pleasance’, reproduced in Landsberg 1995. Figure 16, right: Patio de las Acequias, Generalife gardens, Granada, in which Islamic fourfold design is overlaid with elements added under later Catholic regimes. Photo reproduced in López et al 2005.

The idea of the garden as paradise is ancient,²⁹ and the word ‘paradise’ itself seems to originate with a word meaning walled garden.³⁰ In Judaeo-Christian tradition, paradise-as-

²⁸ Which re-established itself immediately after it was dug out by council workers. Their work activated seeds in the soil, and a vigorous mix of courgette plants, nasturtiums and rocket appeared within weeks, without further human intervention. Interestingly, tomato plants, which I had never grown there, also sprang up. Gradually I resumed care of the patch.

²⁹ Possibly dating back to Mesopotamia in 4000 BCE, when the first known writings mention a paradise garden for the gods (Clark [2004] 2010: 23).

³⁰ Garden designer Emma Clark, a specialist in Islamic art and architecture, relates it to the ancient Persian ‘pairidaeza’, or walled hunting park, formed of the words for ‘around’ and ‘wall’ (Clark [2004] 2010: 24), while Sufi historian Seyyed Hossein Nasr traces it to the Middle Persian for garden, ‘pardis’ (Nasr 2007: xv).

garden becomes the Garden of Eden in Genesis, a story of a primordial state of innocent bliss and its loss, in which expulsion from the garden is experienced as a moment of catastrophe. In section 2.3 I examine the problematic influence of an Aristotelian hierarchy of beings that has justified the exploitation of the nonhuman world. The Judaeo-Christian origin stories of Genesis express a similar elevation of ‘Man’ over the nonhuman, and the garden, in which ‘lower’ forms of creation are at the service of humans, can be seen as an expression of this.³¹



Figure 17, left: Raised beds and seed trays in the Kitchen Garden during the long heatwave in summer 2018. In contrast to the ‘hortus conclusus’ the Garden is characterised by its visual and acoustic openness to adjacent public spaces. A footpath connecting the railway station to the estate runs behind the green fence. Photo: Jeannine Mansell. Figure 18, right: The Kitchen Garden seen from the railway station platform, November 2017.

Given the prevalence of stories of garden-as-paradise, the creation of a garden might be interpreted as a bid to regain a longed-for ideal or blissful state. While utopian dreams of the garden influenced me,³² and may have motivated other Glazebrook Growers, the work of this study is to rescue the garden from being an Eden, enclosed from history. In contrast to the medieval ‘hortus conclusus’, the Glazebrook Growers’ gardens are sites for

³¹ The tension between the garden as a human-centred construct, and as an arena for human–nonhuman encounters beyond the traditional hierarchy, is explored through Chapters Two and Three.

³² At an earlier stage of the research, envisaging a methodology based more closely on Bruno Latour’s Actor-Network Theory, and in recognition of a utopian drive, this thesis was entitled ‘Networking Eden’.

communication, and open to the outside (figures 17 & 18), sometimes uncomfortably so.³³ The pleasures of gardening need not ‘lull us out of history’ (Tsing 2015: 187), but can show us a way into it.

We have seen how the framing of horticulture as a return to an uncorrupted state relates to the garden as a space for private contemplation, but such idealised visions have also been enlisted to political and revolutionary causes. Gerrard Winstanley considered the cultivation of land an expression of the ‘universal law of equity’ (Winstanley quoted in Woodcock 1962: 45). Winstanley and his followers, the Diggers, planted wheat, carrots, parsnips and beans on common land in Surrey in 1649, and, as George McKay notes,³⁴ turned the cultivation of land into a radical gesture, both through their actions and their writings (McKay [2011] 2013; Woodcock 1962: 47). The Diggers’ moment was short-lived, since violent harassment saw their occupation of the commons end within a year,³⁵ but their political gesture has resonated ever since, with groups of ‘Diggers’ emerging in both San Francisco and London in the counterculture of the 1960s.³⁶

More recently the occupation and cultivation of land has been deployed by the French ‘ZADistes’ to prevent the construction of a new airport near Nantes. Naming themselves after ‘Zones à Défendre’ or ‘Zones to Defend’,³⁷ the ZADistes’ aims in occupying areas of land include protecting the future ability of humans to feed ourselves, rainwater absorption, and autonomy from the capitalist system (ZAD website; Eudes 2015). ZADiste Emmeline Eudes sees these actions as a recognition of ‘our unavoidably collective way of being’, linking them

³³ In section 3.4 and Appendix 1 (under ‘Noticing’) I reflect on how attempts to engage in individual reflection in the Kitchen Garden were invariably thwarted by passersby and neighbours eager to engage in conversation.

³⁴ George McKay is Professor of Cultural Studies at the University of Salford, and has written about different aspects of alternative culture. His book *Radical Gardening: Politics, Idealism and Rebellion in the Garden* significantly informs this section (McKay [2011] 2013).

³⁵ Anarchist author George Woodcock notes that Winstanley and his followers ‘refused to be provoked into the violence which they abhorred’, and that troops sent by General Fairfax to investigate the Diggers had to be withdrawn ‘when a number of them showed evident interest in the Digger doctrine’ (Woodcock 1962: 47).

³⁶ A group of San Francisco hippies took on the Diggers’ name and provided free shelter, food and clothing to the homeless, while in London the Hyde Park Diggers were led by the self-styled ‘King of the Hippies’ Syd Rawles (McKay [2011] 2013: 115). The Working Class Movement Library also note that many of their holdings, including recent song recordings, hark back to the story of the Diggers (Working Class Movement library website).

³⁷ To counter the definition of areas of land as ‘Zones d’Aménagement Différé’ or ‘Zones of Deferred Planning’ by developers (ZAD website; Eudes 2015).

to the historical responsibility of European countries for the emissions that are disrupting the climate (Eudes 2015). Where Winstanley looked back to a primordial state of equity, the ZADistes can be seen as also looking forward, in that their activism attempts to prefigure an alternative way of life that will be needed if we are to survive the combined effects of capitalism and the industrial age.³⁸

Imaginative prefiguration of this sort is at work in the 2007 film 'Les Sentiers de l'Utopie' or 'Paths through Utopias', by artists Isabelle Frémeaux, John Jordan and Kypros Kyprianou (Frémeaux, Jordan & Kyprianou 2007). Using documentary-style footage of activist and alternative communities including the Climate Camp that resisted the creation of a third runway at Heathrow Airport, an off-grid permaculture community and a self-managed factory in Serbia, the film imagines a post-capitalist world in which 'dreams and determination' have combined to bring out the best in humanity and cooperative ways of life have become prevalent. Both ZADistes and 'Les Sentiers de l'Utopie' seek to make present a wished-for future through a process of enactment or embodiment that motivates by making such a future imaginable, and so more possible.³⁹

George McKay has traced a history of gardening and horticulture that links Winstanley, permaculture communities and other forms of 'radical gardening' in a tradition of 'horti-countercultural politics' (McKay 2011: 6). One expression of this is the community gardening movement, which I explore below, but other entanglements of horticulture and politics are less benign. Engagement with environmental concerns and horticulture is often associated with left-leaning or progressive politics, but the histories of horticulture include violence and repression as well as co-operation.

The Glazebrook Growers use an allotment system, with individual gardeners tending their own small plots within a collectively managed communal space. The UK tradition of allotments has been seen as a semi-anarchistic form of horticulture, with plotholders working at once independently and within the self-organisation of the allotment site (Crouch and Ward [1988] 1997). However allotments were originally introduced in the UK to

³⁸ An era that has been called the 'Capitalocene'. I discuss this in the context of the 'Anthropocene' in section 2.3.

³⁹ I will explore the potential of embodied practices in Chapter Three, in which human-nonhuman relations are made present through a combination of listening and gardening methods.

assuage anger among the labouring poor following the enclosure of common land. Designed as small recompense for widespread dispossession, they were a means of subduing demands for real agrarian reform rather than a manifestation of radical politics (McKay 2011: 157; Uglow 2004: 194).⁴⁰

The history of the organic methods adopted by the Growers is also entangled with oppressive politics, as historian Philip Conford points out. In the UK ‘many of the organic movement’s leading figures were politically active on the Right during the 1930s and 40s’ (Conford 2001: 146). Jorian Jenks, a leading light in the Soil Association from 1946 onwards, and author of important studies on organic farming methods, was a fascist sympathiser,⁴¹ as was Conservative Member of Parliament P. C. Loftus, who advocated both a return to an agriculture-based society and the consumption of wholemeal bread; for him these were the means of restoring a rightful hierarchy and ‘revitalising our exhausted, city-bred people’ (Conford 2001: 146, 151). Jenks and Loftus were not exceptional, for across Europe there were strong links between organicism, nationalism and fascism, and the Nazi doctrine of ‘blood and soil’ was, for some, compatible with the organic movement’s emphasis on the living soil as the foundation for a healthy way of life (McKay 2011: 44, 54–56). One of the most startling examples of fascist horticulture, which I cite here for its power to disrupt the assumptions that horticulture is necessarily benevolent, and environmental methods of cultivation necessarily left-wing in inspiration, are the biodynamic herb gardens established at Dachau concentration camp. Tended with the slave labour of prisoners, the garden ‘was run on the very organic principles many senior Nazis believed in’ with aims that included testing different composting methods and making Germany’s military state ‘self-sufficient in key areas of medicinal and vitamin value’ (McKay 2011: 62). Not all herb gardens make the world a better place, for humans at least. Gardening as a method is therefore ‘ideologically fluid’ (McKay 2011: 43), and it matters which imaginative stories drive it, and what forms of human organisation it is combined with.

⁴⁰ Recalling the ‘disturbing emergent contradiction’ noted by Jill Casid in the eighteenth-century Caribbean slave gardens that gave growing spaces to enslaved people on plantation estates. These gardens were both sites of domination that sought to root slaves to place and prevent desertion, and sites of ingenuity and resistance, used to produce crops for sale, herbal potions and poisons, which was not the intention of plantation owners (Casid 2005: 197–212).

⁴¹ ‘[I]n his person Fascism and organic husbandry merged most completely’, states Conford (Conford 2001: 146).

1.3 Community Gardening and the Glazebrook Growers

Once the group of neighbours brought together by an interest in growing things had become the Glazebrook Growers and put forward plans to make a 'community garden', we entered a kind of ecosystem of local gardening projects, and became part of a recent history of community gardening.

George McKay begins his account of the community gardening movement with 1970s New York and London, where abandoned plots of land were claimed by local people and turned into gardens for collective local benefit. These grassroots initiatives to transform urban life have, in many cases, survived the intervening decades, in spite of determined official campaigns to remove them (McKay 2011: 168).⁴² A well-known example is that of artist Liz Christy and activists called the Green Guerrillas who in 1973 took over vacant lots on New York's Lower East Side to establish gardens, including the Bowery-Houston Community Farm and Garden (figure 19). This initially took a year of work to transform from a derelict site and eventually included 60 vegetable beds and a number of trees.⁴³ The Green Guerrillas began to run workshops and test which plants were best suited to the urban location, and supported other gardens which were appearing around the city. In 2019 they were still active and working to 'help grassroots groups [...] sustain colourful community gardens and bountiful urban farms' (Green Guerrillas website: home page).

A network of community gardens has developed since the 1970s, not just in New York and London, but in cities in many parts of the world, including Europe and Latin America. In Valencia in Spain, neighbourhood activism⁴⁴ that had mobilised in opposition to urban development plans switched to a proactive occupation of land through the development of neighbourhood gardens, and sociologists contextualise these tactics with reference to Christy and the New York gardens, and as 'collaborative collective action' (Castelló-Cogollos

⁴² A famous exception being Adam Purple's spectacular, circular 'Garden of Eden', which he made 'for everybody' on Eldridge Street, New York, as a work of art that was 'ecologically-based, in terms of the human right to [...] grow food' (Brost & Wang 2011; McKay 2011: 169). He started work in 1975 and city authorities destroyed the garden in 1986 (McKay 2011: 169).

⁴³ This is credited with being New York City's first community garden (NYC Parks, undated).

⁴⁴ Neighbourhood associations in Benimaclet and El Cabanyal opposed 'neoliberal forms of urbanization' with gardens that both occupied land and embodied alternative, collaborative values (Castelló-Cogollos & Llopis-Goig 2019).

& Llopis-Goig 2019).⁴⁵ In contesting the use of land for private profit by using it for a common good, these can be seen as part of the planetary movement to reclaim the commons described by historian Peter Linebaugh, which I explore further below.



Figure 19, left: Liz Christy and others at a Lower East Side community garden she helped to create, 1975, image courtesy Donald Loggins. Figure 20, right: Image from the Green Guerrillas' website in 2019 (detail).

In South London, home to the Glazebrook Growers, local community gardens provide a support system that enables local residents to grow food and learn about plants in spaces that set out to be welcoming and inclusive. There is often no, or very little, money payment asked of those who use the gardens, with classes and vegetables either gifted or exchanged for volunteering time. It is also a network via which small local projects can provide each other with mutual help and access to low cost plants and training.

Brockwell Park Community Greenhouses (BPCG) and Streatham Common Community Garden (SCCG) were two South London projects local to Croxted Road Estate that provided learning opportunities for beginners and more experienced gardeners, and connections to these projects helped establish and sustain the Glazebrook Growers. BPCG had its origins in a guerrilla gardening group called 'Green Adventure', who took over a site in Brockwell Park, including greenhouses, that had been abandoned by Lambeth council when they ceased to grow the borough's park bedding plants in the 1980s. Green Adventure's aim was to link 'inner-city people' into community and sustainable development projects, and they framed this with reference to the Rio Earth Summit and responsibility to 'our communities and

⁴⁵ The research quoted was undertaken within a broader project on 'Sharing Societies: The Impact of Collaborative Collective Action' directed in Spain and involving 14 academic institutions in different parts of the world (Sharing Society website). A conference was held in May 2019.

future generations'.⁴⁶ In 2017 I attended a series of workshops on 'the productive garden' at BPCG, and other Growers also attended events there, helping to build our familiarity not just with gardening practices, but with a local network of people similarly engaged.



Figure 21: Residents of Croxted Road Estate on a 'learner plot' at Streatham Common Community Garden in spring 2014. Having recently formed the Glazebrook Growers, this was our first practical experience of growing food together.

Between 2014 and 2016 the Growers were in a kind of limbo, initially forbidden by Southwark council from growing on our own estate,⁴⁷ and during this time SCCG came to our aid. We were offered a 'learner plot' there, free of charge, so that we could try our hand at food growing, and over the summer of 2014 a number of residents from Croxted Road Estate made their way to Streatham to do this (figure 21).⁴⁸

Figure 22 shows a planting plan agreed upon as part of this effort, with the food crops that various members of the group requested, and it hints at the home cuisine of those involved. Some vegetables, such as carrots and onions, were useful across different cooking styles, while coriander was of particular interest to those making South American and Indian

⁴⁶ A forward-looking use of the term 'community', in contrast to some that I explore in the next section. The business plan through which they formalised and made permanent their occupation of the site declared 'Ordinary people are shaping the next Century' (Green Adventure 1997–1998).

⁴⁷ In 2014 the TRA committee opposed to resident growing stood down, and in early 2015 we secured permission and funding to establish gardens. However it was a further year before a water supply promised by the council was connected, and we could not proceed without it.

⁴⁸ Streatham Common is about 2.5 miles by road from Croxted Road Estate.

Scottish heritage became dedicated to growing as large a crop of basil as he could manage in order to make quantities of Italian pesto.⁵⁰

The planting plan represents aspiration as much as an achieved reality. Many seedlings fell prey to slugs, and the distance from our homes in Dulwich to the learner plot in Streatham hampered the frequent attention needed for some of the plants to flourish. Nevertheless our experience with Streatham Common Community Garden gave a first taste of planning a garden and working together, and the company and advice of other gardeners as we did so.

1.4 Community and its Limitations

Two of the sites within which I conduct my research, those of community gardening and art practice, frequently invoke the idea of community, either as the context for practice, or as something to be encouraged in participants or audience. In section 1.6 I consider, on the one hand, how the intersection between community gardening and art practice can produce positive results in terms both of artwork and support for growing projects (whose existence can be precarious), and, on the other, recent projects in which artists have categorised those they work with as ‘community’, or as lacking community spirit, in order to then speak or act on their behalf.⁵¹ First I consider the implications of the term more broadly, and why I regard it as needing further definition to be of use.

My motivation in initiating a gardening project had to do with a wish to foster what I thought of as ‘shared life’. This initially unformulated feeling was made up of desires for connectedness with those living around me and with what we call ‘nature’, and for a greater say in matters affecting my surroundings.⁵² Frustrations were also a part of it: with the way daily life seemed to be boxed into individual households, and with the sterility and underuse of communal spaces.

⁵⁰ This exercise was mostly conducted at his flat rather than in the garden, culminating in a multilayered structure that extended growing space vertically on his first floor balcony, resulting in an impressive wall of basil during the summer.

⁵¹ Jessie Brennan’s work with The Green Backyard and Anna Francis’s *Community Maker* will provide two contrasting examples, serving as points of comparison to my own practice with the Glazebrook Growers.

⁵² I came to see Haraway’s ‘multispecies flourishing’ and Tsing’s ‘polyphony’ as partially expressive of this thought or feeling, though it was also to do with human self-organisation, or commoning (Haraway 2008: 41, 157; Tsing 2015: 19, 23).

I noted, in the Introduction, that before coming to the estate I had lived in accommodation provided through a self-run housing cooperative which I helped to manage. Those housed by the cooperative also ran it, an arrangement that meant that regular contact with neighbours, collaborative decision-making and some control over our living conditions were part of daily life. This contrasted with the situation on Croxted Road Estate, where I found that a tiny proportion of residents attended Tenants and Residents Association (TRA) meetings and there was very limited control by residents over the way things were managed and maintained. Discussion at meetings often centred on complaints about council failings, since complaints were a well-established means by which residents could influence their living conditions, or attempt to do so.⁵³ This experience was to inform my interpretation of the communal as realised through action and self-organisation, rather than arising from a pre-existing identity.

My action of cultivating plants outside my flat was a conscious step outside my household 'box', and my underlying motivation could be framed as a wish for greater 'community'. However the community I sought was one realised through the ongoing actions and activities of everyday life, rather than being principally confined to meetings,⁵⁴ and one, moreover that might begin to prefigure a different way of living. When the body responsible for representing the community of residents on Croxted Road Estate, the TRA committee, ensured that my and other planting was dug out, it shocked me into thinking more deeply about who decides what version of the communal is enacted and why, not just on Croxted Road Estate, but more broadly.⁵⁵

'Community' is a term that comes freighted with assumptions, which I begin to unpick below. Rather than dismissing the value attached to collective action by the word, I seek to qualify it. My misgivings with regard to certain versions of community arise from the limitation of responsibility for the communal to certain groups of people and certain

⁵³ There was a system for logging complaints that meant that some kind of response would be secured from the council.

⁵⁴ I acknowledge the importance of meetings and collaborative decision-making in section 1.7, but as a support to ongoing activity outside the meeting room as opposed to the means by which a few people take on responsibility for community.

⁵⁵ Others were also shocked, as is illustrated in this extract from an email I wrote at the time: 'Tess [name changed] at no 10, who is six months pregnant, told me she came home and burst into tears when she saw what had happened. She had just planted some more roses on her side. The estate children keep stopping me to ask why the garden was taken out.' (Petersen 2014)

occasions, emphasising fixity rather than enactment. Moreover the term can have a homogenising effect when applied to groups of people, and a quest for community may have oppressive consequences.

Sociologist Gerard Delanty⁵⁶ has noted that in the wake of the First and Second World Wars social theory became ‘marked by distrust of the very idea of community’ (Delanty 2003: 86), tainted as it was by association with nationalisms that gave rise to fascism. Croxted Road Estate owes its location to the destruction of the Second World War, a conflict that arguably had its roots in a particularly oppressive conception of community. Until the end of the nineteenth century the communal had been largely a ‘radical left ideal, subversive of the status quo’, but this changed with the rise of authoritarian nationalism, so that by the early twentieth century it formed part of a right-wing political current (Delanty 2003: 12). In the case of Nazi Germany community was conceptualised through the ‘Volk’, the people of an ideal national community whose essence was a ‘pristine and masculine primordiality’, intolerant of difference (Delanty 2003: 12).

In the decades following the Second World War, and influenced by the violence the century had witnessed, a number of theorists, including Zygmunt Bauman and Jean-Luc Nancy, interrogated the roles played by the idea of community. For Nancy the twentieth-century longing for a lost community was both deluded, in that such a community had never really existed, and potentially oppressive (Nancy [1986] 1991). Nancy attempts to recuperate the idea of community by positing a ‘community without essence’ that requires no oppressive consensus, and whose precondition is the absence of institutions or instrumentalisation (Nancy quoted in Delanty 2003: 108). More recently Bauman has described the desire for identity-based community as a symptom of the state of chronic insecurity in which late capitalism forces so many people to live (Delanty 2003: 91). Where ‘society’, through the state, once provided the safety of ‘collective insurance against individual misfortune’, the removal of welfare provisions and secure employment leaves all but the wealthiest at the mercy of endemic uncertainty, and seeking the ‘missing comforts of a safe existence’

⁵⁶ Whose book *Community* provides an invaluable survey of the evolution and interpretations of the term, and informs much of this section (Delanty 2003).

through the idea of community (Bauman 2001: 112). For Bauman the turn to place-based community arises from a wider social failure, which it cannot remedy.⁵⁷

In spite of the questioning of the concept by philosophers and social theorists, ‘community’ still tends to be used as though it is an uncomplicated term, requiring no further definition, to indicate that a particular group or collective activity is for the greater good and worthy of support.⁵⁸ Jeremy Gilbert⁵⁹ has noted a tendency in mainstream politics in the UK to make ‘direct appeal to poorly defined notions of “community”’, with both Right and Left promising to ‘restore an apparently lost sense of community to British public life’ (Gilbert 2014: 162),⁶⁰ but these appeals mask the unequal distribution of responsibility for demonstrating community. Bauman has noted a ‘secession of the successful’ from community,⁶¹ and artist Grayson Perry has noted that ‘we rarely hear of the white middle-class community’, with the term used much more in relation to marginalised identity groups such as the LGBTQ or Black communities, and as ‘a euphemism for the vulnerable lower orders’. Those in marginalised positions have a more immediate need for the solidarity to be found in an identity-based group, and histories of feminism and civil rights amply demonstrate their importance. However they are also burdened with a level of expectation with regard to social connectedness that the more privileged escape.

We have seen that community can be associated with group conformity and an unequal responsibility for connectedness, but it can alternatively be the context for questioning and dissent. In the current situation of ecological and climate crisis Roger Hallam, co-founder of

⁵⁷ While the questioning of community by twentieth-century theorists, including Nancy and Bauman, revives its relevance, it can be difficult to know how to make use in practice of ideas such as those of Nancy. A project such as the Glazebrook Growers, through its very practicality and by having defined aims, immediately disqualifies itself from being an ‘inoperative community’ as proposed by Nancy, and becomes in some way oppressive. As Kester notes, ‘Nancy’s theory gives us no way to differentiate between ‘the totalitarian “immanence” of fascism and the solidarity of [a] Tenants Association’ (Kester 2004: 182).

⁵⁸ Raymond Williams noted of the term ‘community’ that ‘unlike all other terms of social organization (state, nation, society, etc.) it seems never to be used unfavourably, and never to be given any positive opposing or distinguishing term’ (Williams [1976] 1983: 76).

⁵⁹ Professor of Cultural and Political Theory at the University of East London.

⁶⁰ An example from 2010 was Prime Minister David Cameron’s vague idea of the ‘Big Society’ that set out to promote voluntary self-organisation but in the end merely supported attempts to justify massive cuts in public spending (Gilbert 2014: 162).

⁶¹ He borrows this phrase from Robert Reich. For Bauman ‘the “bubble” in which the new cosmopolitan business and culture-industry elite spend most of their lives is [...] a *community-free zone*’ characterised by the sameness of those who inhabit it (Bauman 2001: 57). Emphasis in the original.

the Extinction Rebellion movement, has associated community with a kind of disruptive love. If a society is framed not as a collection of consumers, but in terms of a 'social body' or community whose members have obligations to each other as well as rights, then 'we are all connected by bonds of community or love', and these preclude an attitude of indifference (Hallam 2019). Love is enacted through disruption when fellow members of the community are acting in ways that harm the sustenance of 'a civilised and democratic society' (Hallam 2019). In 2019 the harmful behaviour being challenged was a failure to take just and effective action in the face of climate breakdown. Extinction Rebellion's refusal to adopt the conventional tactic of lobbying on behalf of the public, instead directly involving large numbers of people through both engagement and disruption, stems from the belief that 'the general public is not some innocent bystander' but consists of people capable of engaging in moral debate about what to do (Hallam 2019). Although on a smaller scale and in a quieter register, both dissensus and an interpretation of the communal as realised through action have contributed to the formation and functioning of the Glazebrook Growers.

The group of people who came together to form the Glazebrook Growers in 2014 encompassed a mix of different nationalities, ages and religions, a mix that continued to change over subsequent years. The children whose curiosity helped initiate our first conversations were as young as five at the start of the project, with adults ranging in age from their thirties to their sixties. There were white residents of English and Irish descent, two of whom who had grown up on the estate, another with roots in Colombia, and families in which the parents were first-generation immigrants from African countries. A large proportion of the Growers spoke more than one language in their day-to-day lives.⁶² I make reference to ethnicity and nationality to build a description of the Growers, but note that this kind of categorisation can act to simplify identity in a misleading way. Conversations with other Glazebrook Growers suggested that movement and mixed origin within families was the norm for the group, and is masked where simple categorisation is used.⁶³

⁶² The group is not unusual for the location in that Southwark is ethnically mixed and has a fast population 'turnover'. According to the Borough's 2018 Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, 54% of Southwark's population is of white ethnicity, 25% black, 11% Asian and 10% 'other'. About ten percent of the population leave each year, and ten percent arrive (Southwark 2018: 5, 12).

⁶³ Detailed analysis of family backgrounds is not a part of this study, and I make this observation based on my conversations with other Growers as friends and neighbours. In my own case, while I am often classed on official forms as 'White British', recent generations of my family have come from different parts of the British Isles and Scandinavia, and from the traveller community.

The Glazebrook Growers are place-based, in that the group was brought together by residence on a particular estate, and through gardening are intimately grounded in the location, which shapes activities, experience and our relationships as neighbours. It is also a heterogeneous and changing group of people, with overlapping sets of commitments and connections, conducted via electronic means as well as face-to-face encounter, and in both public and private spaces.⁶⁴ There has been change and movement, with people joining and leaving as their lives and interests change. Partly this has been in response to conditions of uncertainty such as those described by Bauman,⁶⁵ but it also stems from a multiplicity of connections, in terms of commitments to family, political and activist groups, or religious organisations.⁶⁶ In addition to the core group regularly engaged with the gardens, there has formed a more dispersed community of people who gave up their plots because of time pressures, but remain in contact and participate from time to time in group activities.

Delanty proposes that in contemporary societies community cannot be ‘a backward-looking rejection of modernity’ but must instead take the form of less spatially bound ‘communication communities’, able to encompass critique and reflexivity in order to overcome the ‘demoralization of life’ brought about through global capitalism (Delanty 2003: 52, 85–102). The Glazebrook Growers manifest elements of Delanty’s communication community within a spatially bound context, to some extent bridging this opposition.

1.5 The Commons

The need for more co-operative ways of living is the premise underlying the first research question I seek to answer (how might a commons incorporate both human and nonhuman lives and activities?), and the commons is taken as the preferred framework within which to seek ways of meeting this need. In this section I use a consideration of the literature and

⁶⁴ By ‘public’ I mean not only the physically accessible common spaces of the estate, but the group’s open blog, and participation in the activities of other groups, such as the estate TRA and other local projects.

⁶⁵ As explained above, Right-to-Buy and the increase in buy-to-let properties has led to more short-term residence on the estate.

⁶⁶ Displaying the ‘multiple and overlapping bonds’ that Delanty sees as characterising the modern ‘communication community’ (Delanty 2003: 153). Other groups to which various Growers have devoted considerable time over the years include a mosque in Brixton, a church, the Labour Party, the Liberal Democrat Party, the New Anarchist Research Group, Friends of the Earth, the Sortition Foundation and Extinction Rebellion.

theory in this area, as well as personal reflection, to justify the decision to approach the garden as a commons, and the Glazebrook Growers' activities as commoning.

The decision to ground this research in the commons arises from the search for a version of the communal able to accommodate change and difference as well as cooperative action. As a framework for cooperation that is based on shared actions and decision-making rather than shared identity, I argue that the commons is suited to the diverse group of people who have made up the Glazebrook Growers. It places the emphasis on realising connectedness through action, or commoning, bringing attention to how exactly the work of community is carried out.⁶⁷ This emphasis on action will facilitate the incorporation of nonhumans into the commons in Chapters Two and Three.

The commoning history on which I draw dates back millennia, but, having been generated by on-the-ground efforts by humans to organise themselves effectively and fairly, it retains an enduring relevance. Jeremy Gilbert notes that participants in a commons

[...] will be related primarily by their shared interest in defending or producing a set of common resources, and this shared interest is likely to be the basis for an egalitarian and potentially democratic set of social relationships. (Gilbert 2014: 165)

The resources may be traditional commons in the form of land or fisheries, more recent shared creations such as those of the welfare state, or 'the vast aggregations of free information available on the World Wide Web' (Gilbert 2014: 165).⁶⁸ In other words they may be of recent or ancient origin. Activist and scholar of the commons David Bollier takes New York community gardens as an example of an urban commons in which a gift economy of 'sharing, collaboration, loyalty and trust' is cultivated, an economy that we have seen is also at work in the community gardens of London. Also in the urban context, activists and art institutions have used the framework of the commons to rethink the city, housing and public space. Architect and activist Stavos Stavrides has considered the 'city as commons' as holding the potential for 'new forms of social life, forms of life-in-common' (Stavrides 2014: 2), while in 2016 the art gallery Tenderpixel in London joined other institutions in

⁶⁷ Theorists such as Alberto Melucci have similarly proposed community as 'defined and constructed in social action rather than residing in prior values' (Delanty 2003: 95). I choose to focus on the commons because it arises out of a collective rather than individual thinking-through of co-operative ways of living.

⁶⁸ Silvia Federici calls our attention to the price paid for these apparently free digital resources, as I note in Chapter Two.

contributing to the 'Convention on the Use of Space', a collectively developed, commons-based legal instrument supporting 'the use value of housing and occupied space over vacancy and speculation' (Tenderpixel 2016).

Cultural critic Lewis Hyde⁶⁹ points out that the commons has been defined as both a kind of property and the opposite of property (Hyde 2010: 24), and this thesis works with the understanding set out by Hyde and historian of the commons Peter Linebaugh that while the commons encompasses a kind of property, it is realised through ongoing action rather than material possession, and to the benefit both of each commoner and the common good of a wider group (Hyde 2010; Linebaugh 2008).

To speak of the commons as if it were a natural resource is misleading at best and dangerous at worst – the commons is an activity and, if anything, it expresses relationships in society that are inseparable from relations to nature. (Linebaugh 2008: 279)

Many commons operate at least partly outside the money economy, and are sustained by the time and labour of commoners. Often this means that access is restricted, mediated through a system of rights that determine who is allowed to do what, where and when, and this restriction may be crucial to the survival of the resource. Linebaugh focuses on the historical rights of the English commons to illustrate the broader importance of the commons and how it functions. Among those protected by the Charter of the Forest of 1217, the document accompanying the Magna Carta, is that of 'estovers', a right to wood subsistence products, or to means of subsistence more generally (Linebaugh 2008: 52), which was significant in enabling the poor, older women and widows especially, to survive.⁷⁰ Through estovers, Linebaugh notes the connection of the commons, 'wherever the subject is studied', to women; how it is always embedded in a particular ecology and enacted through particular types of labour; how it is collective and independent from the state.

Historical commoning practices in England are taken by Linebaugh and Bollier not as a nostalgic evocation of a rural past, but as a reference point from which to discuss the loss of freedoms and domains of shared resources and activity in contemporary societies. Bollier

⁶⁹ Hyde is an American writer, translator and academic who has published on gift economies and the commons (Hyde 1983, 2010). His book *Common As Air* is important to my analysis of the relation of nonhumans to the commons in Chapter Two (Hyde 2010).

⁷⁰ I explore the relationship between women and the commons further in sections 2.1 and 2.2.

has noted that the enclosures of English commons ‘aggressively introduced a new social creature: the market-based society’ (Bollier 2002: 46), a process that Vandana Shiva⁷¹ sees at work in twentieth-century India, where the ‘Green Revolution’ replaced the collective heritage of thousands of varieties of locally-adapted crops with high-input monocultures (Shiva 1991; Shiva 1997: 107). Linebaugh meanwhile frames the fight to control access to wood through the enclosure of the commons as a struggle over ‘hydrocarbon energy sources’,⁷² akin to struggles over access to oil in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (Linebaugh 2008: 4). Considering the more recent, planet-wide history of the commons, Linebaugh notes that over the past two centuries enclosures have involved the destruction of woodland and a forced transition to a petroleum-based way of life (Linebaugh 2008: 1–6). Enclosures have therefore contributed to the current climate crisis.

Scholars and activists in this field have shown us the commons as deeply situated sets of practices worked out over centuries in response to particular landscapes and circumstances, and with ongoing relevance in thinking through possibilities of equitable self-organisation. The work of an economist, Elinor Ostrom, was instrumental in reviving interest in the commons, through her work to uncover the principles underlying varied manifestations of the commons up to the present.

In the latter half of the twentieth century, discussion of the commons tended to be dominated by Garrett Hardin’s 1968 essay ‘The Tragedy of the Commons’ (Hardin 1968), and commoning practices were dismissed as outdated and fundamentally flawed. Hardin used a theoretical scenario in which herdsmen with open access to common pasture overgraze and degrade it to propose that commoning arrangements more generally would inevitably fail, and that the ‘mutual coercion, mutually agreed on’ of a system of private property was preferable (Hardin 1968: 1247).

In 1990 Ostrom’s book *Governing the Commons* (Ostrom 1990) transformed discussion of the commons, marking the beginning of a re-evaluation of its histories, and of the viability of commoning practices as a method of human organisation (Neeson 1993; Linebaugh 2008;

⁷¹ An activist and author who informs my analysis of the relation of nonhumans to the commons in Chapter Two.

⁷² Linebaugh makes the point that medieval commons existed in an ‘energy ecology’ based on wood, not coal or oil. Wood provided fuel for heating and cooking, and materials for making houses, vehicles and agricultural implements, and waging war (Linebaugh 2008: 31–34).

Bollier 2014). Ostrom approached the commons from an institutional perspective and analysed commoning practices as ‘common-pool resource management’ (CPR management), the central problem of which was to identify how people who were interdependent in their enjoyment of ‘joint benefits’ from such a resource could successfully organise and govern themselves (Ostrom 1990: 29).

Ostrom carefully unpicked the assumptions underpinning Hardin’s 1968 essay, showing that it only applied within the particular parameters, such as the absence of binding agreements, and fully open access, set by Hardin himself. Of standard, pessimistic, scenarios used to dismiss the viability of commoning arrangements,⁷³ Ostrom said:

What makes these models so dangerous – when they are used metaphorically as the foundation of policy – is that the constraints that are assumed to be fixed for the purpose of analysis are taken on faith as being fixed in empirical settings, unless external authorities change them.

For Ostrom, previous considerations of CPRs and their management had been too simplistic, both in theory and in the practical implementation of policy. She is particularly critical of the assumption that institutions imposed from the outside will automatically function well and at little or no cost; this assumption leads to a failure to give proper consideration to how these institutions should work:

Instead of there being a single solution to a single problem, I argue that many solutions exist to cope with many different problems. Instead of presuming that optimal institutional solutions can be designed easily and imposed at a low cost by external authorities, I argue that ‘getting the institutions right’ is a difficult, time-consuming, conflict-invoking process. (Ostrom 1990: 14)

Ostrom dedicated much of her life to the study of CPRs, and her writing draws both on her own extensive fieldwork, and an analysis of a vast body of work by others in many parts of the world. *Governing the Commons* can therefore be seen as a distillation of centuries of commoners’ experience as they worked out on the ground how best to organise themselves. Such ‘ordinary’ people are often erased from history but are given a voice through Ostrom,

⁷³ The ‘tragedy of the commons’, the ‘prisoner’s dilemma’ and the ‘logic of collective action’, scenarios put forward by Hardin (1968), Dawes (1973, 1975), Mancur Olson (1965) and others. Ostrom acknowledged the value of these in analysing the pitfalls of CPR management, but criticised the way in which they had been used to obscure the possibility of ‘outcomes other than remorseless tragedies’ (Ostrom 1990: 7).

and in referring to her work we can draw on their knowledge and avoid ‘reinventing the wheel’ or seeking solutions that have already been found.

There are important differences between the scenarios analysed by Ostrom and the situation of the Glazebrook Growers. Ostrom was concerned with the behaviour of people who are economically dependent on the resource they share, and with large resource systems such as fisheries, or irrigation systems.⁷⁴ The Growers do not rely on our gardens for survival, and the gardens are small. Nevertheless I propose that the principles contained in Ostrom’s work can be of use in guiding the work and supporting the longevity of smaller groups, and in section 1.7 I adapt these to the circumstances of the Glazebrook Growers.

The movement from community to commons in this research both arises from and enables art practice. My search for a more active interpretation of community originated with the dialogical approach I adopted with the Glazebrook Growers, and the interest in processes of communication and decision-making that such an approach fosters. In Chapter Three the investigation of the commons will open the way for a different category of art method, based on listening. First, over the following section, the relationship between dialogical art methods and concepts of community will come under scrutiny.

1.6 Art practice

Speaking in 2011, Cuban artist Tania Bruguera explained her concept of ‘Arte Útil’ or useful art⁷⁵ as working with aesthetic experience ‘to create the proposal and implementation of solutions’ to societal problems. Bruguera’s *Immigrant Movement International* (2011–2015) provided a community centre for immigrants in Queens, New York,⁷⁶ as part of an ongoing practice that ‘straddles the domains of art and social utility’ (Immigrant Movement International website; Bishop 2012: 249).⁷⁷ Useful art is a recent manifestation of a turn to social engagement that has taken different forms over the past half century, growing out of

⁷⁴ Systems that are ‘sufficiently large as to make it costly [...] to exclude potential beneficiaries from obtaining benefits from its use’ (Ostrom 1990: 26, 30),

⁷⁵ The term also suggests ‘art as a tool or device’ (Arte Útil website).

⁷⁶ Activities included English and Spanish language classes, education in legal rights, dance, photography, workshops for children such as the ‘Immigrant Superhero Art Workshop’, as well as seminars and activist training (Immigrant Movement International website).

⁷⁷ The archive on the Arte Útil website provides a compendium of ‘useful’ practice by other artists, including commons-based propositions such as the Convention on the Use of Space.

the ‘dematerialisation’ of art through the 1960s, and interpreted by Grant Kester as a ‘dialogical’ inclination (Kester 2004), as we saw in the thesis Introduction.

In the UK this inclination gained momentum with the ‘community arts’ movement of the 1970s. Community arts were characterised by new forms of expression, a movement from the gallery to the street, and the use of creativity as a tool of political activism (Leeson 2018: 11). David Harding gives an account of a resident-led project from this time at Craigmillar housing estate, which ‘bypassed the then Scottish Office’ and went straight to the EC to secure £750,000 (Harding in Crummy 2004: 30). Over a number of years this money went into fifty-seven neighbourhood projects employing hundreds of workers including, but not limited to, artists.⁷⁸ Below I contrast the scale and engagement evident in this project to the work of two contemporary artists in the social sphere.

The community arts movement of the 1970s was an important precursor to later practices that have been defined as socially-engaged, participatory or dialogical. I identify my practice with the Glazebrook Growers with the tradition of dialogical practices described by Kester in that it draws on experience and skills gained as an artist, crosses disciplinary boundaries, engages with the ‘broader social and political world’, and is realised durationally, through processes of dialogue and collaboration (Kester 2004: 9). I choose the emphasis on active communication implied by Kester’s term in preference to related terms such as ‘social practice’ or ‘participatory practice’,⁷⁹ because the Glazebrook Growers and our activities emerged over time from day-to-day interactions. These ranged from the conversations with which our group started to the process of designing and building our raised beds, covered in section 1.7. I confine my use of the terms ‘participation’ and ‘participant’, by contrast, to those activities devised by me in advance and to which others were invited, such as the Tea and Talk sessions, and the Deep Listening workshops that will be described in Chapter Three. By framing practice in terms of dialogue, the term ‘dialogical’ encompasses my own position as well as those I am in communication with, in keeping with my embedded perspective. Taking account of one’s own position, situating oneself, is an important part of

⁷⁸ The work undertaken encompassed ‘landscaping, play area development, theatre and art works, play groups, social work and community development’ (Harding in Crummy 2004: 31).

⁷⁹ In its vagueness the term ‘social’ is similar to ‘community’, and I challenge the distinction between society and nature in Chapter Two. ‘Participatory’ meanwhile implies that there is a pre-existing structure or project, set up by the artist, with which participants may choose to become involved.

dialogical practice, and this section will draw attention to the consequences when artists fail to take sufficient responsibility for their own position and interests in community-based work.

To reflect critically on dialogical engagement through art, I will look at the work of three artists who have engaged with residents on housing estates: Stephen Willats, Anna Francis and Fritz Haeg. In doing so I will consider the dangers of an underexamined approach to the idea of community, before looking at examples of practice I consider to have successfully negotiated community-based work, and contextualising my own methodology with the Glazebrook Growers.

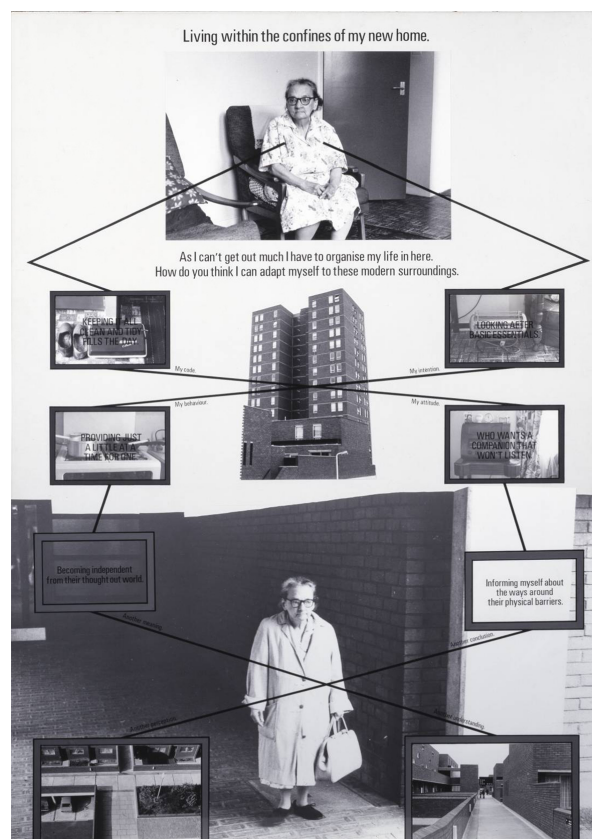


Figure 23: *Living Within the Confines of my New Home* by Stephen Willats, exhibit from the 'Living with Practical Realities' section of the exhibition 'Concerning our Present Way of Living', Whitechapel Gallery, 1979.

Kester regards London-based Stephen Willats as influential in establishing the dialogical approach. Starting in the 1960s, Willats set out to devise strategies that reduced the separation between artist and audience, and by the 1970s had become concerned with the experience of residents in social housing, both in England and further afield (Kester 2004: 91). To prepare work for his 1979 exhibition 'Concerning Our Present Way of Living' at the Whitechapel Gallery in London, Willats visited the nearby Ocean Estate over a period of

months. He interviewed residents and issued questionnaires, building up a picture of how the circumstances in which they lived affected their daily lives.⁸⁰ While the main exhibition took place at the gallery, Willats also set up display boards on the estate, arranging images and text into an analytical interpretation of the issues affecting residents.

Willats describes his methodology as 'descriptively rooted', in that the final works are generated by the accounts of interviewees, and he has stated that his intention is to represent the 'potential self-organizing richness of people within a reductive culture of objects and possessions' (Willats in Kester 2004: 91). However I question his success in doing so via the formal means he selects.⁸¹ Willats' interest in the science of cybernetics⁸² and the semi-scientific 'encoding' of the information he gathers has the effect of visually objectifying participants' lives, subsuming them to his artwork. Figure 23 draws on Willats' interview with an elderly resident of a tower block, and gives insight into the detail of her daily life, but she looks as trapped by Willats' diagrammatic representation as by the circumstances she describes.

Some methods used in this doctoral research are similar to those deployed by Willats. I use description as a method, in both ethnographic and (unlike Willats) autoethnographic modes, and make use of long engagement and recorded conversations. However, while art methods inform both practice and research, the goal is not gallery exhibition, and so I am not faced with the need for formal translation for exhibition purposes. The combination of visual, audio and textual descriptions used in this thesis to make accessible the Glazebrook Growers and communicate our activities aims to avoid spotlighting individuals and focuses instead on our actions and interactions as forms of commoning.

In his book *Conversation Pieces* (Kester 2004), Kester uses the idea of an 'orthopedic aesthetic', a concept I have found useful in critically examining my own work and that of others. Kester analyses the attitudes of artists including Bertold Brecht and Barnett Newman,

⁸⁰ An approach that led a critic at the time to maintain that he was primarily 'a social scientist' (Talbot 1979).

⁸¹ Reception of Willats' work in 1979 was also mixed: critics hailed him for 'redefining his function within society' (Cork 1979), and criticised him for intruding on tenants' lives without offering any concrete benefit (Kent 1979).

⁸² The science of closed systems that emerged in the post-Second World War era. It incorporates the concepts of feedback loops and homeostasis, and can be applied to different fields. Willats was interested in the distinction between voluntary behaviour and behaviour imposed by the control mechanisms of society (Wilson in Sainsbury 2014: 21).

for whom the audience or viewer was ‘inherently flawed’ and the artist a ‘superior being’ able to see through hegemonic cultural systems, such as the mass media, that distort the orientation to the world of the ‘hapless modern subject’ (Kester 2004: 87–88). The belief that ‘the viewer suffers from an epistemological lack that will be corrected by the artist’ can translate in dialogical or socially-engaged practice into a similar assumption that the participant or community requires artistic intervention to remedy a deficiency identified by the artist (Kester 2004: 88). I perceive elements of this aesthetic in the work of Anna Francis and Fritz Haeg, with the lack identified as that of community.

In 2015 artist Anna Francis and AirSpace Gallery launched the *Community Maker* project on the Portland Street estate in Stoke-on-Trent. Francis had moved to the area with her family, as part of a ‘one pound house’ scheme devised by the local council to revive an area that had been partially cleared for a regeneration project called ‘Pathfinder’ and then left with streets of boarded-up houses when the project was cancelled (Francis blog: 2015; Domokos 2018).⁸³ Existing residents were ‘just left’, their community centre sold off by the council, the local church demolished, the corner shop closed, even their post box removed by the Royal Mail (Domokos 2018). This was the situation when the council offered to sell houses for a pound to people who would live in them for at least ten years, and undertake to be ‘active members of the community’ (Francis blog: June 2016), in an attempt to turn the area’s fortunes around. Having moved to one of these houses, Francis started the *Community Maker* project, drawing on a local tradition of street parties and the city’s tradition of ceramics manufacture.⁸⁴ A series of events, including picnics, walks and design and making sessions, took place, which also served to facilitate discussions among the residents about the issues affecting them.

A series of documentary videos made about Stoke-on-Trent showed the difficulties faced by those living in the area, including Francis (Domokos 2018). Drug dealing was a problem that increased over the three years of *Community Maker*, and the loss of all community spaces meant that project events were held in a tent, except for a few months when the artists gained access to a boarded-up pub. Existing residents, who had suffered the consequences

⁸³ Francis is originally from Kent, but had worked in Stoke for fifteen years, making her eligible for the scheme. She and her partner were successful in applying for a ‘one pound house’ and a £30,000 refurbishment loan that came with it.

⁸⁴ In particular the ‘Homemaker’ tableware designed by Enid Seeney in the 1950s.

of the area's decline for many years, and were not offered the financial support granted to the new arrivals, were asked by Francis to accept an artistic intervention as a form of support.

The progress of *Community Maker* from 2015 to 2018 is described in Francis's blog. In 2015 initial events were planned to address the questions of 'What makes a strong community?', and 'what the community wants to do together' (Francis blog: May 2015). The questions of why people become categorised as 'community', or are seen to be in need of more of it, are not examined. Positioning themselves as 'makers' of community, Francis and the other artists involved in *Community Maker* attempted to ameliorate deep-seated problems caused by the collapse of a government development scheme and the withdrawal of services from an area already affected by economic decline. In this context, the one pound housing scheme, with its requirement to actively support the community, reads like a handing over of responsibility to the new householders. Their arrival was expected to rectify a situation resulting from 'years of state failure and cuts' that had 'ripped the heart out of the place' (Domokos 2018). Francis's intervention recalls the misgivings of Claire Bishop in relation to socially-engaged art:

The fate of community arts in the '70s should be a warning here: rather than being a vehicle for dissent and empowerment, they became a cost-effective way of mopping up where social agencies were lacking. (Bishop 2012: np)

In her blog Francis reflects on the personal cost of working as a 'social artist',⁸⁵ and on the pressure to emphasise the positive in such work, in order not to further stigmatise those she was working with, or deter potential funders of future projects. I venture that in glossing over difficulties and focusing on a small-scale art project of her own devising, Francis failed to respond adequately to the situation she chose to engage with.

Of her position in relation to participants in the project, Francis says,

[...] I am seen as a neighbour first (and maybe) an artist second. Being a resident and an artist means that I am more aware of the rhythms of the place, and able to respond genuinely to what is happening on the doorstep. (Francis blog: February 2018)

⁸⁵ Francis identifies as part of the Social Art Network, a UK based community of artists committed to building agency for the field of art and social practice (Francis blog: 3 April 2019).

However documentation of the project suggests that the interests of the art project and those of the area's residents did not fully coincide. Given that, in the case of *Community Maker*, Francis is referring to her immediate neighbours, her references to 'the community' establishes an odd sense of distance, an 'us and them' dynamic between the group of artist collaborators and the residents of the Portland Street area who attended their events. The title of her project invokes community as a lack, which the artist sets out to remedy, so that she is from the outset positioned separately from her neighbours as the catalyst for needed change. The lack projected onto residents brings with it Francis as a solution, justifying her intervention as a social artist.

Francis's engagement, in its scale and nature, contrasts with those of earlier practitioners of 'community art', such as those assisting the Craigmillar Festival Society, mentioned above. There the project was set up by residents to meet needs that they themselves had identified, and artists became involved with the scheme at residents' invitation.⁸⁶ As a result of the scheme, a community centre was established in an old church, and there followed two decades of well-established, and at least initially well-funded, community engagement with a variety of arts (Harding in 2004; Craigmillar Festival Society 1991). Loraine Leeson⁸⁷ is an artist whose long practice has been based on a capacity to 'listen, openly and actively', in Kester's words, and to 'maximize the collective creative potential of a given constituency or site' (Kester 2004: 24). She has noted the important difference, for artists working through social engagement, between being 'a drop in the ocean' and 'part of a groundswell' (Leeson 2018: 15).⁸⁸ I argue that before engaging with situations such as that in Stoke's Portland Street, artists have a duty to both listen, 'openly and actively', and think carefully about which of these they are likely to be (Kester 2004: 24).

⁸⁶ The project grew out of a 'People's Festival' first organised by the Peffermill School Mothers' Club, who were frustrated with a lack of arts education for their children (Crummy in Crummy 2004: 40).

⁸⁷ Now Senior Lecturer in Visual Arts at Middlesex University, Leeson worked with artist Peter Dunn as 'The Art of Change' for almost twenty years. Together they focused on collaborative projects with different groups in East London.

⁸⁸ In Chapter Three (3.3) I defend Pauline Oliveros against the accusation by activist artists Ultra-red that she stops short of taking action to transform reality (Ultra-red 2012: 2). This neighbourhood of Stoke, however, is a context in which Ultra-red's deliberately political approach, and particularly their *Five protocols for listening*, might have provided a starting point more suited to the injustices of the area's recent history (Ultra-red 2012).

The theme of community came together with that of horticulture in a project by artist Fritz Haeg in ways that confirm the importance of attending to how projects will be sustained long term, if that is how they are envisaged. Haeg's *Edible Estates* is a series of 'prototype' food-growing gardens established in different cities around the world and intended to 'inspire others, demonstrating what is possible for anyone with the will to grow food and some unused land between the house and the street', a combination of the practical and the utopian.⁸⁹ The fourth iteration or 'prototype' was established at Brookwood House, a block on a housing estate in Southwark, a few miles north of Croxted Road Estate. The project was not just driven by the desire to create 'a public model for the world in which we would like to live' (Haeg website: *Edible Estates* pages), there was also a commissioning body – Tate – and an exhibition at stake, and a very tight timeline in which to make it happen. The residents of Brookwood House and the new garden were to become Fritz Haeg's *Edible Estates regional prototype garden #4, London UK* (mixed media) in the exhibition 'Global Cities'. An examination of Haeg's involvement with Brookwood House brings into question whether it really offered residents 'a license to be an active part in the creation of the cities that we share' in any sustained way (Haeg website, *Edible Estates* pages), and provides a point of comparison with the methodology adopted with other practices, among them the Glazebrook Growers.

In establishing *Regional prototype #4*, Haeg and Tate worked with a local organisation, the Bankside Open Spaces Trust (BOST), to survey resident attitudes and persuade them to participate in the garden. Documentation of the Brookwood House project on Haeg's website includes an account by Carole Wright, employed by BOST as a Community Gardener/Educator, who describes a process of winning round reluctant residents, and involving them in a garden that came to thrive. However the online documentation contains conflicting narratives. On the one hand Wright describes residents as 'disenfranchised', with 'no real sense of community spirit' or experience of 'environmental improvement'. But when the voices of the residents themselves are heard, on the video embedded in the *Edible*

⁸⁹ It also relates to a proposal made by Haeg for a network of resident-managed 'Olympic Farming' spaces across London that he envisaged feeding visitors to the city during the 2012 Olympic Games, and leaving a legacy of a 'spectacular network of urban pleasure gardens' that would continue to feed London's residents after the games were over (Haeg website: *Edible Estates* pages). Independently of this, the London-based organisation Sustain in fact created 2,012 community growing spaces in the city by the end of the Olympic year (Sustain website: archive pages), in conjunction with Capital Growth, who were to offer me free training the following year.

Estates webpages, a different picture emerges. Longstanding residents show off the flowers they cultivate on balconies and walkways, describe the local gardening competition in which they and their neighbours win prizes, point out their mum's house across the rooftops.



Figure 24: Fritz Haeg's *Edible Estates Regional Prototype #4* at the time of its launch in 2007. Photo: Fritz Haeg website

The type of balcony gardening in which Brookwood House residents are shown to be engaged prior to the arrival of Haeg, consisting of containers of well-tended flowers, answers Taylor's description of a working-class aesthetic of gardening, based on neatness, bright colours and a 'wish to please' (Taylor 2008: 110).⁹⁰ Located outside the boundaries of 'legitimate taste' this aesthetic tends to be denigrated (Taylor 2008: 127), and the text on the *Edible Estates* webpages makes no mention of this pre-existing practice.

Carole Wright's online description also documents the rapidity of the creation of the garden. There was 'only one month' in which to complete the project, plants were bought in advance of discussions with residents, and the planting itself took 'two days flat'. This description raises the possibility that the 'deep mistrust' sensed by Wright was not of 'anyone in authority' but rather of a rushed timetable and the agenda of an artist who was to be on site only as long as it took to make the garden and open the exhibition at nearby Tate.

⁹⁰ Mentioned earlier in connection to informal planting on Croxted Road Estate.

Haeg creates the impression that the project is breaking new ground by setting up a false opposition and conflating two traditions of communal growing in the UK:

This garden is intended as a new model for urban agriculture. It is not a true community garden (or ‘allotment’ as the popular practice is referred to in Britain) with separate private plots for each gardener. It is one holistic design that also integrates spaces where people may gather; a pleasure garden made up entirely of edibles. Those who tend it will eat from it. (Haeg website: Edible Estates #4 page)

Allotment sites are not synonymous with community gardens,⁹¹ and neither are they ‘private’, but instead have a particular tradition that can be traced directly back to the English enclosures,⁹² with individual plotholders traditionally assigned an area of between 1/8 and 1/16 of an acre each to cultivate (Crouch and Ward [1988] 1997: 55, 59), and a committee of plotholders administering the site as a whole.⁹³ Community gardens are usually much smaller, more recent, and have a distinct history, described earlier.⁹⁴ They may incorporate individual food-growing plots, as in the case of the ‘learner plots’ made available at Streatham Common Community Gardens, but it is usual for them to organise some, if not all, growing communally ‘in one holistic space’. In London, Brockwell Park Community Greenhouses is one of many community gardens that integrate communal growing with spaces for social and educational gatherings. Moreover we need only recall Liz Christy’s gardens in New York to realise that artist-led community food-growing spaces are nothing new. The novelty of Haeg’s project lies not in making a communal ‘pleasure garden of edibles’ eaten by those who tend it, but in its lack of consideration for the vital human and organisational infrastructure that sustains such projects long term.

In June 2018 I visited Brookwood House to see how *Regional prototype #4* had fared. It looked at first like an illustration of the failures predicted by a Southwark council officer

⁹¹ As we saw in the histories of these styles of growing set out in section 1.2.

⁹² Professor of Cultural Geography David Crouch and anarchist author and educator Colin Ward give a detailed account of this in *The Allotment: Its Landscape and Culture* (Crouch and Ward [1988] 1997).

⁹³ Allotment plots are now often much smaller. For example Grange Lane allotments, near Croxted Road Estate, is divided into plots of 5 ‘rods’, or roughly 1/32 of an acre.

⁹⁴ Community gardens are also more likely to be sited near city centres, with allotments generally located in more suburban areas.

responding to initial proposals for resident gardening on Croxted Road Estate.⁹⁵ The originally bright and open spaces of the garden were now overgrown and shaded, with thistles above head height in what had been vegetable beds. Fruit trees and herbs survived among the weeds, but otherwise there was an air of abandonment. What had happened? An undated, faded piece of paper declared that the garden was now run by residents and their Tenants and Residents Association. It looked as though BOST had withdrawn support and the residents involved in the garden were overwhelmed. Whatever the advantages to biodiversity of this reversion to a semi-wild state, this was scarcely an inspirational and abundant food growing space for humans.⁹⁶



Figures 25 & 26: *Edible Estates Regional Prototype #4* in June 2018 (left), and August 2019. The inclusion of numerous bay trees (*Laurus nobilis*) in a main food-growing bed meant that eleven years after planting they left room for little else.

In her 2015 thesis on 'Housing, Memory and the Post-War State', Paula Smalley describes the 'overriding narratives of failure' that have come to be associated with council housing and the term 'community' (Smalley 2015: 22), a narrative surely confirmed by the sight of weed-filled beds outside a council block. According to Taylor, '[l]eaving the garden uncultivated

⁹⁵ An initial idea of starting a small community orchard on Croxted Road Estate (located in the same borough as Brookwood House) was dismissed by our Resident Housing Officer on the grounds that it was likely to be 'nothing but trouble in terms of vandalism and upkeep' (Fox 2013).

⁹⁶ In August 2019 the picture was the same, with, remarkably, the same A4 piece of paper still in place. At this point I discovered a social media presence for the space under the name 'Brookwood Triangle' in which Carole Wright announces the garden is to be recategorised as a 'forest garden' in 2020.

generates powerful emotions' in people anxious to avoid the perception of working-class people as 'degenerate [...] and irresponsible' (Taylor 2008: 117), and so the overgrown beds in front of Brookwood House would cause particular distress to residents aware of perjorative associations not just with council estates but with the working class more broadly.

Fritz Haeg had posited the new garden space, overlooked by buildings on all sides, as a place where 'local gardeners would perform for their neighbors' and 'the production of food would become a spectacle' (Haeg website: Edible Estates section). The spectacle being played out under so many eyes in the summer of 2018 was all too likely to feed prejudice against both council estates and community-based projects.⁹⁷

If, as Haraway says, we must be 'somewhere in particular' in order to have a 'larger vision', Haeg's Brookwood House engagement shows a failure to truly arrive at this particular location, and so to discover whether and how it connected with his larger vision. Many community gardens, some mentioned above, have found ways to initiate, sustain and grow similar projects over decades, but they do so from the ground up. The cultural site with which Haeg engaged was not that of the residents but that of the art world and Tate Gallery, while the "'locational' anchor' of the work was the 'discursive realm' associated with socially-engaged art practice (Kwon 1997: 93).⁹⁸ As a result, I contend that in this case the involvement of an artist undermined the long term survival of the project.

Grant Kester notes that 'it is in the nature of dialogical projects to be impure, to represent a practical negotiation (self-reflexive but nonetheless compromised) around issues of power, identity and difference' (Kester 2004: 123). In *Conversation Pieces* he highlights a question asked in 1981 by a resident on New York's Lower East Side, talking to an artist who had helped set up a gallery in the area: 'You know, like I don't want to be nosy [...], but I wonder – everybody here on the block wonders – what are you doing here?' (Kester 2004: 124). By

⁹⁷ The spectacle of derelict growing spaces is risked by any initiative that fails to build ongoing local support, not just artist-led ones. Reflecting on the installation of planters on housing estates by a gardening charity, Paul Richens remarks, 'on my travels around London I've come across many of their old project sites [...] just left to rack and ruin' (Richens 2018). Nevertheless I argue that in this case the involvement of the artworld impeded a genuine collaboration with residents.

⁹⁸ By contrast artist Nils Norman's *Edible Park* intervention, a permaculture-based scheme in the Hague, while framed as a work of art, was made in co-operation with a local permaculture group. Intended by the artist as a 'ground up, Utopia inspired, sustainable urban planning process', it showed that a pragmatic concern for the project's ongoing survival could coexist with the larger themes the artist wished to address (Nils Norman website: Collaboration).

the time the Growers were formalized as a group two and a half years had elapsed since my arrival on the estate, a significant period of familiarization for me.⁹⁹ I had had many encounters with those living around me, both in casual conversation and formal meetings, during which I made connections with other residents interested in setting up a resident-led growing project and was held to account by those with different views. I had ample time to ask myself ‘what am I doing here?’, and my embedded position meant that as time passed and relationships formed I could also ask ‘what are we doing here?’. After the formalization of the Growers a further two years elapsed before we were able to set up the Kitchen Garden, during which time the group gathered and held workshops at different venues, strengthened our connections with each other and built a more positive relationship with Southwark Council.

Our differences were not erased by these processes, but their duration ensured a prolonged ‘practical negotiation’ between different interests, and encouraged an understanding of and responsiveness to context that I have argued were lacking both in Fritz Haeg’s *Edible Estates* intervention at Brookwood House, and Anna Francis’s *Community Maker*. The fact that others set up the project with me and that the common factor was our place of residence, rather than an art background, meant we dwelt more carefully on our location and circumstances, from a position of close familiarity, in determining its scale and nature. My art training and experience were of service to me and the group, but the project began with the wish of residents to get together and grow things, not with a proposal to a commissioning body.

My argument is not that artists must live on site for several years in the run-up to every intervention, important though that was to my practice with the Growers, but that careful and sustained attention be given to the relationships in play. The examples of Jessie Brennan’s work with The Green Backyard (2015–2016), and Grizedale Arts, an art commissioning and residency programme in the Lake District (mentioned in the thesis Introduction), show alternative solutions.

The Green Backyard is a community growing project sited on a formerly derelict plot in Peterborough. By the time of Brennan’s intervention it had been established for six years as

⁹⁹ A further two years were to elapse before we were able to install raised beds and set up our Kitchen Garden

an active organization with strong local involvement, but the City Council was threatening the site with development (Brennan 2016). For *Inside the Green Backyard (Opportunity Area)* (2015–2016) Brennan gave voice to those involved in the project and to their site through the collaborative creation of a series of photograms that captured the silhouettes of objects and plants from the site, and audio recordings of the people. Her intervention *If This Were To Be Lost* (2016) then turned a phrase spoken by a contributor to the recordings into a nineteen-metre-long installation (figure 27), visible to the adjacent East Coast railway. In this way both the positive effects of the project and its predicament were given heightened public visibility and made part of a visual and audio archive questioning ‘the capitalist logic’ behind the proposed development (Brennan website: Inside the Green Backyard page).¹⁰⁰



Figure 27: Jessie Brennan, *If This Were To Be Lost*, 2016, painted birch plywood on scaffold, 1.9 x 19 m, situated at The Green Backyard, Peterborough. Photo: Jessie Brennan

Brennan’s work has parallels to that of Francis – the involvement of an artist with a constituency facing difficulties, the use of art workshops – but also an important difference. While the residents of Portland Street appear not to have had any effective organization defending their interests and faced multiple difficulties, those involved with The Green

¹⁰⁰ The work was reported in the media, exhibited and published in book form as well as being visible, for a time, on site (Brennan 2016; Jessie Brennan website).

Backyard were already mobilized and cohesive as a group.¹⁰¹ Brennan could therefore meet them under more equitable circumstances and, although her work aimed to support them, she was not attempting to rescue or ‘make’ a community. Both the duration and scale of Brennan’s intervention is more modest than that of Francis and her collaborators, but the resulting work communicates an impression of the site, its people and plants with effective simplicity.

The approach taken by Brennan is distinct to mine with the Glazebrook Growers, in that she was a visitor to the project and her contribution as an artist had clear boundaries, while I worked from an embedded position as a full member of the Growers, and initially made my contribution by facilitating group formation and decision-making. The element I consider us to have in common, and to be lacking in *Community Maker* and Haeg’s Brookwood House intervention, is a truly situated approach. In the context of art practice I mean by this a careful tailoring of the artists’ contributions to the particular circumstances and set of relationships that we encounter, incorporating an awareness of our own positions, capabilities and limitations, and different registers of research. For Brennan this was achieved through time spent at the project and dialogue with its collaborators and volunteers. The Green Backyard as an organisation acted as a mediating presence, holding the interests of the site and volunteers while enabling Brennan’s involvement. By contrast I was part of a group of residents (those interested in growing) without representation on our estate, and I took this as the starting point for my response.

At Grizedale the role of mediation is carried out by a long-established arts organization with a consciously dialogical and embedded ethos (O’Neill & Doherty 2011: 81–118). Looking to serve both visiting artists and those living and working in the rural area in which they are located, Grizedale’s interpretation of the dialogical process means that ‘control is passed over to others – local agencies, residents, collaborators’. One project took on the revival of the local Coniston Water Festival; in the first year it was run by Grizedale, with artists contributing “art-related” rather than “art-specific” projects intended to encourage decision-making in the community (O’Neill & Doherty 2011: 96). This was followed by a planned handover from Grizedale to Coniston’s village committee, so that in the second

¹⁰¹ And arguably faced a less daunting set of circumstances in that they faced one main threat, that of development, rather than the multiple and entrenched issues besetting the residents of Portland Street.

year the festival was ‘unrecognisable as a contemporary arts project’, but regarded as a success because the villagers ‘had made it their own work’ (Stephen Wright quoted in O’Neill & Doherty 2011: 96–97). The Glazebrook Growers are a growing project rather than an arts organization, and our small scale also sets us apart from Grizedale, but their aim to achieve

[...] not a dominant type of public artwork, rather an everyday form of discursive practice, always allowing things, networks, relations and projects to be stretched out over time, rather than working to predetermined deadlines (O’Neill & Doherty 2011: 116)

closely reflects my approach to working with the Growers.

All of the projects considered in this section can be seen as durational, but as my critique of the work of Haeg and Francis has shown, long duration is not sufficient on its own to ensure positive, generative results for all sides in community-based projects. Earlier I described the ‘knot of concerns’ I encountered on Croxted Road Estate, and how my response resulted in the formation of the Glazebrook Growers. The attention to organisation needed to sustain such projects over time is the site addressed in the final part of this chapter.

1.7 The Work of Organisation

As the Glazebrook Growers established ourselves as a group, and negotiated permission to manage two spaces as gardens, we embarked on what Elinor Ostrom has described as the ‘difficult, time-consuming, conflict-invoking process’ of deciding how our group and gardens would function (Ostrom 1990: 14). In this section I look more closely at the collective human organisation that has sustained the Glazebrook Growers. I briefly summarise the transition from the ‘loose space’ of our estate, where we first assembled, into officially sanctioned gardening spaces, and then introduce Elinor Ostrom’s ‘Design principles illustrated by long-enduring CPR institutions’ (figure 31). This is by no means an exhaustive analysis in the purely institutional terms proposed by Ostrom, but rather a broad interpretation of how her ‘Design principles’ can be useful in thinking about our activities. I consider our relation to other organisations, the process of designing our Kitchen Garden and the ways in which we structured our decision-making, both in terms of Ostrom’s principles and as durational, situated processes.



Figure 28: The site that was to become the Kitchen Garden, 2013. The 'Pleasure Garden' was proposed for a similar fenced area 30m away, with a 'multi-sports court', used for basketball and football, occupying the space between.

While a group of residents had been expressing an interest in growing food on Croxted Road Estate since 2012, it was not until 2016 that we were able to install our gardens. In the face of hostility from the TRA committee and Southwark Council officers,¹⁰² plans were slowed until a new TRA committee was elected in 2014. In the meantime we made what preparations we could, and by 2015 were running several events a year to build connections between neighbours and to learn the basics of organic food growing.



Figure 29, left: A seed-sowing event outside the TRA hall in April 2015, at which we sowed container crops while we waited to install our gardens. Figure 30, right: In September 2015 our harvest provided ingredients for a very small salad, the preparation and consumption of which generated surprising levels of excitement. Photo: Andy Martinez

¹⁰² Outlined in the thesis Introduction.

The election of a TRA committee that favoured resident gardening was key to enabling the activities of the Glazebrook Growers and I use this point to introduce Ostrom's 'Design principles illustrated by long-enduring CPR institutions' (Ostrom 1990: 90; see figure 31). Ostrom devised these principles in relation to 'appropriation and provision rules' and the 'institutions' through which rules are decided, but I interpret them more broadly, in relation to communicative and practical support and to the design of space, as well as to the Glazebrook Growers as an 'institution'.

Table 3.1. <i>Design principles illustrated by long-enduring CPR institutions</i>	
1.	Clearly defined boundaries Individuals or households who have rights to withdraw resource units from the CPR must be clearly defined, as must the boundaries of the CPR itself.
2.	Congruence between appropriation and provision rules and local conditions Appropriation rules restricting time, place, technology, and/or quantity of resource units are related to local conditions and to provision rules requiring labor, material, and/or money.
3.	Collective-choice arrangements Most individuals affected by the operational rules can participate in modifying the operational rules.
4.	Monitoring Monitors, who actively audit CPR conditions and appropriator behavior, are accountable to the appropriators or are the appropriators.
5.	Graduated sanctions Appropriators who violate operational rules are likely to be assessed graduated sanctions (depending on the seriousness and context of the offense) by other appropriators, by officials accountable to these appropriators, or by both.
6.	Conflict-resolution mechanisms Appropriators and their officials have rapid access to low-cost local arenas to resolve conflicts among appropriators or between appropriators and officials.
7.	Minimal recognition of rights to organize The rights of appropriators to devise their own institutions are not challenged by external governmental authorities.
<i>For CPRs that are parts of larger systems:</i>	
8.	Nested enterprises Appropriation, provision, monitoring, enforcement, conflict resolution, and governance activities are organized in multiple layers of nested enterprises.

Figure 31: Table in which Elinor Ostrom summarises the characteristics likely to be found in commoning arrangements that survive over long periods, reproduced from *Governing the Commons* (Ostrom 1990).

Ostrom proposed that 'minimal recognition of rights to organize' on the part of external authorities were needed for a commons-based group to endure, and the Growers could not securely establish ourselves as a group and a viable project without this. In our case the

authorities took the form of the TRA committee and Southwark Council, and the new committee not only recognised our right to organise but provided us with access to valuable organisational infrastructure, bringing us to another of Ostrom's Principles.

Ostrom stated that 'nested enterprises' were important in supporting CPR management and monitoring compliance with its rules. For the Glazebrook Growers the 'nesting' related not so much to monitoring compliance but more to other practical support, particularly for communication. Once we were working in cooperation with the TRA, we gained the use of a small hall, noticeboards on each estate stairwell and free printing for flyers and posters at a local Resource Centre run by the council.¹⁰³ The TRA also provided a contact point with the council, local councillors and residents not involved in gardening through regular face-to-face meetings and email groups. Further support was afforded by the council's Grounds Maintenance Team mowing our growing spaces and by the TRA's support for our funding applications. These tasks would have been burdensome for a small, newly formed group to take on alone, and our chances of survival were thus improved.



Figure 32: A meeting with fellow residents in Croxted Road Estate TRA hall to discuss plans for resident-managed gardens, March 2016. Photo: Andy Martinez

¹⁰³ The local tenants' resource centre also provided training to support local TRAs on subjects such as first aid and how to run a committee. It closed in 2018, after which Croxted Road Estate residents had to travel much further, to a centre in Camberwell, to access this support.

Once we had secured permission to create gardens, we were faced, in the Kitchen Garden, with the requirement that we install raised beds with imported topsoil and allow no contact between food plants and the existing earth.¹⁰⁴ This considerably increased the amount of money we needed.¹⁰⁵ However the extra hurdle proved valuable in that it obliged us to think collectively and carefully about the design and arrangement of the raised beds.¹⁰⁶ It set in motion a back-and-forth between individual ideas, group discussion, and testing ideas out in the space itself, which demonstrate the value of durational practices, and Ostrom's Principle of 'congruence'. This is illustrated in the images set out on pages 87–89.

The Kitchen Garden was planned as an allotment system, with Growers taking on individual beds while sharing the care of communal areas. This was in part to give people an area that they could manage as they wished, growing crops that they liked, and also to minimise the need to continually organise group work days, for which we had limited time.

The early stages of measuring up the gardens and testing different dimensions for our raised beds (figures 33 & 34), became, respectively, an occasion for play and an embodied, collective thinking through of the garden space, demonstrating the enjoyable and dialogical elements forfeited when this process is rushed, or a design is fixed in advance by an artist.¹⁰⁷

My initial suggestion for the design of raised beds and Kitchen Garden (figure 35) responded to the space by concentrating beds in the area that received most sunlight, and proposed a built-in encouragement for social encounters in the form of benches attached to each bed. Another Grower, a carpenter with design experience, responded with a modified design (figure 36), varying the size of beds and softening the layout so that it seemed to grow more organically out of the sunniest corner of the garden. Through discussions and a meeting a final layout was agreed, taking on elements of this softer design, but, anticipating possible disagreements if some raised beds were larger than others, keeping the beds uniform in size

¹⁰⁴ A former TRA committee member had contacted the council to suggest there might be arsenic in the soil due to its proximity to the railway.

¹⁰⁵ Which was supplied by grants from Southwark's 'Greener Cleaner Safer' fund, intended to '[help] Southwark residents transform their local areas' ('About Cleaner Greener Safer' page, Southwark website).

¹⁰⁶ The result provided greater accessibility to those with limited movement and was also appreciated by passers-by. A local growing initiative, Tritton Vale Pocket Garden, that started up at this time adapted our raised bed design for their own scheme.

¹⁰⁷ As in Haeg's *Regional prototype #4*.

(figure 37). The carpenters who led the construction of the beds also devised a structure into which benches were incorporated simply and robustly (figure 38), rather than bolted on.

The duration of this process, and its several stages, enabled us to make use of the different knowledge and life experiences of various members of the group, so that considerations that had not occurred to one person could be suggested by another. This in turn ensured ‘congruence’ (Ostrom’s second Principle) between the design of the garden and ‘local conditions’, including the lives of its users. A Grower with back problems was glad to be able to sit on the benches to tend plants, and small children enjoyed having the soil near eye level, where they could minutely investigate it.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ As so often with features that make the lives of children and the disabled more agreeable, they provided benefits to the group generally, encouraging us to pause, sit down and engage in unplanned conversations.

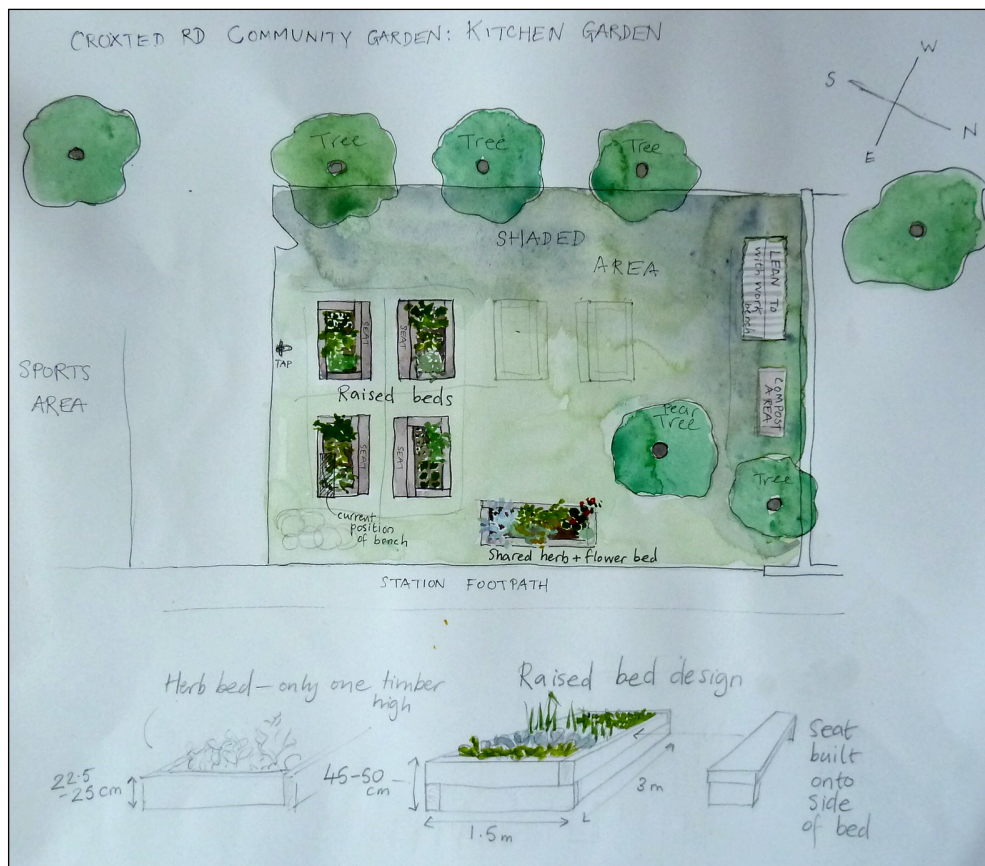


Figure 35: My initial suggestion for the design of the raised beds and layout of the Kitchen Garden, with beds in the sunniest area. I envisaged a bench for each bed, but thought they would have to be constructed separately. An 'interactive' version of this design was taken to meetings with the beds represented by paper rectangles that could be moved into different configurations, to help think through different possibilities.

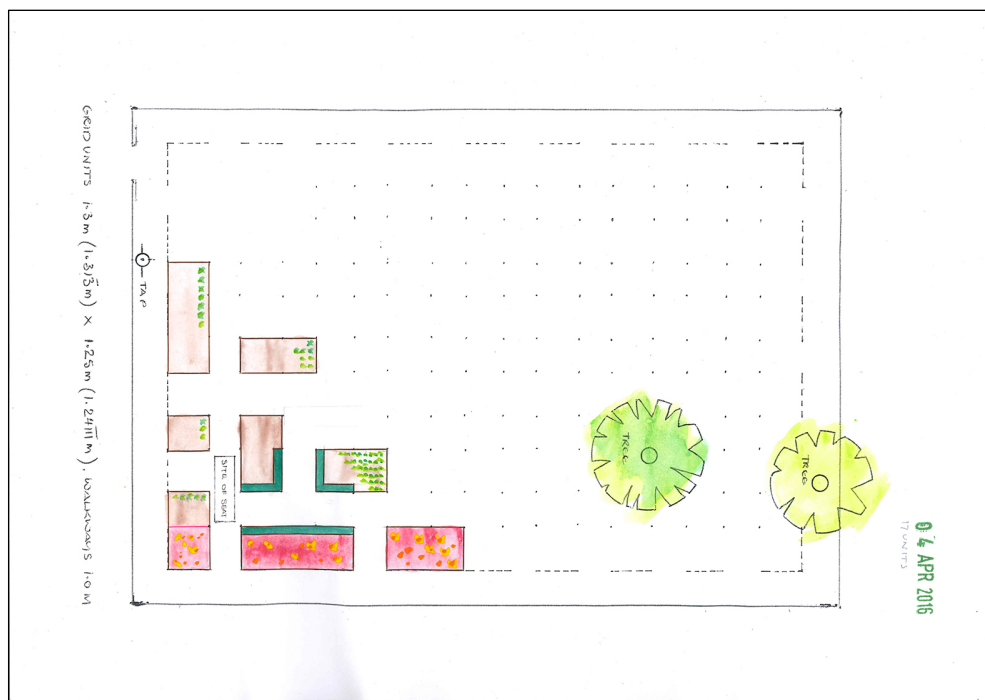


Figure 36: A subsequent design drawn up by Richard Schofield, a carpenter involved with the Growers, based on his careful measurement of the space. Staggered positioning and varied dimensions for the beds created a softer layout.



Figure 37: The final layout agreed for the first set of raised beds, based in part on the design in figure 36, but with uniform bed dimensions to minimise potential conflicts over allocation. Plans for future expansion were incorporated, and the following year two further beds were constructed. Drawing: Richard Schofield & Zoë Petersen



Figure 38: The final raised bed design incorporates benches efficiently into the main structure. Here the Glazebrook Growers begin to plant up their raised beds, April 2016. This was preceded by two days of construction and earth moving with a group of estate residents, friends and families, during which children moved around a tonne of topsoil. Photo: Andy Martinez

Several of Ostrom's Principles were addressed through the group's decision-making and organisational structure. At the time of the formation of the Glazebrook Growers, many residents of Croxted Road Estate were familiar with committee-based organisation, with decisions made by majority voting, through the estate's TRA. The committee structure has the advantage of creating clear roles, distributing responsibility and helping to keep meetings (relatively) short. This latter point is crucial in enabling as many as possible to participate in decision-making, fulfilling Ostrom's third Principle, on 'collective-choice arrangements', that those affected by rules should be able to modify them.

Particularly within activist circles, participatory democracy, based on consensual decision-making,¹⁰⁹ became popular during the 2000s, as groups looked for decentralised and nonhierarchical ways of working (Polletta 2015: 215). However this can result in very lengthy meetings, which has the effect of excluding people with families, jobs and other responsibilities who are unable to commit the time required (Polletta 2015: 215). All those involved with our gardening project at the start had full-time commitments, in some cases encompassing children and organisations other than the Glazebrook Growers as well as paid employment. When we formalised ourselves as a group it was clear that using a familiar decision-making structure and keeping meetings short were strategies that would promote inclusion. This takes us again to 'congruence', this time between our organisational choices and the time restrictions in Growers' lives, and to the third Principle, on collective choice.

The small size of the Glazebrook Growers meant that we could create a committee in which there was room for every member to take on a specific task, and we could incorporate elements of a consensus-based approach, resorting to majority voting only occasionally.¹¹⁰ As well as the traditional roles of Chair, Secretary and Treasurer we created garden-specific roles, including Head of Herbs and the Composting Team, expanding the traditional committee structure so that oversight of various aspects of the garden were the responsibility of named people. In this small-scale organisation the committee therefore

¹⁰⁹ This is a method whereby an issue is discussed and a proposal formulated whereupon participants signal agreement, dissent or that they are standing aside from the decision. Dissenters' concerns are then discussed, and amendments may be introduced before consensus is again assessed. The process continues until full, or near-unanimous, consensus is reached (Polletta 2013).

¹¹⁰ Rather than having separate committee meetings, all members were asked to attend.

became a means by which participation in decision-making and responsibility was encouraged in all members, rather than parcelled off to a small subsection of the group.

Meetings were also a forum at which we discussed violations of 'operational rules' (neglect of beds, failure to attend meetings), and decided on 'graduated sanctions' (Ostrom's fourth and fifth Principles).¹¹¹ In most cases the gardeners in question accepted they were too busy and gave up their plots, and some continued to attend other events in the garden.¹¹² The relative ease of monitoring and imposing sanctions illustrates the difference, mentioned above, between our situation and those of Ostrom's CPRs, upon which the beneficiaries were economically dependent. Feelings were not so strong in the Kitchen Garden since it was not a means of economic survival. An associated disadvantage was the relative lack of motivation to contribute to common tasks, sometimes resulting in low attendance at meetings.



Figure 39: A workshop in the Kitchen Garden in June 2018, two years after construction of the first beds. By this time we had agreed a less frequent mowing regime with the grounds maintenance team, so that plants in the lawn could flower, providing food and habitat for insects and a softer feel to the garden for humans.

¹¹¹ Our 'graduated sanctions' escalated from 'having a quiet word', to issuing notice letters, to requesting that plotholders relinquish their beds if they were not using them.

¹¹² This is not to dismiss moments when feelings ran high, generally sparked by clashes of personality rather than the imposition of sanctions, but they were not frequent or typical of our day-to-day interactions.

Conclusion

In April 2019, Australian journalist Jason Wilson warned that ‘some see looming ecological collapse as an opportunity to reorder society along [...] frankly genocidal lines’, noting the revival of a ‘longstanding political ideology’ in the contemporary manifestation of ‘eco-fascism’ (Wilson 2019: n.p.).¹¹³ This has confirmed the importance of establishing a structure for inclusive and equitable human relations before pursuing my enquiry into relations with the nonhuman world. My first research question asks how a commons might incorporate both human and nonhuman lives and activities, and this chapter has opened my argument by establishing the relevance of the commons in relation to human lives and activities.

Sociologist Les Back has described listening as ‘a form of opening to others’ (Back 2007: 8), and through a combination of ethnographic listening, in the Tea and Talk conversations, and archival research this chapter has opened the research to the voices of residents with a long experience of Croxted Road Estate and to some of its histories as a cultural site. The attention to the origins of the estate in the Second World War has served the dual function of situating the argument in relation to this site, and as a reminder of the violent potential of conceptions of the communal that are intolerant of difference.

An associated caution with regard to the idea of community informed my consideration of the site of art practice in this chapter. Examples of art practice in which ‘the community’ was assumed to be suffering from a deficiency which the artist could remedy were shown to favour the artist rather than the constituency whom they claimed to serve. These were compared to dialogical approaches in which artists situated their practices more sensitively, through different combinations of careful listening, an embedded approach, the use of a mediating organisation and a commitment to duration determined by the situation encountered and not a commissioning body.

Earlier in the chapter we saw examples in which council-managed estates were deemed lacking in community spirit, but they can have advantages when devising ways of co-operating with neighbours. ‘The estate’ works as a kind of notional community: its residents

¹¹³ Wilson was commentating on the murder by shooting of fifty people in mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand in March 2019. The man accused of the killings issued a manifesto in which he identified as an ‘eco-fascist’ (Wilson 2019).

have views on what the estate is like and on what happens there,¹¹⁴ even if the ties of family, work, and acquaintance with immediate neighbours in a particular small area of the estate have more impact on daily life. As we have seen, it also provides support structures in which local initiatives can ‘nest’ if relations are good.

Through Ostrom’s Design Principles I have entered into aspects of group formation and collaborative action in some detail to give concrete examples of how the accumulated collective knowledge of the commons can work in the particular, situated context of the Glazebrook Growers. This is significant in establishing the commons as not only a conceptual framework but a practical resource of value in sustaining small-scale collaborative projects.

The commons has been used to introduce an emphasis on coming together through action rather than identity, and this emphasis on action will be taken up through the next two chapters. Malcolm Miles has written that ‘solidarity is [...] a form of human ecology’ and I have proposed that the commons fosters this human ecology, before I consider how it might be extended to incorporate nonhuman lives and activities (Miles 2014: 6).



Figures 40, 41 & 42: Different iterations of the sign identifying the Kitchen Garden, made and remade by adults and children between 2015 and 2019. The middle and righthand images are the same sign in February 2017 and February 2019. Giving visual expression to the garden as a commons realised through action, these chalkboard signs fade and are refreshed as activity in the garden lulls and picks up.

¹¹⁴ For instance Irene Williams described the estate as quiet, and as a place where it had become more difficult for her to start conversations (‘They just don’t want to know, a lot of them’), but also as ‘lovely’ and ‘the best estate in Southwark’ for its cleanliness (App 1b/(i) 00:04:33, p 25).

Chapter Two: Nonhumans and the Commons

2.0 Introduction

The activities of some humans have created a series of ecological crises, resulting in high rates of extinction, depauperation of environments and climate change that is dangerous to us and to other species.¹ This chapter engages with this situation of ecological crisis by proposing a radical adjustment to some humans' view of ourselves in relation to the nonhuman world and asks how it might be sought conceptually and through practice. Destructive ways of living have been accompanied and reinforced by a worldview based on a dichotomy between 'Man' and 'Nature', and a hierarchy which places Man atop a pyramid of living and non-living beings and so justifies the exploitation of the nonhuman world as a resource. The recently popularised concept of the Anthropocene, explored below, arguably perpetuates the 'false universal' inherent in the Enlightenment figure of Man, taken to represent all of humanity but in fact based on 'a white, Christian, heterosexual male person' (Tsing in Haraway, Tsing & Mitman 2019: 3), in ways that hinder the search for better ways of cohabiting on the planet. In view of the persistence of this world view, and the violent exterminism with which it is associated,² I propose that commoning practices, while they have the potential to be robust and long-enduring as a means of sustaining human co-operation, must be rethought so that they more fully incorporate the sustenance of nonhuman lives.

The beginning of this chapter looks again at the history of land-based commons and ask what dynamics, other than the 'appropriator-resource' binary, which organises Elinor Ostrom's institutional analysis of common-pool resource management (Ostrom 1990), might be at work and influencing human–nonhuman relations in such commons. Drawing on the work of Marxist autonomist Sylvia Federici³ and cultural critic Lewis Hyde I consider why the traditional structure of the commons is problematic and how it might be rethought. In the search for a way out of the conceptual dichotomy between humans and nature I

¹ Though not to all of 'us' equally. I consider the dangers of the 'false universal' below.

² Haraway uses the term 'exterminism' in relation to the concept of the Plantationocene, discussed below. Plantation agriculture exterminates life forms by exhausting soils, peoples, plants and animals, thus destroying its own base (Haraway, Tsing and Mitman 2019: 10).

³ Federici is an Italian-American feminist activist and academic who contributed to the Wages for Housework movement in the 1970s and co-founded the Committee for Academic Freedom in Africa.

borrow from Bruno Latour and John Law's Actor-Network Theory, and turn to anthropologist Anna's Tsing's ANT-influenced concept of multispecies assemblages.

Through Donna Haraway's writings, I arrive at the work of evolutionary microbiologist Lynn Margulis on symbiosis. Margulis challenges the hierarchy of 'higher' and 'lower' organisms, and presents a situation of non-negotiable interdependence underpinning the day-to-day survival of humans and all other life. This is a situation that already exists rather than an aspiration, and it stands in contradiction to the conceptual hierarchy through which many humans see themselves in relation to the nonhuman world.

Examining human–nonhuman relations in the gardening practices of the Glazebrook Growers, I argue that recognition by humans of already-existing symbiotic relationships can allow us to see, through the garden, the symbiotic associations through which we are 'at stake in one another' (Haraway in Tsing et al 2017: M45). Such a recognition constitutes a step towards altering commoning practices and human relationships to the nonhuman world.

Recent art practice has engaged with our condition of interdependence with nonhumans, and T. J. Demos surveys artists including Subankar Banerjee and Mabe Bethônico who reveal relationships between political, cultural and ecological concerns. To establish a methodological context in terms of practice that works through an engagement with place, I go on to consider the different approaches of Joanna Rajkowska and Patricia Johanson in approaching human–nonhuman relationships.

Finally I turn again to Anna Tsing and her proposal that certain disciplines can constitute 'arts of noticing' (Tsing 2015: 22–24, 143), a concept I use to encompass the attentiveness fostered by gardening practices and the listening practices that I will explore in Chapter Three.⁴

This chapter continues to address my first research question on how a commons might incorporate both human and nonhuman lives and activities, by asking what changes in human perception might support a commons that incorporates nonhumans. It asks what

⁴ As I explain in the Introduction to this thesis, I consider the attentiveness necessary to dialogical art practice as a form of noticing, and that art practice more broadly is able to foster a curious, interdisciplinary mode of engaging with, or 'noticing', the world.

practices might support these changes in a housing estate gardening group, a question I will continue to explore in Chapter Three.

2.1 Nonhumans and Land-based Commons

Commoning practices have been devised by humans in response to places, circumstances and particular types of nonhuman, and so their manifestations are hugely varied. In Elinor Ostrom's analysis these practices are generally structured around a defined group of beneficiaries or 'appropriators' – humans – who have more or less regulated access to a certain resource – generally, but, as we will see not always, nonhumans. I argue that the categories of 'appropriator' and 'resource' pose a challenge to the incorporation of nonhumans into the commons as actors with a right to exist independent of their use to humans.

The history of commoning even within a country as modest in size as England is rich.⁵ Historian J. M. Neeson describes commoning practices in eighteenth-century England in which there is an intimate connection between people, plants, soil and animals, and this prompts her to remark, 'Commoners were the "human fauna" of their lands' (Neeson 1993: 179). The traditional English commons is often associated with an open field system of strip farming⁶ and with grazing arrangements for livestock, but Neeson sets out a list of the other resources derived from common land that runs from acorns, ashes, beanstakes and beechmast to mushrooms, watercress, weeds and willows. A great variety and specificity of engagements between humans and nonhumans across heath, fen and forest as well as in pasture and arable field are revealed (Neeson 1993: 372). Different types of terrain gave rise to different practices, regulated sometimes by custom, sometimes with more formalised by-laws and 'stints', or restrictions on what could be done, where and when. Stints were not always used or welcomed, many commons being managed by long established custom and no written rules. Commoners opposed both regulation and partial enclosure at Flitton Moor in 1775, and did so by identifying their own wellbeing with that of the common:

⁵ Section 1.5 demonstrated, through the arguments made by scholars including Peter Linebaugh, David Bollier and Lewis Hyde, the contemporary and global relevance of the commons. The work of Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies on commoning in India informs the latter half of this section.

⁶ In which large open fields were divided into much smaller strips for cultivation. Families would hold a number of strips scattered across these fields and arrangements for crop rotation, ploughing etc were generally made cooperatively.

...we want no stint, we want no separation – we have been used time out of mind to inter common we never differ about one another's stock; and if we do *dig it up* to our own hurt, we *only* hurt ourselves – We do not desire anybody to interfere. The Common is our own... (Flitton Moor commoners quoted in Neeson 1993: 108)

Many arrangements related to common pasture, and allowed for the grazing of different numbers of animals, often dependent both on the size of the animal and the circumstances of the commoner. Landless commoners could sometimes pasture a cow or horse, but more often enjoyed the right to graze a few sheep, while for cottagers the right to pasture a cow often came with the house they occupied (Neeson 1993: 64–74, 61–64).

'A poor man lays by something by labour, or how he can, so that he is just able to buy a few sheep – the more the better': Swedish explorer Pehr Kalm, who visited England in 1748, describes a system of practices linking poor commoners, farmers, land and sheep (Kalm quoted in Neeson 1993: 66). Landless commoners known as 'sheep-men' were able to raise sheep both on common pasture and on land owned by farmers 'because they by the droppings which they leave after them always pay for what they eat' (Kalm in Neeson 1993: 66). In this way the 'poor man' enabled the sheep to eat, and the sheep enabled the poor man to better his lot, while facilitating a relationship between poor man and farmer in which grazing was exchanged for droppings, and the land left mulched with enriching dung, helpfully trodden in by the sharp little hooves of the sheep. In such a context the actions and effects of the sheep, and their physical particularities – their hooves, their production of fertilising dung – were crucial to the humans concerned, and shaped the commoning arrangements ostensibly devised by humans. Sheep and commoners were mutually dependent upon each other, and humans lived with sheep in an association of practical familiarity.⁷

A more elaborate web of human reliance on a multiplicity of species was enacted through common rights in woods, forest and wastes, through which humans obtained

⁷ Which is not to deny the violence inherent in a relationship based in part on humans eating sheep. Reflecting on a past in which humans had a dualistic attitude to animals – they 'subjected *and* worshipped' them – John Berger proposed that 'vestiges of this dualism remain among those who live intimately with, and depend upon, animals. A peasant becomes fond of his pig and is glad to salt away its pork. What is significant, and so difficult for the urban stranger to understand, is that the two statements in that sentence are connected by an *and* and not by a *but*.' (Berger [1980] 1991: 5)

fuel for cooking and wood for repairing houses, useful dietary supplements from the wild bird and animal life, crab apples and cob nuts from the hedgerows, brambles, whortles and juniper berries from the heaths, and mint, thyme, balm, tansy and other wild herbs from any other little patch of waste... (Humphries 1990: 32)

so that '[a]lmost every living thing in the parish however insignificant could be turned to some good use' (Alan Everitt quoted in Humphries 1990: 32).

Neeson notes the effects on relationships within the hierarchies of village life resulting from access to the plants, animals and spaces of the commons, effects that were altered when this access was curtailed. 'Every commoning economy provided the materials for small exchanges – gifts of things like blackberries, dandelion wine, jam, or labour in carrying home wood or reeds' (Neeson 1993: 180). This created 'bonds of obligation' that both acted as a safety net in times of hardship, and 'established a kind of equality between people' (Neeson 1993: 180, 181); even the apparently poor had a level of solvency in the commons, a solvency provided by living nonhumans, both domesticated and wild. In addition to this, some commoners used to moving through common woodland and waste as of right seem to have felt an entitlement that went beyond the bounds of designated commons. Neeson observes in relation to wood gatherers that they 'did not recognise (although they may have understood) the nice distinctions of property owners. Instead there is a deliberate and confident assertiveness about wood gathering in areas where wood abounded, or had once done so' (Neeson 1993: 162).

Access to the commons was of particular significance to women, and women were key to the functioning of the commons, as historian of the commons Peter Linebaugh notes.

Estovers, or the acquisition of fuel, was largely women's work. Herbage, or the grazing rights that permitted the keeping of a cow, was also her work, and thus she provided the cheese, butter, and milk for a healthy diet, and her livestock provided manuring to replenish nutrients in garden and field. (Linebaugh 2008: 125)

Economic historian Jane Humphries researched the economic value derived by women and families from the commons, and the support they lost as enclosures advanced. Many women were enabled by the commons to keep livestock and bring in an income while nursing babies and raising children, or in the absence of a male income. The opportunity to keep a cow was particularly beneficial in this regard, as it both improved diet within the household,

helped sustain pig-keeping with a supply of skim-milk, and brought in money independent of wage labour. Before enclosure 'annual income from a cow was often more than half the adult male labourer's wage', with profits halved, or the possibility of keeping a cow eliminated altogether, upon enclosure (Humphries 1990: 31). It was women and children who most exploited the wastes, too. Young children could forage in the wastes alongside their mothers, but were a hindrance to undertaking paid agricultural labour.⁸

The picture of the historical commons in England is one in which, on one level, humans make arrangements to their own benefit, and nonhumans, whether cows, sheep or dandelions, are either fed by the commons to be food for humans, or are themselves part of a common resource that humans divide among themselves. The idea that nonhumans or their actions should be accommodated as having a right to exist outside their use to humans does not seem to be at work within these customs of commoning. Nevertheless, in practice nonhumans are a dynamic presence in this landscape; they shape the lives lived and the agreements arrived at by humans, and the relations between one human and another. The plants and animals of woods and waste, and those raised on the fields, provided subsistence and income; but they also influenced relations between women and men, children and adults, and commoners and those who used their labour, or wished to. They provided a degree of independence that was available to women and the landless, and of particular importance to them. Those humans whose access to the nonhumans of the commons was curtailed with enclosure suffered materially, lost a degree of 'confident assertiveness' in their relationship with the land and their neighbours (Neeson 1993: 162), and became increasingly dependent on wage labour, whether directly or through male members of their household.⁹ The lives of commoners and nonhumans were intimately entangled during this period, with

⁸ In eighteenth and early nineteenth-century England 'women's wages in agriculture were only one-half to two-thirds the male wage and sometimes even lower', making the relative importance of access to the commons even greater to women (Humphries 1990: 37–38). The severing of this source of sustenance and income was part of a process through which work came to mean work outside the household, and women's labour came to replace the lost commons (Federici 2011: n.p.), a process explored further in section 2.2.

⁹ Neeson notes that the intention to increase dependency on wage income and produce 'a more biddable, available labouring class' (Neeson 1993: 30) through the separation of commoners from the commons was quite explicit. Enclosure would remove the "means of subsisting in idleness" (John Clark quoted in Neeson 1993: 28). While commoners, like those of Flitton Moor, quoted above, sometimes expressed resistance to enclosures by identifying themselves with the commons that supported them, critics of the commons used perceived similarities between the people and the land to condemn: commoners were lazy and dangerous just as the common 'wastes' were wild and unproductive. 'So wild a country nurses up a race of people as wild as the fen,' wrote A. Young in 1813, describing Wildmore fen in Lincolnshire (Young quoted in Neeson 1993: 32).

commoners only able to thrive if those species upon which humans relied also prospered, even if individual animals were eaten, and plants made into thatch or wine.

The English land-based commons described by Neeson, Humphries and Linebaugh has, for the most part, been lost to enclosure and private ownership, but in other parts of the world such commons, and the entangled human–nonhuman relations they sustain, are the subject of ongoing contestation. Sylvia Federici has pointed out that those resisting a more recent wave of privatisation and enclosure, such as the Zapatistas who protested against the dissolution of the *ejidos*, or common lands, in Mexico in 1993, helped to demonstrate that ‘not only the common had not vanished, but also new forms of social cooperation are constantly being produced’ (Federici 2011: n.p.). Sociologist Maria Mies and feminist activist Vandana Shiva¹⁰ have described the attitude of subsistence farmers, who are often those who rely on and defend land-based commons, as the ‘subsistence perspective’, whereby value is given to the independence associated with having ‘enough’, and being able to meet one’s own needs (Mies & Shiva 1993).

In 1986 Chamundeyi, a villager from Nahi-Kala in India, spoke to Shiva about the villagers’ protests against destructive mining. During the conversation, Chamundeyi enumerates a list of species to which they had had access before mining destroyed the forest: ‘...the forests were rich and dense with ringal, tun, sinsyaru, gald, chir, and banj’ (Mies & Shiva 1993: 247), recalling the list of species of the English common ‘wastes’ set out by Humphries: ‘crab apples... cob nuts... brambles, whortle and juniper berries’ (Humphries 1990: 32), and suggesting a similarly intimate entanglement of human and nonhuman lives. Asked what she considered most important in life, Chamundeyi replied:

Our freedom and forests and food. Without these, we are nothing, we are impoverished. With our own food production we are prosperous – we do not need jobs from businessmen and governments – we make our own livelihood...’ (Mies & Shiva 1993: 249).

¹⁰ An important critic of the ecological and social costs of India’s so-called ‘Green Revolution’, Shiva has also opposed the patenting of life forms, particularly seeds, as a modern form of enclosure by corporations including Monsanto. She has advocated for ‘seed freedom’ for Indian farmers and for the preservation of the many local varieties of seeds, suited to local conditions, that have come under threat with the increasing domination of seed production by multinational corporations (Shiva 1991, 1997, 2011).

The protests of the commoners of Flitton Moor in defence of their common – ‘if we do *dig it up* to our own hurt, we *only* hurt ourselves – We do not desire anybody to interfere’ – finds a parallel in these words spoken in India two centuries later. Thus accounts from commoners in both historical and more recent land-based commons suggest that an entanglement with a diverse human–nonhuman ecosystem, and particularly the opportunity it provides to subsist without wages, have been the source of practical independence and a sense of confidence, and that the severing of ties between human commoners and their nonhuman support systems continues to be a means of increasing the availability of wage labour.

2.2 Sylvia Federici and Lewis Hyde: Limits and Potential of the Commons

Like a garden, a commons can be made to serve disparate ends depending on how and why it is made. Silvia Federici warns that the commons can serve the ‘cash-nexus’ and exploitation for profit as well as co-operative and equitable practices (Federici 2011: n.p.), when common resources meet the drive for resource extraction. Looking back at the historical English commons, Federici sees the elimination of access to the commons as indispensable to the rise of capitalist relations. We have seen how the severing of access to the plants, animals and spaces of the English commons had a particular impact on women. Federici associates the loss of the commons with a degradation of women’s status and bodies that progressed hand-in-hand with the social division of labour in capitalism.

As access to the old commons was shut down, commoners were corralled into waged work through the loss of other means of subsistence. Women’s independence and access to subsistence was further curtailed by their expulsion from workplaces¹¹ and by the terror of the anti-witchcraft campaigns of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Federici 2004: 163–218). In this Federici identifies a process accompanying the enclosures by which ‘work’ came to mean work away from the home, and women were made dependent on male wage earners and transformed from active participants in the commons into a ‘natural resource’ ourselves. With the elimination of traditional commoning rights, it was women and women’s labour that came to be treated as a common upon which a growing system of wage labour depended. For male workers, women’s labour in the home and rearing children became ‘the substitute for the land lost to the enclosures, their most basic means of

¹¹ For instance, from craft workshops and from practicing midwifery (Federici 2004: 83–84, 95–96).

reproduction, and a common good anyone could appropriate' (Federici 2004: 97).

Consequently,

[...] in the new organization of work *every woman* [...] became a communal good, for once women's activities were defined as non-work, women's labor began to appear as a natural resource, available to all, no less than the air we breathe or the water we drink. (Federici 2004: 97)

Federici thus uses the framework of the commons to analyse different forms of human organisation: a set of arrangements, preceding the enclosures, that promoted a certain level of autonomy for women and working people, and the new relations needed for the rise of mercantile capitalism, which divided women from men and transformed women from commoners into common resource; a commons at the service of capitalism. In this way Federici simultaneously expands and problematises the concept of the commons in ways that I argue are useful to rethinking human–nonhuman relations.



Figure 43: Woodcut depicting a witch surrounded by her cronies and nonhuman familiars, from *The Wonderful Discoveries of the Witchcrafts of Margaret and Phillip Flowers*, reproduced in *Caliban and the Witch* (Federici [2004] 2014).

Federici's account of the loss of historical commons in Europe is bleak, but, like Peter Linebaugh and David Bollier, she sees commoning as gaining renewed relevance in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. A fresh assault on surviving commons around the world, for instance through the attempts to privatise the *ejidos* in Mexico, and fisheries in

Maine, served to draw attention to the continuing relevance of commons-based arrangements (Federici 2011: n.p.).

I take from Federici's analysis a confirmation that the model of the commons can be a way 'to bring together what capitalism has been dividing' (Federici 2012), but also a way to see the limitation of the concepts and practices of the commons, inherent in their reliance on the category of 'resource'. The danger of a system of practice built around human beneficiaries and a human or nonhuman resource, is that the position of resource is vulnerable to exploitation. Pointing out that the new internet-based commons rely on resource extraction in African mines, and are implicated in the destruction of commons in the global South, Federici states

No common is possible unless we refuse to base our life and our reproduction on the suffering of others, unless we refuse to see ourselves as separate from them. (Federici 2011: n.p.)

Federici declares we must refuse to rely on the suffering of others in building the commons. Who is to be included in these 'others'? We should not build our way of living on the suffering of other humans; should we also rescue plants, animals, and even water and air from the category 'natural resource', which seems to promise endless giving at no cost? Federici argues that capitalism rests on the rock of 'reproductive labour'¹² mainly carried out by women, which is continually appropriated and devalued through invisible and unwaged labour that sustains the system of wage labour, and so highlights the existence of exploitative forms of commoning. This prompts the question: should we regard the category of 'resource' as acceptable for nonhumans? If not, what kind of a commons is possible?

I turn to another scholar of the commons to look for a 'way in' that might allow nonhuman actions to be recognised within this human framework. Lewis Hyde, in his book *Common As Air* (2010), uses the commons to consider questions including 'intellectual property', publishing rights and computing software and how these are made accessible or closed off among humans. To clarify the definition with which he is working, Hyde says, 'I take a commons to be a kind of property (not "the opposite of property" as some say) and I take "property" to be, by one old dictionary definition, a *right of action*' (Hyde 2010: 24). Hyde

¹² Reproductive labour refers not only to the bearing and care of children, but all of the many ongoing tasks needed to keep people alive and cared for day to day. These constitute 'the reproduction of the worker as a social-economic activity, and a source of capital accumulation' (Federici 2014: 8).

focuses on an element of the commons, namely an emphasis on realisation through action, which I will argue has the potential to allow a fuller acknowledgement of nonhumans within the framework of the commons. Hyde's interpretation of 'property' is concerned less with holding onto something material and more with a kind of agency, which he illustrates in terms of the right to vote, a right that he maintains can be thought of as a property.

You cannot sell your vote; you cannot give it away. There is no material property, only an action that expresses the political agency of persons who have it as a right. In fact, by its inalienability it is one of the things that makes such persons who they are. (Hyde 2010: 25)

Incorporating nonhumans into the commons relies on a consideration of actions rather than intentions, for instance through 'rights of action' and also through a wider 'noticing' of nonhuman actions,¹³ since the intentions of nonhumans are for the most part not knowable to humans. At the same time, human agency in a situation of group organisation has its foundations in intentions that by contrast can be at least partially communicated, and the nature of which have political implications, as I have shown in Chapter One.¹⁴

Extending rights to nonhumans has precedents in the field of law, as in the adoption of the 'Rights of Nature' in the Constitution of Ecuador (Asamblea Constituyente 2008).¹⁵ This move to bring the beliefs of indigenous peoples in Ecuador into a framework of constitutional law is an essentially statist approach; appeals on behalf of 'nature' in Ecuador's Constitution may originate with the concerns of local people, but they must be made to the State or the courts. The commons brings a different slant to the question of rights, as a system of practice for the most part worked out on the ground, among commoners themselves. Any attempt to give nonhumans a right of action in a commons

¹³ I examine Anna Tsing's proposal of noticing as a method in section 2.6.

¹⁴ I explore the importance of acknowledging personal motivations in section 2.4, and the accommodation of human intentionality within a human–nonhuman commons is explored through the listening practices that are the subject of Chapter Three.

¹⁵ This has had the power to effect practical change, providing greater legal foundation for opposition to mining and oil extraction, and with it imaginative change through the concept of ecosystems as rights-bearing persons. 'Nature or Pacha Mama, where life is reproduced and occurs, has the right to integral respect for its existence, and for the maintenance and regeneration of its life cycles, structure, functions and evolutionary processes.' (Political Database of the Americas 2011: Title II, Chapter 7 n.p.; Asamblea Constituyente 2008: 52). The activism of indigenous lawyers and experts in promoting this change to the constitution, and the legal recourse it has given to local opposition to mining and oil extraction has been documented and disseminated by Ursula Biemann and Paulo Tavares in exhibitions including 'Rights of Nature' Nottingham Contemporary, 2015 and 'Forest Law', BAK, Utrecht, 2015.

raises the question of who decides which nonhumans are to flourish, and which of their actions are to be supported or allowed, in the absence of appeals to the state.

Although Hyde's focus is on kinds of 'immaterial' and knowledge-based commons,¹⁶ his idea of the commons as 'a right of action' provides a tool with which to examine how far commoning can accommodate nonhumans as active participants and beneficiaries. If we use Hyde's definition on the one hand and the traditional idea of 'stints' or restrictions on the other, we can ask: Who has a right of action in this commons? What stints or restrictions on action are enforced in this commons, who enforces them, and upon whom?

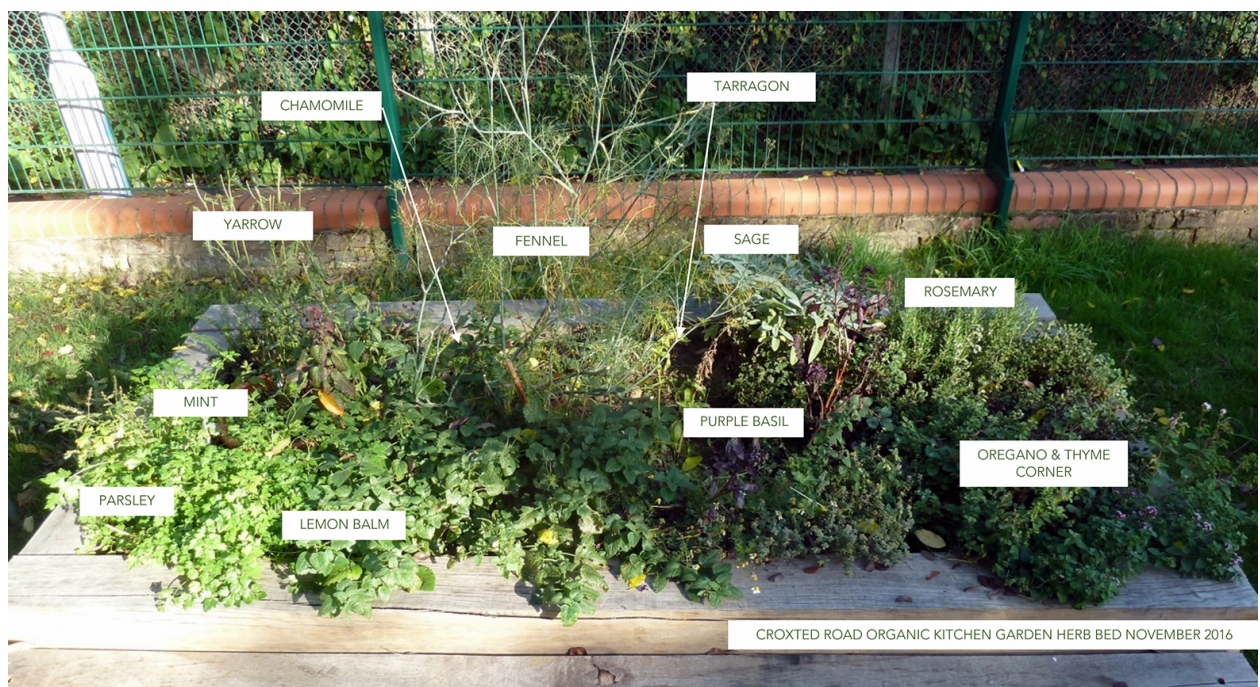


Figure 44: Labelled photograph prepared by the Glazebrook Growers' 'Head of Herbs' in order to help others identify and use the herbs grown. The image was posted to the Glazebrook Growers blog in November 2016. Photo: J. Mansell

On the small scale of the Kitchen Garden, a consideration of stints and rights of action can shed light on the nature of human–nonhuman relations at work. The minutes of a meeting of the Glazebrook Growers in August 2016 record a division of responsibility among human gardeners. The six areas included 'Composting system', 'Herbs' and 'Flowers and growing for animals, insects and birds', a person or two people taking responsibility for each (Glazebrook Growers 2016). In minutes from October the same year this results in a more detailed focus on nonhuman creatures, with the Grower taking care of herbs reporting:

¹⁶ To the extent that such a thing exists. I recall Federici's caveat, which reminds us of the material input and costs to people and ecosystems underlying the existence of internet-based and knowledge-based commons.

‘...lots of coriander, but basil fading. Fennel going to seed. Sage in good nick. Yarrow can be used in salads’ (Glazebrook Growers 2016a). Later a ‘Pollinators’ Corner’ was established in the garden, and an assortment of wild and cultivated plants encouraged to grow there in order to provide food and cover for insects. The assigning of specific human caretakers to different areas of nonhuman life helped us to focus more effectively on them, but mainly in terms of their use to us. The information minuted on herbs relates to their fitness to eat, and even the name of the ‘Pollinator’s Corner’ gives a utilitarian slant to this small concession to a messier style of growing, more likely to harbour insects and other invertebrates. The attitude to garden molluscs was less forgiving, and illustrates the severity of human restrictions on nonhumans who interfere with their plans. The absence of slugs and snails in the first year was met with celebration, and their arrival later on prompted discussion of all the ways to exclude or kill them within the bounds of organic gardening practice. The minutes of October 2016 note that one Grower is ‘experimenting with copper strips, beer in plastic cups’ (Glazebrook Growers 2016a). Jars full of small floating slug corpses soon became a common sight tucked into the soil of the raised beds.¹⁷



Figure 45, left: A slug on Croxted Road Estate, 2017; Figure 46, centre: beer traps with drowned slugs from a raised bed in the Kitchen Garden, 2016; Figure 47, right: dead slugs emptied from a beer trap, 2016, right.

If we take a ‘right of action’ in relation to nonhuman organisms to be granted through the conditions which enable them to flourish and reproduce, human gardeners encouraged and enabled this for a particular set of plants, and through them, other organisms. For others – slugs, the woody nightshade we found in one neglected bed – these rights were very ‘stinted’ indeed, or denied altogether. Much was beyond our control of course; unwanted plants, or

¹⁷ Snails seeming more sure of foot or less susceptible to beer: we never caught them this way.

‘weeds’ grew and seeded themselves while inattentive gardeners were at work, little colonies of selfheal and ribwort plantain got on fine in the garden before we made it a garden, and continued to do so once we were there, with no extra encouragement.

Commoning practices have been proposed as ‘a form of prefiguration of different social relations’, a means by which we can enact in the present ways of living that might show us how to live better in the future (Stavrides 2016: 263). Who and what is incorporated into such practices and on what basis – whether, for instance, as a resource to be divided, or as having a right of action – will determine the form these relations take. While the garden facilitates encounters with the nonhuman, simply combining the two traditionally human-centred practices of gardening and commoning will not in itself result in a novel recognition of nonhuman rights of action. The remainder of this chapter considers means by which a commons based on more fully integrated human–nonhuman rights of action might be thought through and enacted.

2.3 From the ‘Pyramid of the Living’ to the Anthropocene

The currency of terms including Capitalocene, (Haraway 2016; Malm 2009; Moore 2013) Cthulucene, (Haraway 2016; Moore Wark 2016), Plantationocene (Haraway 2016; Haraway, Tsing & Mitman 2019) and particularly Anthropocene (Crutzen and Stoermer 2000; Haraway 2016; World Wildlife Fund 2016); indicate a recognition, in some circles, of the scale of human impact not only on particular living species but on planet-wide systems across oceans, landmasses, atmosphere and climate. The term Anthropocene is used to designate a new geological epoch characterised by ‘major and still growing impacts of human activities on earth and atmosphere [...] at all [...] scales’; and the Capitalocene to indicate that these impacts are generated within ‘a world-ecology of capital, power, and nature’ (Moore 2016: xi). Meanwhile, and presumably to offset the risks associated with not being considered useful to humans, those concerned with the adverse effects of humans on others often refer to the ‘ecological services’ provided by nonhuman species and systems: ‘Living systems keep the air breathable and the water drinkable, and provide nutritious food. To continue to perform these vital services they need to retain their complexity, diversity and resilience’ (World Wildlife Fund 2016: 8). I argue that the logic underpinning both the idea of the Anthropocene and the assignment of value to nonhumans in return for their ‘ecological services’ works within and reinforces a conceptual framework from which we need to

escape, because it elevates the status of humans with destructive effect. In what follows, I consider this framework and how it might be changed.

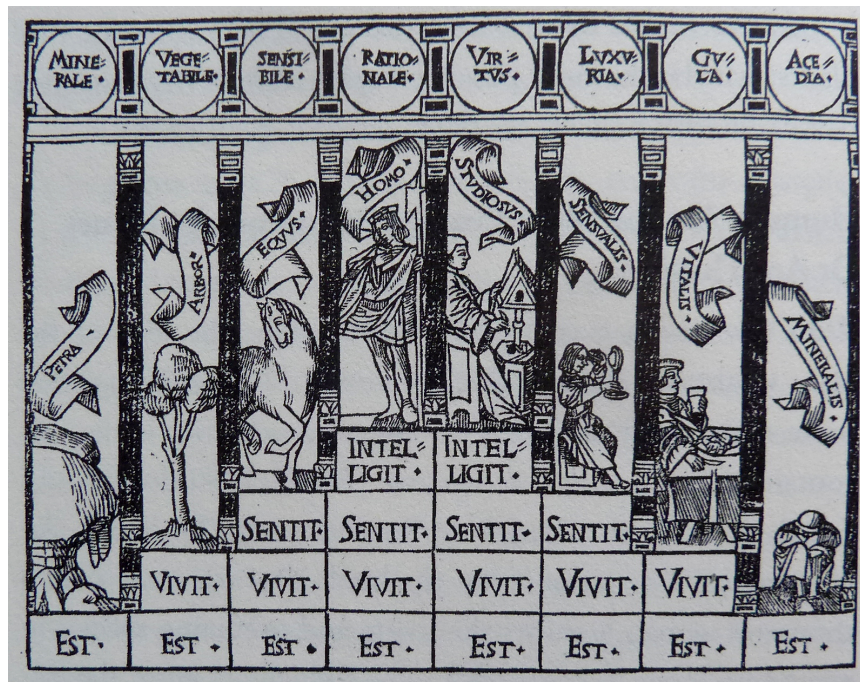


Figure 48: Charles de Bouvelle's 'Pyramid of the Living' from *The Book of Wisdom* (1509), reproduced in *Brilliant Green* (Mancuso and Viola 2015).

Where does the conceptual hierarchy that assigns a special and separate status to humans originate? Stefano Mancuso, a scientist working to establish the new field of 'plant neurobiology', has used recent scientific developments to make the case for plants as sentient, perceptive beings, and to challenge humans' hierarchical assumptions. His 2015 book *Brilliant Green*,¹⁸ co-authored with journalist Alessandra Viola, notes the widespread influence, persisting to the present day, of an Aristotelian model of the material world. In this conception, sometimes illustrated as a pyramid-shaped diagram, living things are classified according to the supposed presence or absence of a soul or 'anima' (Mancuso and Viola [2013] 2015: 10–14). The presence of 'anima' is indicated in part by movement – the word is the root of the English word 'animation' – and this has been used to map out a hierarchy of existence with rock at the bottom, 'Man' at the top, and the rest of the living world arranged in between, a model that exerted influence across different fields over many

¹⁸ One of several popular science books that have disseminated research on plant perception and communication in recent years. Others include *The Hidden Life of Trees* (Wohlleben [2015] 2016), and *What a Plant Knows* (Chamovitz 2012).

centuries, and continues to shape attitudes.¹⁹ A belief in such a hierarchy appears to be at work in the framing both of the current epoch as the 'Anthropocene' and of calls to remedy the effects of human activities.

Donna Haraway, insisting that telling the same stories about ourselves on the planet will only lead to more of the same trouble,²⁰ concedes that the term 'Anthropocene' will continue to be needed now that it is 'well entrenched', but issues this robust challenge to its use:

The story of Species Man as the agent of the Anthropocene is an almost laughable rerun of the great phallic humanizing and modernizing adventure, where man, made in the image of a vanished god, takes on superpowers in his secular-sacred ascent, only to end in tragic detumescence, once again.' (Haraway 2016: 47)

Eileen Crist similarly describes an 'Anthropocene discourse' built around 'a Promethean self-portrait' of humans as 'an ingenious if unruly species [...] whose unstoppable and in many ways glorious history [...] has yielded an "I" on a par with Nature's own tremendous forces'; she warns that this discourse means that 'the historical legacy of human dominion is not up for scrutiny'. The risk of accepting 'the Anthropocene' as a description is that it becomes prescriptive of 'a project of rationalized dominion perpetuated into, and *as*, the future' (Crist 2016: 16–17, 26).

The concept of the Anthropocene matters, because while it was originally used by scientists to indicate that human activity has started to leave significant traces 'in geology and ecology', detectable in ice cores, lake sediments and in the transformation of '30–50% of the land surface' (Crutzen and Stoermer 2000: 17),²¹ it has been adopted more widely in ways

¹⁹ By this measure animals sit below 'Man', and of all living organisms (or those visible to the eye when this model was conceived) plants fare worst, being literally rooted to the spot, and not swift movers compared to animals.

²⁰ Haraway proposes that we designate the times in which we are living the 'Cthulucene', 'a time-place for learning to stay with the trouble of living and dying in response-ability on a damaged earth' (Haraway 2016: 2), but her term has generated trouble of its own. Despite Haraway's disavowals, her 'Cthulu' bears a resemblance to horror writer H. P. Lovecraft's monstrous entity 'Cthulhu' (separated by one 'h'). Lovecraft is widely regarded as racist (Lewis 2017; Barnett 2017), and the choice of this name, sitting alongside Haraway's calls for a decline in human populations in *Staying with the Trouble* (Haraway 2016), risks a 'eugenic anti-humanism', according to critical geographer Sophie Lewis (Lewis 2017: n.p.).

²¹ It appears the term was used first by biologist Eugene Stoermer in the 1980s and then popularised by atmospheric scientist Paul Crutzen (Revkin 2011); together they co-authored this 2000 paper explaining the rationale behind the term.

that reinforce the tendency of some humans to see ourselves as separate from, and above, the mass of living creatures. The image of a planet-raiding Anthropos leaves unchallenged a conceptual hierarchy that places humans – specifically Man – at the summit of a pyramid formed of descending orders of nonhuman beings and things. Moreover, the Anthropocene perpetuates the false universal of Man-as-humanity to attribute responsibility to humans as an undifferentiated species, erasing the ‘historical, situated set of conjunctures that are absolutely *not* a species act’ and that have brought about ecological breakdown (Haraway, Tsing & Mitman 2019: 4).²²

The World Wildlife Fund’s ‘Living Planet Report 2016’ worked with the concept of the ‘Anthropocene’: ‘During the Anthropocene, our climate has changed more rapidly, oceans are acidifying and entire biomes are disappearing – all at a rate measurable during a single human lifetime’ (WWF 2016: 10). Changing this state of affairs will entail ‘a transformation in which human development is decoupled from environmental degradation and social exclusion’ in order for the planet to become ‘resilient’. The report sees changes in human attitudes as a prerequisite for such a transformation; it would require ‘changing the way we measure success, managing natural resources sustainably, and taking future generations and the value of nature into account in decision-making’ (WWF 2016: 14). The Living Planet Reports and the indices they draw up provide important measures of how plants, animals and ecosystems are faring. They hold humans to account for ‘the pressure we exert on the planet’ and call for the redefinition of humans’ relationship with the planet (WWF 2018: 4). Yet the terms in which the reports are framed often resort to habits of thought whereby humans and nature are seen as separate, and nonhumans valued in terms of their usefulness to humans. Setting out ‘Why Biodiversity Matters’, the opening to Chapter One of the 2018 report states

Everything that has built modern human society, with its benefits and luxuries, is provided by nature – and we will continue to need these natural resources to survive and thrive. [...] As we better understand our reliance on natural systems it’s clear that nature is not just a “nice to have”. (WWF 2018: 11)

²² For instance, from a historical perspective different regions have been responsible for vastly differing carbon emissions. This is one of the factors acknowledged through the concept of the ‘ecological debt’ accumulated by industrialised nations with histories of ‘plundering, ecological damage and social oppression’ (Goeminne & Paredis 2010: 692).

While on one level the Living Planet Report challenges human behaviour, on the level of language and conceptual framework it fails to challenge certain habits of perception that underlie behaviour. It frames its arguments in language that echoes the Aristotelian hierarchy described above, entwined with economic measures of value and a kind of management-speak, leaving unchallenged the categories of humans as beneficiaries versus nature as resource, and framing the damage inflicted by humans as putting at risk 'nature and the services it provides to humanity' (WWF 2016: 10). As the report suggests, shifting human attitudes is key to changing the decisions we make, and to finding a way of living on Earth without destroying our planetmates. I argue, with Haraway and Crist, that for these attitudes to change a further step back is needed. Humans implicated in causing ecological destruction need to find other ways of conceiving of ourselves in relation to others of all species.

Anthropologist Anna Tsing has collaborated with Haraway in thinking through the implications of how the current epoch is named.²³ They propose the term 'Plantationocene', derived from the rise of plantation agriculture that followed the European invasion of the New World and came to depend upon the enslavement of Africans as agricultural workers. While small-scale independent farmers may attend to many crops at once, systems dependent on coerced labour require the simplification of crops, resulting in the plantation mode of agriculture. The characteristics developed then, and that typify the industrial monoculture plantations implicated in ecological breakdown now, include ecological simplification, as complex ecosystems are cleared for monoculture, an associated proliferation of pathogens, coerced labour, often reliant on migrant rather than local workers, and the dispossession of indigenous peoples and ecologies.²⁴ The concept of the Plantationocene acknowledges the relatedness of 'deep environmental and social inequalities that emerge and allow certain human beings to flourish [...] and others to suffer' (Haraway, Tsing & Mitman 2019: 9).

²³ Most recently in a discussion hosted by the University of Wisconsin-Madison in April 2019, 'Reflections on the Plantationocene: A Conversation with Donna Haraway and Anna Tsing' (Haraway, Tsing & Mitman 2019).

²⁴ Tsing recalls conducting research in Kalimantan, Indonesia at a time when local villagers were being moved out to make way for oil palm plantations. At the same time the rainforest was cleared and Tsing recounts suddenly seeing numerous forest animals out in the open: 'I saw all of the exotic animals because they had no place to go, and they were running out, displaced from the forest' (Haraway, Tsing & Mitman 2019: 11).

The acknowledgment within the concept of the Plantationocene of plant–human interactions, and particularly the ‘disciplining’ of both plants and humans,²⁵ brings the naming of epochs into the realm of the commons, since in many cases the plantation and its associated practices have replaced commons and commoning. In this way, a gathering as small-scale as the Glazebrook Growers can be positioned in relation to planet-wide ecologies and climate, in that both our self-determination as an organisation and our gardening practices situate us as an ‘anti-plantation’.



Figure 49: The mixture of vegetables in this Glazebrook Grower’s raised bed provided small repeated harvests through the winter of 2017. They included two varieties of chard, the Japanese leaves mizuna and mibuna, as well as kale, curly kale and cavolo nero (an Italian variety of kale). Photo: J. Mansell

The small scale and ties to place of the Glazebrook Growers, and of any urban community garden, are antithetical to the plantation, as is the mixture of plants grown, or that sprout independently. As an example, plant characteristics suited to plantation agriculture may not suit the gardener: while mechanical harvesting requires a whole, single crop to ripen simultaneously, small-scale gatherers tend to prefer a mixture of crops, and varieties that

²⁵ In discussing ‘discipline’ in relation to the plantation, Tsing and Haraway refer to aspects such as the coercion of human labour and the imposition of plant monoculture (Haraway, Tsing & Mitman 2019).

ripen a few at a time, or enable a ‘cut-and-come-again’ harvest, as in figure 49. The mutual responsiveness of plants and humans to each other also distinguishes the garden from the plantation. In the Kitchen Garden Japanese salad leaves such as mizuna and mibuna were found to do well in the raised beds through winter, and were then cultivated by some every year. When our most successful grower of coriander moved to another estate, others found they could not coax the plant into the same abundance, and it disappeared from the garden. Haraway and Tsing maintain that ‘the capacity to love and care for place is radically incompatible with the plantation’ (Haraway, Tsing & Mitman 2019: 6), and the specific relationships between gardens, gardeners and immediate locality at work through the Glazebrook Growers can be seen as a demonstration of what is lacking in the plantation.

2.4 Dismantling the Pyramid: From ANT to Symbiosis

At an earlier stage of this research, looking for a way to break out of my own habits of thought in relation to human–nonhuman relations, and the hierarchy embedded in them, I turned to Actor-Network Theory (ANT). ANT is a method of analysis devised by Bruno Latour and John Law, among others, and which Latour initially used to scrutinise how knowledge was produced in scientific laboratories and institutions. ANT was useful in thinking through my methodology both for the aspects I was able to borrow, and for its limitations in relation to my research.

Three elements from Latour and Law’s ANT helped me consider how I would think about our gardens and their many species of gardeners. First was their insistence on making descriptions by tracing actions and the effect of one thing on another, and the associations arising from these actions, which seemed to link it both to the practical reality of gardening, in which the particular effects of one thing upon others are often visible and significant to the overall enterprise, and to the idea of the commons as continually realised through action. In ANT the world is described in terms of effects rather than things, and ‘if you stop making and remaking groups, you stop having groups’ (Latour 2005: 35). Second was the refusal of traditional categories, particularly those of nature and society, that results from having at the core of one’s thinking the statement ‘Either it does something or it does not’ (Latour 2005: 53). If something does something it counts, and the ‘doer’, or actor, qualifies for inclusion in an ANT-based description. Moreover the actor can exist in three dimensions or as a concept; it can be a child, a microbe, a road, or a set of beliefs. ‘A good ANT account

is a narrative or a description or a proposition where all the actors *do something* and don't just sit there' (Latour 2005: 128). These two elements of ANT influenced, for example, my view of the relationship between sheep, commoners and farmers in section 2.1, since they allow sheep to be considered as actors even in the absence of any (knowable) intention on their part. Third, leading on from this, the hierarchy between humans and nonhumans evaporates in ANT descriptions. This was helpful in allowing an openness to seeing the garden as held in webs of connection on different levels: systems of transport and weather, creatures eating or feeding each other, intersecting paths trodden by humans, foxes, cats and snails, organisational connections, connections of friendship; each had consequences or effects in the world.

A consideration of the ANT approach was therefore significant in the evolution of my practice. The questions 'Who is doing what?' and, after Latour, 'When we act, who else is acting?' entered my toolbox (Latour 2005: 43). It was my engagement with ANT that first stripped away the assumptions that 'who' is either human or singular, or that doing/acting is immediately obvious. I first encountered the paired terms 'human' and 'nonhuman' through Latour,²⁶ and continue to make use of them. Nevertheless an ANT analysis of associations in the garden came to seem unsuited both to my practice, and to the wider project in which I was engaged with my neighbours, for reasons I outline below.

In an analysis of ANT in relation to gender, race and class, Susan Sturman criticises Latour for leaving 'these categories uninterrogated' while reserving for himself 'the "neutral" male subjectivity born of Enlightenment science' (Sturman 2006: 181). My far-from-neutral position was one reason I had difficulty with ANT. A white middle-class woman among people who might share one, some or none of these characteristics, I was aware that the human Growers were working with many differences between us. Gardening helped to assemble people who might not otherwise have spent time together, and an examination of my fellow gardeners simply as actors, as slugs were actors, was not a strategy I wished to adopt. Moreover I had a personal agenda, and needed a methodology that could encompass my subjective experience and acknowledge that not all my motivations were expressed or

²⁶ See the thesis Introduction p.16 for an explanation of the term 'nonhumans' as used in this research. For Latour "nonhumans" is not just an odd name for what used to be referred to as nature, or the material world' (de Vries 2016: 88); he uses it to designate anything at all, whether material or not, that has agency but is not human.

sanctioned through the group. I wanted the gardens to flourish, to share a love of growing things with others, and also to enjoy myself, to have somewhere to sit in the sun, for my home surroundings to be agreeable; an ongoing list of desires from which I could not step back, and upon which I relied, at times, to keep me going.²⁷

In 'Actor-Network Theory and Material Semiotics' (Law 2007), John Law works with the assumption that 'nothing has reality or form' except in the enactment of 'the webs of relations in which they are located' (Law 2007: 2); this is the basis on which an ANT or what Law calls 'material semiotic' description is based. Law also describes the approach as 'a sensibility to the messy practices of relationality and materiality of the world' (Law 2007: 2). This description notwithstanding, as I worked to take on board the ANT method of describing the world I came to suspect it relied on a degree of detachment on the part of the person making the description, and on selecting situations that were not *too* messy, but had at least some clarity in terms of boundaries and rules: a scientific laboratory, a fishery, a market. One of the case studies used by Law to illustrate the importance to ANT of performativity or 'enactment', is an analysis by Marie-France Garcia-Parpet²⁸ of the strawberry market at Fontaine-en-Sologne, France, in which she considers 'buyers, sellers, notice boards, strawberries, spatial arrangements, economic theories, and rules of conduct' assembled into a 'precarious reality'. Garcia Parpet presumably spent time in the market, but there is no hint as to the subjective experience of being there, or what the strawberries tasted like, if indeed she ate one. As I read it, my own associations with the strawberry were conjured up, from berries I grew in pots outside my flat on Croxted Road Estate to memories of a little patch of wild strawberries by a hillside road in Kent, that I would find year after year among the summer grasses. I loved the semi-hidden plants and their tiny perfumed fruit. How to reconcile the powerful sense of a small, distilled and particular presence in the wild strawberry – its semi-hidden but potent strawberry-ness – with the proposition that there is no stable, knowable strawberry plant there at all? To return to Latour, was the wild strawberry plant in Kent *doing something*, or was it just sitting there? The latter question

²⁷ An awareness of personal motivation as well as agreed group aims is useful when carrying out group work of any sort, but particularly unpaid work for community-based groups. I had witnessed the exhaustion and disillusionment of members of a previous TRA committee on the estate, and the resentments this could generate. Making use of the overlap between self-interest and the interests of the group, not least by focusing on activities that one enjoys, is a valuable strategy in sustaining this kind of engagement.

²⁸ Garcia-Parpet is an anthropologist who has researched the social construction of markets.

only makes sense if the parameters of description are narrowed to a ‘web of relations’ or a range of concerns with which the strawberry might not have an involvement. The strawberry plant was of course doing many things, not least acting as a ‘connecting link between the earth and the sun’ through the tiny chloroplasts in its leaves (Kliment Timiryazev quoted in Mancuso and Viola [2013] 2015: 43).

The influence of Latour’s ANT, and its ability to describe networks of action that include humans and nonhumans equally, is acknowledged by Anna Tsing in her 2015 book *The Mushroom at the End of the World* (Tsing 2015: 315). Tsing works with an ANT-inflected concept of ‘assemblages’, which she describes as ‘open-ended gatherings’ that allow consideration of communal effects without assuming them (Tsing 2015: 22). Her account of the entanglements of the matsutake mushroom, prized as a delicacy in Japan and now to be found in the human-disturbed forests of Oregon in the United States, traces the ways in which the mushroom moves through different economies. Starting with its interdependence with certain species of pine, Tsing follows the mushroom’s connections to reveal multispecies assemblages that encompass pine forests, fungal communities, human migration, gift-giving and commodity flows and the particular scent of the matsutake. In contrast to Garcia-Parpet’s ANT-based account of the strawberry market, Tsing’s description of the assemblages gathered by matsutake notices the subjective impact – sensory, emotional, aesthetic – of the mushroom on the humans who seek it and those who consume it. She notes that in Japan the mushroom is associated with a certain ‘mood’, as expressed in an Edo period poem:

The sound of a temple bell is heard in the cedar forest at dusk
The autumn aroma drifts on the roads below.

Akemi Tachibana (1812–1868) (Tsing 2015: 7)

This emotional and aesthetic appeal of the mushroom underlies its importance as a gift in Japan, and so connects to its movement as a commodity.

Tsing’s multispecies assemblages, to which I return in section 2.6, take forward the investigation of this chapter into how nonhuman lives and activities might be incorporated into the human-centred concept of the commons. The understanding of symbiosis provided by Lynn Margulis below, provides another tool with which to address the question of how a multispecies commons might be realised.

Donna Haraway has frequently acknowledged the influence on her thinking of evolutionary biologist Lynn Margulis, in particular Margulis's work on symbiogenesis, or 'the formation of new organs or organisms through symbiotic mergers' (Haraway 2008: 31; Haraway 2016: 97; Haraway in Tsing et al 2017: M25–M30; Margulis 1998: 33). Haraway uses the challenges that Margulis's work poses to humans and our relationships in the world to call for humans to better attune ourselves to life as 'becoming-with each other in response-ability', rather than only individual struggle (Haraway 2016: 125). Haraway tells us that 'Critters are at stake in one another at every mixing and turning of the terran compost pile' (Haraway in Tsing et al 2017: M45), and Margulis provides some of the detail of how this is so, through her work on symbiosis.

Lynn Margulis gave short shrift to those who regard larger organisms as 'more evolved' than smaller ones:

All beings alive today are equally evolved. All have survived over three thousand million years of evolution from common bacterial ancestors. There are no "higher" beings, no "lower animals", no angels, and no gods (Margulis 1998: 3).

Margulis's great contribution was as the main proponent of symbiosis as a phenomenon vital both to evolutionary processes and to the processes that sustain organisms from day to day.²⁹ 'We are symbionts on a symbiotic planet, and if we care to, we can find symbiosis everywhere. Physical contact is a nonnegotiable requisite for many differing kinds of life' (Margulis 1998: 5). The first single-celled organisms that had nuclei acquired them through a kind of 'indigestion': the nucleus was originally one 'non-nucleated' organism swallowed by a bigger one. Instead of being digested it lived on. According to Margulis, the ability of plants to photosynthesise originates with successive mergers of 'four once independent and physically entirely separate ancestors' (Margulis 1998: 34). These have become the chloroplasts used by plants to convert sunlight into chemical energy, one of the processes fundamental to the ongoing survival of life on our planet.

²⁹ She is also well-known for her collaboration with James Lovelock in developing the Gaia hypothesis. Lovelock proposed that 'life at an early stage of its evolution acquired the capacity to control the global environment to suit its needs', a capacity still active (Lovelock 1972: 579). Margulis contributed her understanding of interactions between microbial life and the atmosphere to propose mechanisms through which this control system might function (Lovelock & Margulis 1974).

The realisation that life forms evolved through symbiotic associations as well as competition, and continue to be fully reliant on these associations, is a powerful one. It disrupts the conception of ‘the survival of the fittest’ as the main engine driving life (Spencer 1864) and challenges our view of ourselves as ‘individuals’.

“We”, a kind of baroque edifice, are rebuilt every two decades or so by fused and mutating symbiotic bacteria. Our bodies are built from protocist sex cells that clone themselves by mitosis.³⁰ Symbiotic interaction is the stuff of life on a crowded planet. Our symbiogenetic core is far older than the recent innovation we call the individual human. (Margulis 1998: 98)

This is not a cosy view of life; symbiosis does not mean a relationship of mutual benefit, and many symbiotic associations seem to have started with the failed attempt of one organism to eat another. Symbiosis simply means ‘living together’, or living in contact with each other, and this contact may have differing levels of benefit or harm for those involved. The term encompasses both mutualistic and parasitic living together.

It is therefore not a matter of us all just getting along together. What Margulis’s work on symbiosis offers is a recognition of some precise ways in which we are ‘at stake in one another’ (Haraway in Tsing et al 2017: M45), and, reliant as we are on the ceaseless action of countless symbionts, of ourselves as inescapably cooperative creations. Of the relatively recent appearance of humans on the planet, Margulis says, ‘My claim is that, like all other apes, humans are not the work of God, but of thousands of millions of years of interaction between highly responsive microbes’ (Margulis 1998: 4).

New York-born anarchist Murray Bookchin, who worked to reconcile anarchism with ecological concerns, associated Margulis’s work with what he termed ‘mystical ecologies’. In his essay ‘Romanticizing Organic Society’ he criticises the rejection by some ecologists of any “‘otherness,” duality and differentiation’ distinguishing humans and human creativity from the nonhuman world (Biehl 1999: 65–74). Without such a differentiation life would be limited to a ‘deadening homogeneity’ and the biosphere ‘a “Gaia” covered by Lynn Margulis’s soup of prokaryotic cells’ (Biehl 1999: 71). In this passage Bookchin appears to identify Margulis’s views with those of deep ecologists, and to see in her work a refusal of any

³⁰ Protocist organisms are a ‘motley group’ of microorganisms whose cells contain a nucleus (unlike bacteria) and are neither animals, fungi nor plants. Mitosis is the process of cell division that enables tissue growth.

distinction between the human and the nonhuman, in what I regard as an oversimplification of Margulis's arguments. While Margulis certainly has much to say about human arrogance, and our lack of awareness of how we intimately depend on, and evolved through, myriad symbiotic processes, this is not the same as flattening out all distinctions between humans and other organisms. Whatever qualities may be specific to human beings, we are also symbiotic beings, whether we like it or not. Becoming conscious of this interconnectedness does not preclude efforts towards human solidarity or the expression of human creativity.

Margulis's microbial perspective on the processes sustaining life led her to admonish that 'the human move to take responsibility for the living earth is laughable', and 'evidence of our immense capacity for self delusion' (Margulis 1998: 115). The claim made in the most recent Living Planet Report that 'Our planet is at a crossroads and we have the opportunity to decide the path ahead' (WWF 2018: 4) might best be tempered by the humility inherent in Margulis's perspective. 'Our strong sense of difference from any other life-form, our sense of species superiority, is a delusion of grandeur' (Margulis 1998: 98).

2.5 Art and Human–Nonhuman Relations

Art historian T. J. Demos engages with both political relations between humans, and human interactions with the nonhuman world by following the trajectory of art practices engaged with political ecology (Demos 2012; 2013; 2015; 2019). In *Decolonizing Nature* (Demos 2019) he describes a 'flourishing of contemporary artistic and activist practices that address and negotiate environmental destruction', surveying art-based strategies that include analysing ecological destruction and devising alternatives that 'model forms of environmental sustainability and egalitarian structures of living' (Demos 2019: 10).

Demos traces a lineage of ecological art practices back to environmental, Land and Earth art in the United States in the 1960s. In early practices, surveyed in the 'Fragile Ecologies' exhibition in 1992,³¹ Demos notes a tendency to separate 'pure nature' into isolated sites, and

³¹ Curated by Barbara Matilsky at the Queens Museum of Art, New York.

a ‘restorationist eco-aesthetics’ which focused on repairing ecosystems without addressing the socio-political systems in which they are enmeshed (Demos 2019: 41–42).³²

The more recent art practices surveyed by Demos himself as curator of the exhibition ‘Rights of Nature: Art and Ecology in the Americas’ (Nottingham Contemporary, 2015) are by contrast concerned with ‘economic, political and cultural, as well as ecological’ aspects of the growing environmental crisis. Work in the exhibition included that of photographer and activist Subhankar Banerjee, who has followed the interconnections of caribou, the Gwich’in people and attempts by oil companies to initiate extraction in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska to ask whether access to food should be a ‘species right’ for both humans and nonhumans, and Mabe Bethônico, who has established a ‘counter archive’ of state-backed mining in Minas Gerais in Brazil to highlight both environmental degradation and the seizing of indigenous people’s lands.

Recent art practice tackling the current context of ecological breakdown often works across broad geographical areas in order to examine the relationships at work.

Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson’s project *Visitations: Polar Bears Out of Place* is a three-year collaborative research project, initiated in 2019, that is looking at polar bear visits to Iceland between the nineteenth century and the present day, drawing on historical documents, folk tales and news reports, as well as scientific writing and research with respect to each bear. Paired with a partner project in the USA, Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson’s layered intervention aims to test ‘the contact zones between humans and polar bears and [...] related networked effects of climate change, population displacement and environmental disruption’ (Visitations website: About page).

Like those of Banerjee and Bethônico, my practice with the Glazebrook Growers engages with land use to consider human–nonhuman relations, and like Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson’s *Polar Bears* project it uses multiple registers of research to bring into focus the

³² Hans Haacke’s *Grass Grows* (1966), a mound of earth sprouting grass in a gallery, and Alan Sonquist’s *Time Landscape New York City* (proposed 1965, realised 1978), attempting the restoration of a precolonial flora on an urban plot in New York, were early examples. Later Helen Mayer Harrison and Newton Harrison took agriculture into the gallery with *Portable Orchard* (1972–1973), Bonnie Ora Sherk established a communal farm beneath a raised freeway (*The Farm*, 1974), and Agnes Denes cultivated a field of wheat on earth excavated from the site of the World Trade Center in New York (*Wheatfield: A Confrontation*, 1982).

entanglement of human-nonhuman lifeways.³³ The scale and perspective deployed are quite different, however. I work from the intimate perspective of a resident at the site of the project and the ‘contact zones’ I examine are small and easily accessible, falling within the domestic and gardening routines of those around me. The particular contribution of working at this small scale and in this context is that it allows an examination of how human-nonhuman interactions play out, and can be recognised, and perhaps changed, in lives as they are lived from day to day. Detail of these interactions, ranging from the drowning of garden molluscs to the cultivation of seedlings and the making of garden compost, are examined in the next section and I return to them in section 3.5.

In the remainder of this section I look at works by two further artists who have engaged with particular sites set to address human–nonhuman relations: *Trafostation* (2016) by Joanna Rajkowska, and the public parks and spaces created by Patricia Johanson, particularly *Fair Park Lagoon* (1981–86). Both artists are concerned with nonhuman agency, but their approaches are very different, and, like those examined above, are useful for methodological comparison.

Polish artist Joanna Rajkowska takes a radical stance in relation to the sense of species superiority identified by Margulis above (Margulis 1998: 98), saying that, in the light of the ‘horror’ created by humans, ‘when art makes humans feel like nothing, I feel right’ (Rajkowska 2017). Her *Trafostation*, 2016, is an art project that aims to pass agency to water and plants by feeding water into a defunct electricity transformer station, which has been planted with ferns, mosses and other plants, in order to create a ‘biological “machine”’ that will continue without further interference from the artist or human presence (figures 50 & 51). Intended to come to maturity over fifty years, *Trafostation* is intended as ‘a gesture of offering the human phenomena of architecture to other species’ (Rajkowska website).

Rajkowska’s view of humans as agents of horror, and her wish to remove humans from centre-stage in her work, are informed by her reading of Timothy Morton, a philosopher interested in the large-scale processes at work in ecological crises (Morton 2010, 2013). Rajkowska describes *Trafostation* as a ‘sense machine’, to be received by a human audience, and the work of both Rajkowska and Morton emphasises the power of somatic experience in

³³ An approach that recalls the ‘polyphonic’ research methods of Anna Tsing, which have informed this study. They are examined in section 3.2.

the face of global ecological crisis. ‘Every day, global warming burns the skin on the back of my neck, making me itch with physical discomfort and inner anxiety’, says Morton in *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (Morton 2013). The vision projected by *Trafostation* is one of dystopian drama, in which humans have provided a striking modernist structure, not to mention the plumbing that feeds water over the walls to hasten their decay, but must be allowed no further place or comfort. This desire to exclude humans was confronted with practical consequences when the artist and those helping her to set up the artwork found a homeless man living in the building before it was flooded, and asked him to leave.



Figure 50, left: Joanna Rajkowska’s *Trafostation* in 2016; Figure 51, right: a design for the project. Images from the artist’s website.

Rajkowska’s *Trafostation* raises multiple questions around relations between humans, human–nonhuman relations, and more specifically the responsibility of an artist within these relationships and to the places in which she intervenes.

Water and plants are understood as the agents and the driving force of the project, hence the form and future of the project is up to them. The vegetation cycle will be a spectacle of non-human forces playing out on a stage created by architecture. And, although the performance is intended for humans, the actors of *Trafostation* are the organisms resident in the ecosystem.

Trafostation is therefore a gesture of offering the human phenomena of architecture to other species.

In response to Rajkowska's assertion, I would argue that nonhuman actors do not require a gesture of offering before intervening in human architecture and projects of all sorts. A process of nonhuman colonisation and decay, set in train by weather, plants and microbes, would in any case have overtaken the transformer station, and the artist's ostensible timeframe of fifty years would have allowed ample time for such a process to become perceptible to a human audience. The intervention chosen by the artist, with plumbing apparatus and planting introduced by humans, suggests instead that her agenda had an accelerated timeframe, dictated more by the demands of commissioning bodies and the art world,³⁴ with a concomitant need to swiftly create an arresting spectacle, and less by a surrender to nonhuman agency, which can be slow and require more careful attention to be perceived. It is not clear how the *Trafostation* plumbing is fed, and what impact the project's use of water might have locally or elsewhere, but it raises the question of why rainfall, unmediated by human apparatus, was not regarded as an adequate actor in the context of the project.

The ejection of a homeless man from the structure to make way for the art project and artificial flooding also raises the question of why the artist's extensive intervention on the site, driven by the need to create an artwork, was acceptable, but the man's presence, driven by the need for shelter, was not. The role of Rajkowska as artist in this project, orchestrating human and nonhuman presences, recalls Donna Haraway's description of the 'Man' of the Anthropocene, who, 'made in the image of a vanished god, takes on superpowers in his secular-sacred ascent' (Haraway 2016: 47). Rajkowska states that 'as humans we are empowered enough, as artists we are empowered enough' (Rajkowska 2017) but the expulsion of the homeless man from the set of *Trafostation* was enabled by a power differential between one human and another, suggesting that her use of 'we' masks difference in a similar way to the 'anthropos' of the Anthropocene. Gabrielle Hecht,³⁵ in her

³⁴ For those unable to visit the site, *Trafostation* can be experienced 'using a multi-channel video and media installation', according to the artist's website. The project formed part of the European Cultural Capital Wrocław 2016 programme, with patronage from the association Dachy Zielone (Rajkowska website).

³⁵ Gabrielle Hecht is Frank Stanton Foundation Professor of Nuclear Security at Stanford University, and has written on technology, society, 'nuclear things', and the effects of nuclear technologies in Africa and France (Hecht 1998, 2012).

essay 'The African Anthropocene' asks, in connection to the idea of the Anthropocene, 'who, exactly, are "we"?' As a concept it 'attributes ecological collapse to an undifferentiated humanity, when in practice both responsibility and vulnerability are unevenly distributed' (Hecht 2018: n.p.). Similarly, Rajkowska's description of her project suggests an 'undifferentiated humanity', while the practicalities of its construction revealed some of the unevenness of responsibility and vulnerability among the humans it touched.

Working in collaboration with human neighbours rather than for an audience seeking art, and with a focus on our situation of inextricable human–nonhuman entanglement, my gardening practice with the Glazebrook Growers is far removed from the imposing spectacle of Rajkowska's *Trafostation*. While I look at my own behaviour and experience, alongside that of my neighbours and fellow gardeners, from a vantage point embedded within our group and location, Rajkowska's intervention operates more as a stage or film set, designed to be observed from outside.³⁶ What my practice does share with Rajkowska's work is an interest in how a rich sensory experience might connect to wider ecological concerns, but instead of creating an arresting visual drama I slow my engagement down, focus it tightly, and work intimately with some of my fellow humans in my attempt to discover such connections. These connections require particular kinds of attentiveness to be noticed, and nature of this attentiveness will be explored in section 2.6, and then in greater detail through Chapter Three.

A different approach to acknowledging the agency of nonhumans has been used by Patricia Johanson, who in the 1960s began to imagine large-scale artworks that would work to bring life to human-damaged areas of land, taking their forms from the plants and animals local to that area. 'The most important aspect of my art is in the parts I do *not* design', states Johanson, yet a design strategy based on a lengthy process of research and engagement has characterised her projects (Kelley 2006: 20).

Perhaps her best-known intervention is *Fair Park Lagoon* (1981–86) in Dallas, Texas, where Johanson's extensive land sculptures used the forms of two Texas plants to help restore a degraded lagoon ecosystem in an urban park (see Kastner [1998] 2005: 158–159, 265–266;

³⁶ Rajkowska's attitude to her human audience recalls Kester's 'orthopedic aesthetic', discussed in relation to Fritz Haeg and Anna Francis in section 1.6, in which the flawed modern subject is set right by the artist, who is 'uniquely suited to both recognize and remedy this defect'; the defect is identified by Haeg and Francis as that of insufficient community, while for Rajkowska it is that of species arrogance (Kester 2005: 88).

Kelly 2006: 16–25). The entangled root, stem and leaf forms of the delta duck-potato, *Sagittaria platyphylla*, were used to make entwined walkways, perches and islands that protected the eroding shoreline, provided spaces for plants, fish and turtles, and gave human park users paths to explore. The Texas fern *Pteris multifida* provided shapes for causeways and bridges with small-scale plant basins and fish ponds in between them. The sculptural elements were accompanied by biological restoration. A littoral zone of plants stabilised banks, provided nesting sites for insects, birds and small mammals and reduced the fertiliser run-off that had fed the algal blooms, while a fauna of snails, clams, freshwater sponges, shrimp, fish, reptiles and waterfowl was re-established. Johanson's project transformed an ecologically depleted area into one teeming with life, and gave city-dwellers access not just to a park, but a functioning ecosystem.

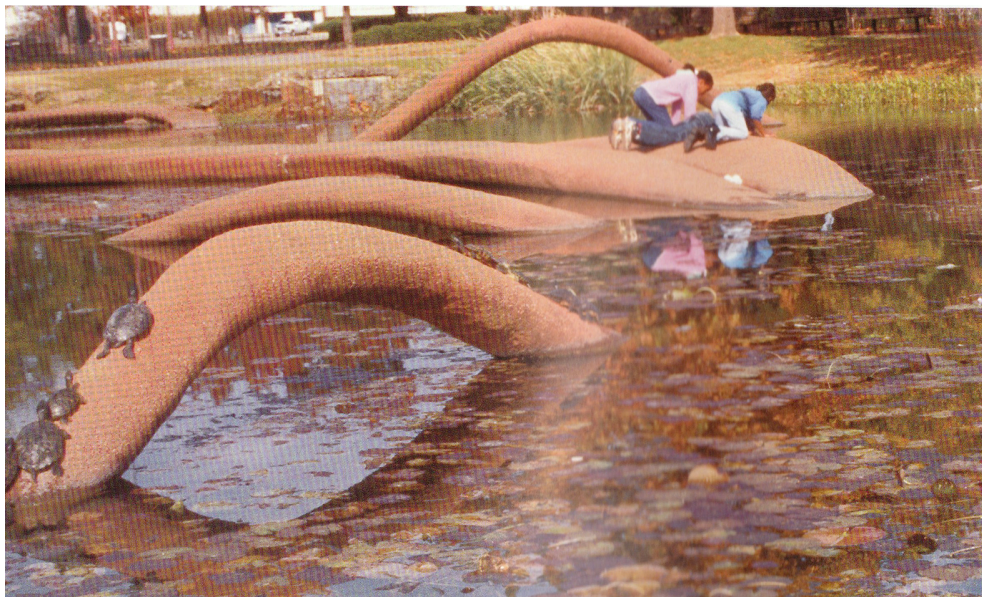


Figure 52: Patricia Johanson's *Sagittaria platyphylla*, Fair Park Lagoon, Dallas, 235' x 175' x 12', gunite, plants and animals, 1981–1986, reproduced in *Art and Survival* (Kelly 2006).

Many of Johanson's proposals have never been realised, such as the *Rocky Marciano Trail* (1997–1999) conceived for Brockton, Massachusetts. Tracing the route of the training runs made around Brockton in the 1940s by Marciano, later a celebrated heavyweight boxing champion, the project envisaged three public sites linked by green streets. Linking disparate urban neighbourhoods in a town badly affected by the loss of manufacturing jobs, the Trail was to provide a route for human pedestrians and a biological corridor for wildlife, as well as restoring a network of brooks and wetlands, thereby delivering both human benefits and ecological restoration.

Where Rajkowska's *Trafostation* partially hid the plumbing and planting needed to accelerate the transformation of her chosen site, creating a covertly staged spectacle of human abandonment and nonhuman colonisation, Johanson's designed elements are overt, but leave space for nonhuman species to re-establish themselves alongside human use. The question of how her projects relate to and affect the surrounding area is the subject of a lengthy process of research and engagement that precedes any physical construction.

I never design until I have discovered the meaning of the place. Each place has a unique set of conditions, and we need an intimate understanding of what it has been, is now, and will become in the future, in order to create a design that is more than a wilful act. (Johanson in Kelley 2006: 19)

This makes Johanson's designs, constructed or not yet realised, a useful methodological source. Her approach is a situated one, grounded in research into a specific situation, and combining her partial perspective as an artist and as a mother³⁷ with the scientific and organisational disciplines relevant to the situations she encounters. She has pursued a personal vision³⁸ while acquiring expertise in fields including biology and engineering, and her projects grow out of this multifaceted strategy. Johanson's work demonstrates the value of an individual vision mediated through a durational process of dialogue and research.

Johanson's approach to timescale is also significant. Rather than fitting her work into slots of time determined by commissioners, she develops her projects over years. Often involving public infrastructure, they must be negotiated with multiple agencies and Johanson has experienced 'failure, postponement and even sabotage' in projects such as *Endangered Garden* (1987–1995). A design for a sewer system in San Francisco Bay that used the forms of the Garter Snake, it was to give people access to the waterfront while providing habitat for various endangered species, but was only partially constructed (figure 53). In spite of this 'the world at that one place is more livable and whole because of her involvement' (Kelley 2006: 29).

³⁷ She remarks, 'One key benefit I have in all my parks is that I've spent so much time observing my own children, which is invaluable when you design public spaces' (Johanson in Kelley 2006: 148).

³⁸ Johanson worked in isolation for years, and when her designs were exhibited they were discussed as visionary fantasies rather than practical proposals (Kelley 2006: 14).

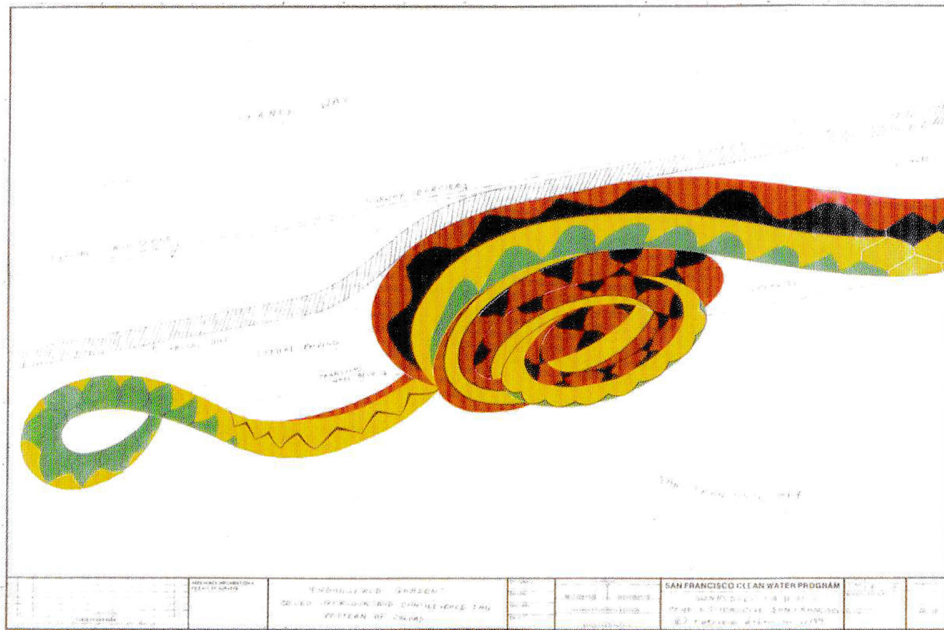


Figure 53: Patricia Johanson, *Endangered Garden, Coiled Tail Overlook and Cantilevered Tail*, 22" x 34", acrylic and ink, 1989, reproduced in *Art and Survival* (Kelly 2006).

In Johanson's work it is taken for granted that 'livable' means supportive of the life of both humans and nonhumans, and there is no neat division between where humans go and where 'wild' nonhumans can live. *Fair Park Lagoon* and *Endangered Garden* are investigations into how places can become better habitats for both humans and nonhumans, and they acknowledge and nurture multi-layered symbioses, or situations of 'living in contact' with one another.

Johanson's art practice is not overtly political, but I regard it, like mine with the Glazebrook Growers, as an expression of political ecology after Demos. Working at different scales, both practices address what alternatives to environmental destruction might look like, and we do so through a careful engagement with those who live and play at the sites of our interventions.

2.7 Nonhumans, Gardening Practice and 'Arts of Noticing'

At the back of my flat on Croxted Road Estate I grew foxgloves for several years, until they were dug out by council workers in 2014. A striking plant, which received a stream of bumble bees and other insect visitors, it attracted the attention of the children who were themselves drawn to my jumble of flowers and vegetables. Having noted a lack of familiarity with specific plants among the children, I began to use plant names more frequently in

conversation, and the word 'foxglove' aroused their interest, as had the plant. On a morning soon after I first named it to one small girl, I overheard her comment to her father, 'I know what that is; that's a foxglove,' as they passed my flat on the way to school. A small moment, but one that seemed significant: with a brief introduction the girl had made a kind of acquaintance with that particular plant, was proud of knowing its name, and was already passing it on.

Strawberry plants, which I grew in pots on the concrete path to my back door, were another favourite. The red fruit caused excitement when they appeared, recalling my own on finding wild strawberries in Kent many years before, and they regularly vanished when only half ripe. Children started to ask if there were any at the oddest times, even in the depths of winter, and even after I had explained that the strawberries only fruited in the summer. The plants' trefoil leaves, white flowers and green fruit ripening to red, appearing in succession year by year, first outside my flat and later in the Kitchen Garden, became slow teachers of seasons to children unimpressed by verbal explanations.

Anna Tsing, whose concept of assemblages is introduced above, argues that 'tools for noticing' are needed now that life on earth seems at stake and proposes her discipline of anthropology as an 'art of noticing' (Tsing 2015: 23–24, 143). Tsing has said that her use of noticing as a tool is indebted to Donna Haraway, who 'follows threads to draw attention to the interplay across divergent projects' (Tsing 2015: 293). Haraway uses language to bring into question accepted categories, and 'to say things without believing in the names' (Schneider 2005: 156). While useful conceptually, it can be difficult to know how to translate this approach into practice on the ground with a group as pragmatic as the Glazebrook Growers, and I use the methods offered by Tsing to translate into practice Haraway's ideas on situatedness and interspecies relations. I will frame the garden as a multispecies assemblage to propose gardening and, in the following chapter, listening as complementary 'arts of noticing'.

The creation of the Kitchen Garden, which I explored in relation to human relations in Chapter One, created new potential for situations of noticing not just the presence of a plant, or the rhythms of its flowering and fruiting, but more complex systems and requirements that enable nonhuman lives to flourish. The garden as a whole hosts an assemblage of plants, insects, microbes and humans, which is affected by local topography and conditions including climate, gardening practices and food preferences. Within that

wider gathering, the compost bins host a particular type of working-together between fungi, bacteria, invertebrates, plant matter, the structure of the plastic bins, and the humans ‘managing’ them. In what follows I look at these multispecies assemblages in the garden, with an emphasis on opportunities they provide to notice symbiotic relationships.

From the outset, the Glazebrook Growers chose to follow organic gardening practices, and these contain within them an acknowledgement of symbiotic processes. The principles of organic gardening are based on encouraging soil life to support plant growth, building biodiversity in the growing area, avoiding the use of toxic chemicals as pesticides and herbicides, and minimising the use of resources (Garden Organic website).



Figure 54, left: A workshop and social event organised by the Glazebrook Growers, August 2017. Urban gardener Paul Richens demonstrates how to make plant-based fertilisers to feed plants indirectly through their symbiotic relationships with soil flora. Photo: J. Mansell. Figure 55, right: Growers examine a sample of humus at a workshop in 2016.

The use of synthetic fertilisers is prohibited because they can disrupt the soil microbiome, altering the balance between different soil microbes, and in some situations wiping out certain types of microbe altogether (Barabasz et al 2002; Geisseler and Scow 2014). ‘Bulk’ fertilisers, such as garden compost, that add partially decomposed organic matter to the soil, are preferred to liquid fertilisers for their ability to improve soil structure and support microbial life.³⁹ For this reason, the Glazebrook Growers acquired several compost bins

³⁹ Liquid fertilisers are used sparingly and during times of fast growth since they give a short, intense burst of nutrients. They are more prone to leach out into ground water if not taken up by plants.

while setting up our gardens,⁴⁰ and were soon producing a compost consisting of a rotted-down mixture of weeds, kitchen waste and plain cardboard.

In 2017 the Glazebrook Growers were also given two wormeries, layered ‘worm farms’, the inhabitants of which could be fed with a mixture of cardboard, discarded food and garden waste. The fluid that drained from the wormeries, known as ‘worm tea’, is a kind of fertiliser that is diluted and watered onto the soil. This encourages microbial activity, and the symbiotic relationships through which soil microbes supply nutrients to plants and are in turn fed by root exudates.⁴¹



Figure 56, left: Herbalist Janine Gerhardt leads an exploration of the ‘wild’ flora on Croxted Road Estate, identifying the colonies of selfheal and ribwort plantain mentioned in section 2.2. Figure 57, right: An information sheet used by Gerhardt, showing characteristics of the daisy *Bellis perennis*, and its uses for human beings. Photos: J. Mansell.

These composting systems constitute multispecies assemblages in which many species feed each other to provide food for themselves. Inside the human-designed containers interactions between microbes, worms and the ‘waste’ generated by cooking and gardening, produce compost. When this is spread on the surface of a vegetable bed it is consumed and drawn into the soil by earthworms, where it provides a hospitable, water-retaining medium for both microbes and plant roots. Proliferating microbes liberate nutrients for plants and

⁴⁰ The bins themselves were passed on from a North London composting scheme that had closed down.

⁴¹ Root exudates are compounds released into the soil by plant roots, leading to a process called ‘soil priming’ in which microbial activity increases, often liberating nutrients important to plant health (Gargallo-Garriga et al 2017: 1).

plant roots exude compounds that feed microbes. This mutual feeding then supports the production of vegetables eaten by humans.

Participation in such assemblages gives humans the opportunity to observe and value symbiotic relationships.⁴² Nevertheless, it is perfectly possible to follow the guidelines of organic gardening without an awareness of the symbiotic relationships they intend to foster.

Attention must be paid to the ways in which gardeners encounter symbiosis in the garden in order to facilitate its recognition. Once the Kitchen Garden had been established, part of the organisational work of the Glazebrook Growers was to build a knowledge of organic gardening techniques and an understanding of why they are used. In July 2016 gardening tutor Paul Richens ran a composting workshop in the Kitchen Garden that supplemented basic knowledge of composting techniques with an understanding of how these support particular types of microbial life, revealing that both worms and bacteria actively regulate the temperature of their surroundings.⁴³

An opportunity for a closer view of symbiosis is provided when seedlings are transferred from trays to pots. In April 2017 the Glazebrook Growers held an event to coincide with the 'Big Dig' day organised by Capital Growth.⁴⁴ The various activities included 'pricking out' flower seedlings, a method of teasing each tiny plant away from its neighbours in the seed tray and potting it up to grow on separately. This method generated an abundance of plants, and it also gave an early view of the web of activity beneath the soil surface. A small seedling, consisting of a vulnerable stem and just two or four recently-emerged leaves, could trail a much longer tangle of roots, festooned with little clumps of compost that seemed to cling on even when it proved impossible to lift roots with an intact portion of soil (figure 58).

⁴² Which are increasingly recognised as affecting and being affected by climate change. A recent paper that sought to better understand 'the impacts of water stress on plants, soils and their interactions' showed that drought conditions irreversibly changed the exudates that tree roots of the Holm oak *Quercus ilex* were able to produce even after the drought came to an end (Gargallo-Garriga et al 2018).

⁴³ Worms tend to maintain a relatively cool temperature, while different types of bacteria can raise the temperature to successively higher levels, with thermophiles and hyperthermophiles able to raise compost temperatures to 80°C and 106°C respectively (Richens 2016).

⁴⁴ Capital Growth is an organisation that supports food growing in London. The Big Dig is an annual event that matches community growing projects with volunteers wishing to lend a hand with gardening activities.

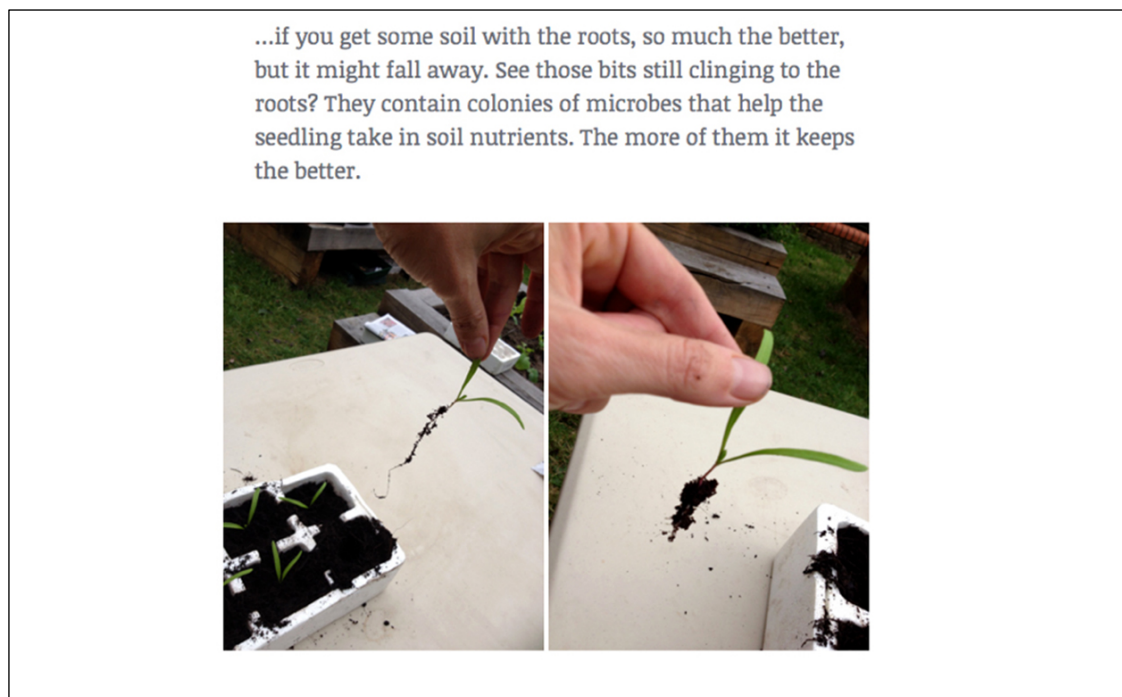


Figure 58: Extract from 'Pricking Out and Potting Up,' a step-by-step instructional post on the Glazebrook Growers' blog, October 2016, showing how to transfer seedlings from seed trays to pots. The text points out how microbial symbiont colonies come within the range of human vision as they create clumps of compost around seedling roots.

To successfully prick out and pot on the seedlings, the team of three who volunteered for the task were obliged to be mindful of the particular fragility of the stems, gingerly manipulating the plants by their leaves – marginally tougher than the stems and able to sustain damage without killing the plant – and using a pencil to lift the roots and as much earth as possible. In other words it required a careful focus on the plant and an engagement with the characteristics through which its life was sustained. The seedlings were snapdragons (*Antirrhinum majus*), wallflowers (*Erysimum cheiri*) and Echinacea, selected for the colour of their flowers and their capacity to feed insects. Far from endangered, and not wild in the UK or 'native' here, but with their own set of nonhuman requirements.

2.8 Conclusion

In 2017, a drastic decline in insect numbers recorded in Germany hit the news (Carrington 2017; *Nature* 2017). Researchers in Krefeld, who had been working with amateur entomologists across Germany, noted:

Our results document a dramatic decline in average airborne insect biomass of 76% (up to 82% in midsummer) in just 27 years for protected nature areas in Germany. [...] Our results demonstrate that recently reported declines in several taxa such as butterflies, wild bees and moths, are in parallel with a severe loss of total aerial insect biomass, suggesting that it is not only the vulnerable species but the flying insect community as a whole, that has been decimated over the last few decades. (Hallman et al 2017: np)

The data were the more disturbing for having been gathered ‘in protected areas that are meant to preserve ecosystem functions and biodiversity’ (Hallman et al 2017: np).⁴⁵

Discussion of the report linked the plummeting insect population to the practice of ‘dosing whole landscapes with chemicals’ (Carrington 2017: n.p.). On reading about this, I thought back to my own casual observation of the disappearance of flying insects over three decades, that had caused me great unease.⁴⁶

While I was relieved that a phenomenon that had troubled me for twenty years was finally the subject of public discussion, I was also puzzled that it was presented as a novel discovery.⁴⁷ How was a change on this scale, which had presented itself clearly to a layperson who had not set out to look for it, ‘news’ decades after it became easily perceptible? We saw in section 2.3, using the work of Silvia Federici, how both humans and nonhumans become vulnerable to exploitation when they are categorised as a resource, but in a world so widely affected by human activity, not being regarded as a resource may render one entirely invisible. In this way humans annihilate certain of our planetmates almost casually, for instance by changing land use until it only benefits humans, and only in the narrowest sense, noticing and acknowledging the results of our activities long after they first occur. Haraway and Tsing show how, through the plantation, this annihilation of nonhumans goes hand-in-hand with the destruction of indigenous commons, and the dispossession of many humans.

⁴⁵ They were taken to have implications for insect populations more widely.

⁴⁶ I had noticed through the 1980s and 1990s, at home in Kent, that the crowds of moths and flies drawn to my bedroom lamp at night were vanishing. Conversations with a friend in Colombia revealed that he had had a parallel experience over the same period. The quantity of insects drawn to the light at his family’s coffee farm at night had also dramatically diminished (Ceballos 2018).

⁴⁷ Previous studies had documented declines in taxa such as moths (Fox et al 2014), or bumblebees (Goulson et al 2008); the particular contribution of the Krefeld report was to show what had happened to the biomass of flying insects overall; the air had been depopulated.

In light of this, the importance of humans attuning ourselves to the lives of our nonhuman planetmates becomes key to a less destructive way of human living. If commoning practices are to accommodate nonhumans, a conceptual and imaginative shift in the way humans see themselves in relation to nonhumans is required. The insights of evolutionary biology in the work of Lynn Margulis, which Haraway elaborates into a multispecies 'becoming-with', lead to my proposition that the recognition of symbiosis is a conceptual move by which humans can accept our situation of unavoidable interdependence.

A consideration of the contribution of art practice to questions of human-nonhuman living-together looked at work by Joanna Rajkowska and Patricia Johanson. While Rajkowska's *Trafostation* is a striking intervention, I question what it has to contribute at a moment of acute ecological crisis that is 'absolutely *not* a species act', but rather the consequence of the actions of some humans over a particular period (Haraway, Tsing & Mitman 2019: 4). Johanson also restores space to nonhumans, but on a wider scale and using a sustained, practical engagement in which, after Tsing, '[h]umans become only one of many participants in making livability' (Tsing 2015: 263). An examination of her projects confirms the value of using multiple vantage points, including personal experience and scientific research, in building a situated approach; the approach also underlying this thesis.

Comparison to work on wider scales, both municipal and geographical, highlights the particular contribution of research on the small scale of the Glazebrook Growers. In our small Kitchen Garden, the Glazebrook Growers are shown to be part of a symbiotic commons, reliant on microbe-plant-human relations as well as the human organisation described in Chapter One, and gardening activities are shown to provide opportunities for noticing this human-nonhuman commons. The gardening practices undertaken by the Glazebrook Growers, although weighted to benefit humans, and violent in regard to certain nonhumans, have the potential to begin the process of connecting humans to nonhuman needs, and to do so within a context accessible to many humans.

However, while gardening activities and workshops are useful in cultivating awareness of nonhuman activities, the essentially pragmatic context they provide for learning limits the methods by which they can challenge human habits of perception. In Chapter Three I introduce the framework of a perceptual commons and look at methods of embodied practice, complementary to those of gardening, that work with sensory perception to move human gardeners out of the realm of the familiar.

Chapter Three: Listening as Commoning

3.0 Introduction

In February 2017, I encountered a robin singing loudly from a small tree planted into the pavement. Having stopped to listen, I became aware of several more robins nearby:

There's another robin, maybe two, maybe more, one of them on the other side of the nearest houses, and I realise that 'my' robin seems to be listening, then interjecting; its short bursts and more florid elaborations are responding to what it hears in the pauses.

As I stand and listen, everything shifts a little. My routes, foot-treads, territories. The robins' patches, lines of flight, sonic declarations. There are streets and houses, but not just streets and houses. These other, feathered, beasts are practising different spaces and lives above and interweaving with our human ones. It's happening constantly, of course, and with millions of different organisms in any one place, but for me it's made real at this moment, on this South London street, by a few birds singing at (with?) each other. And one particular bird whose dedication to the task of singing makes me feel that all my own preoccupations are paper-thin and throw-away. This bird doesn't give a toss about me. And that makes me happy, as though a burden is lifted. (Networking Eden blog: February 2017)

I quote at length from my individual reflection on this moment, because the impact of the encounter demonstrates the potentials activated by attention to sound. It disrupted my business-as-usual perception of the streets and living things around me; it was an indicator of action, in this case nonhuman action, as the birds sang and communicated their territories (and who knows what else); and it traversed spaces, as birdsong crossed human-made streets and spaces, making perceptible a different, robin-generated, set of spaces and connections. Less easy to define but equally significant is the sensation of joy it provoked, a 'state of being permeable, instigated by sound' (LaBelle 2018).

I argued in Chapter Two that human perception and self-perception, particularly in terms of our place in relationship to other species, underlies exploitative behaviours. The Aristotelian 'pyramid of life' has provided a conceptual framework for such attitudes, which find practical expression not only through capitalist resource extraction, but also in the appropriator-resource dichotomy at work in commoning arrangements. It is therefore in the realm of perception, in the overlapping territories of the sensory and the conceptual, that I seek to establish the ground for a commons in which actions other than, and as well as,

human ones might be recognised and supported. The perceptual ground which I explore in the first part of this chapter is that of sound.

In their book *Ways of Sensing* (2014), David Howes and Constance Classen¹ consider the particular characteristics of the senses:

Touch is intimate and reciprocal: when we touch someone, that person feels our touch. Sight, by contrast, operates at a distance and requires no physical contact [or] interaction. [...] Sound in turn, is dynamic. We can see things that are completely still, but when we hear something we know an activity is taking place. There are no still sounds. (Howes & Classen 2014: 8)

The practice of the Glazebrook Growers involves multisensory engagement, and indeed this is one of the attractions of gardening. More than most urban activities in the global North, working in a garden engages touch, smell, taste and hearing, as well as sight. Of the senses, I have chosen to explore the specific potential of listening and sound for three main reasons. The first is that shifting emphasis from looking to listening involves, for many humans, a shift in our habitual way of relating to the world, which tends to rely heavily on sight. Howes and Classen note that, in addition to the physiological and practical importance of sight, it ‘has a high cultural value in Western society’, and ‘has been exalted as a “noble” sense and associated with both spiritual and intellectual enlightenment’ (Howes & Classen 2014: 1). This dominance can result in ‘a reduction of knowledge to the visual’ (Bull & Back 2003: 2), and it has been further entrenched by the rising importance of screen-based computing technologies in daily life. By moving away from a habitual preference for the visual, and into a sounding world, I seek a greater openness and vulnerability to encounters with others, including nonhuman others. The second reason for the use of listening is the particular quality of sound as a communicator of action (‘there are no still sounds’), which aligns with my emphasis on the commons as continually realised by the actions of commoners. It recalls also the requirement of ANT-based descriptions, which have influenced this study, that ‘all the actors *do something*, and don’t just sit there’ (Latour 2005: 128), and Lewis Hyde’s definition of a commons as a ‘right of action’. The third is the capacity of sound to traverse, and so link, spaces, establishing connections that are perceptible despite the presence of walls and other such barriers, that block sightlines. This

¹ David Howes is an anthropologist who has researched the life of the senses in society. Constance Classen is a cultural historian who specialises in the history of the senses.

capacity enables the sensing of connections, such as those of the robins mentioned above, that map onto space differently from the physical structures built by humans.

The ground for my moment of reflection, prompted by a robin, had been laid by a growing interest in sound and listening practices. In section 3.1 I give a brief account of how these have evolved since the mid twentieth century, looking at the work of Murray Schafer and Bernie Krause, and the development of the overlapping fields of soundscape ecology and acoustic ecology. Through the work of contemporary sound artists I consider how sound makes accessible nonhuman lives usually beyond the reach of human perception, allows us to encounter familiar surroundings differently, and transforms vulnerability into engagement.

In section 3.2 I place sound in relation to the commons. Having proposed in Chapter Two that human recognition of symbiosis could alter conceptions of our relationships with nonhuman species, and enable an awareness both of our own interdependence and of the crises of survival affecting so many nonhumans, I now propose that recognition of our symbiotic condition might be enabled within a perceptual commons, as proposed by Clarice Allgood. One layer within the multilayered commons of the garden, the perceptual commons can be experienced and recognised through the medium of sound. I use Anna Tsing's concept of the polyphonic assemblage to bring human intention into this commons, moving beyond a passive recognition of what is, and setting human voices and activities within a polyphony of lifeways.

To translate the concept of a perceptual, polyphonic commons into practice I turn in section 3.3 to composer Pauline Oliveros and the meditative discipline of Deep Listening. A contemporary of Murray Schafer, Oliveros developed an approach to listening that delays judgement and categorisation, and connects the inner world of human thought and dreams to the outer soundscape. Arising out of Oliveros's teaching practice, it is suited to working with groups, and in section 3.4 I explore the two Deep Listening sessions undertaken with the Glazebrook Growers in the Kitchen Garden, and the implications of the openness and vulnerability fostered by the practice.

In the final section I look at the Glazebrook Growers' compost bins as multispecies assemblages, and seek to draw together themes of commoning that I developed earlier in this thesis with the perceptual and acoustic investigation that is the subject of this chapter. I

look for ways into the polyphonic commons of the bins that move beyond the acoustic to engage other senses. I then return to sound practice to consider the potential of technology in extending human perception in ways that may open new avenues of research.

3.1 Listening, Soundscapes and Acoustic Ecology

For soundscape ecologist Bernie Krause, who has been recording environments around the world since 1968, wild soundscapes ‘provide exceptionally instructive perspectives from which to connect with the living planet’, and ‘narratives that can point us to avenues of healthy survival’ (Krause 2015: 25–26). Krause defines a soundscape as ‘all of the sound that reaches our ears in a given moment’ and has been a pioneer in approaching the nonhuman world through this means (Krause [2012] 2013: 26). Previous wildlife recordists had concentrated on achieving clear recordings of single species, thus assembling ‘distorted snapshots of solo animals’ abstracted from their acoustic world (Krause 2015: 35). Krause became interested in the entire assemblage of sounds he experienced in different environments and, by making ‘whole-habitat recordings’, helped to develop a different approach to perceiving the nonhuman world.

Figure 59 is a visual representation, or ‘spectrogram’ of two recordings made by Krause in a forest in the Sierra Nevada, California, just before selective logging and a year afterwards. While to the human eye the landscape looked unchanged ‘and would have supported the logging company’s sustainability contention’, both the recordings and the accompanying spectrograms demonstrated that the previously ‘rich biophony [...] was now practically silent’ (Krause 2015: 30). The forest articulated its depauperation through sound, and listening revealed what could not easily be seen.

‘Biophony’, meaning the collective sound produced by all living organisms in a biome, is part of a vocabulary developed by Krause with which to describe an acoustic approach to the world. ‘Geophony’ is ‘the non-biological natural sounds produced in any given habitat’, such as the sound of wind in trees, and ‘anthropophony’ is all of the sounds generated by humans (Krause 2015: 11–12).

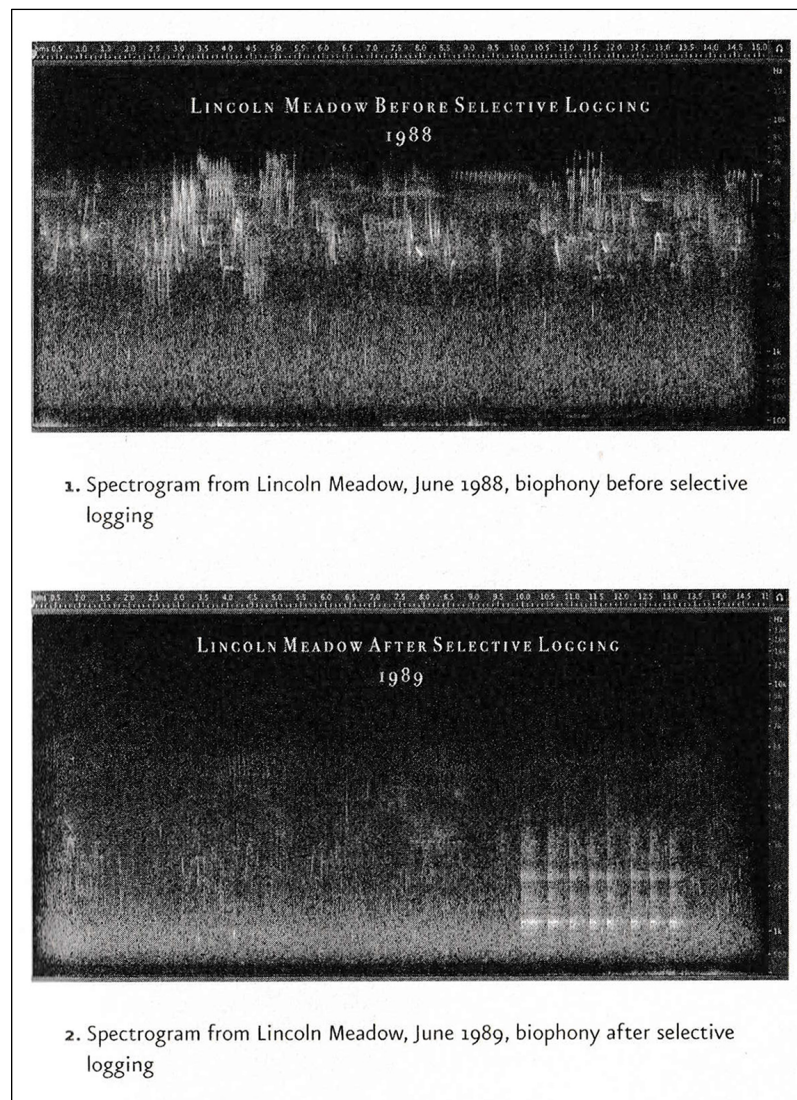


Figure 59: Spectrograms showing the impact on biophony, and therefore on ecology, of selective logging in a Californian forest, reproduced in *Voices of the Wild* (Krause 2015).

This vocabulary is used by Krause in conjunction with a significant theoretical tool he developed with Ruth Happel: the ‘niche hypothesis’ (Krause [2012] 2013: 99–103).² This proposes that the sounds emitted by living organisms that evolve alongside each other ‘tend to split into a series of unoccupied channels’, so that individual voices do not overlap and can still be heard (Krause [2012] 2013: 98). Insects, different birds and other creatures may use different frequencies in the acoustic bandwidth, or they may time their sounding to alternate with something occupying the same frequency, or to occur at a different time of day (Krause [2012] 2013: 99–103). In this way, noticing how the sounds in a given location relate to each other can reveal the diversity or disruption of a given ecology, and whether

² The insight and vocabulary developed by Krause will contribute to my interpretation of the listening sessions conducted in the Kitchen Garden, described in section 3.4.

living creatures have evolved together. Changes in biophony reflect changes in ecology. Krause has called this approach ‘soundscape ecology’.³

The term ‘soundscape’, does not originate with Krause, however, but with Canadian composer and environmentalist Murray Schafer, to whom the work of Krause and other sound practitioners has been indebted. Schafer coined the term in the 1960s, establishing a research group called the World Soundscape Project. In 1975 the group travelled across Europe to gather material for ‘Five Village Soundscapes’, approximately hour-long edited pieces that sought to capture the particular sound world of each village.⁴ Schafer and his colleagues worked in urban as well as rural and ‘natural’ locations, and demonstrated the value of the soundscape in representing a particular time and location through a unique blend of voices (Krause [2012] 2013: 27).

Since the 1970s soundscape projects influenced by Schafer’s work have proliferated, and ‘acoustic ecology’ has become an established field.⁵ Acoustic ecology represents an overlapping but distinct approach to soundscape ecology, in that it gives greater weight to social, cultural and art-based, as opposed to mainly ecological, engagements.⁶ Artist Jana Winderen, whose recent sound works have been made with recordings gathered in oceans and rivers, is concerned with ‘audio environments and ecosystems which are hard for humans to access, both physically and aurally’. Her compositions have made available to humans ‘the realm of the phytoplankton’ through hydrophone recordings from the Atlantic (*The Wanderer*, 2015), and investigated ‘the use and production of sound by decapods’, a kind of shrimp (*The Noisiest Guys on the Planet*, 2009–10). Winderen engages with human

³ Krause’s approach of interpreting ecology through sound has informed a vast data collection project currently under way. The Australian Acoustic Observatory is a ‘continental-scale acoustic sensor network, recording for a five-year period across multiple Australian ecosystems’ through 400 recording devices (Australian Acoustic Observatory website).

⁴ Schafer’s ideas, and his concept of the soundscape were further disseminated with the publication of his influential book *The Tuning of the World* in 1977 (Schafer 1977; Bull & Back 2003; 23).

⁵ Served by the World Forum for Acoustic Ecology and the journal *Soundscape*.

⁶ This is not a hard and fast division: Krause is a musician and composer as well as a soundscape ecologist, and there are art-based soundscape projects made in consultation with scientists.

sensory and associative experience through her work, while disseminating scientific knowledge about the nonhuman species she records.⁷

The sound work of Jez Riley French is guided by ‘detail, simplicity and his emotive response to places and situations’ (Jez Riley French website: About page), and, in a similar vein to Winderen, this has included remote locations such as glacial lakes, where he has captured the sound of ancient air escaping from glaciers (*Island/Fjórar*, 2013–ongoing). Riley French also investigates the subtle details of more accessible soundscapes and ecologies: the sound of forced rhubarb growing, of tadpoles, the resonance of a footbridge. His interest encompasses the anthropophony of human technologies, ‘wild’ biophony and the geophony of planetary movement, a breadth of curiosity that recalls the work of Pauline Oliveros, to whom we will turn in section 3.3.

Addressing the World Conference for Acoustic Ecology in 2011, Murray Schafer remarked that no object can make a sound by itself; rather ‘all sounds result from two or more objects moving and touching one another’ (Schafer 2011). This reciprocal quality of sound, the fact that it always speaks of contact and friction, has been drawn out by artist and theorist Brandon LaBelle, who conceives of sound as an ‘area of conflict, contact, shared space’, in which one encounters both ‘the pain of the arrival of the other’ and ‘the joy of community’ (LaBelle 2018). This conception of sound as a space of encounter will be further investigated through the practice described in section 3.4, and it also brings us back to the question of the commons.

3.2 The Perceptual Commons and Soundscape as Polyphony

To incorporate the ‘shared space’ of sound within the framework of the commons, I turn to potter and independent scholar Clarice Allgood’s notion of the ‘perceptual commons’. In the context of the garden, the perceptual commons is one in which both human and nonhuman actors can be recognised, and a means of perceiving the symbiosis in which our garden commons is held. In her essay ‘Negative Space: Reframing Personal Space as a Perceptual Commons’, Allgood takes the concept of ‘personal space’ and considers it as a commons held in the perceptual realm (Allgood 2010). In an analysis focused on hearing and

⁷ Winderen notes that few people understand ‘the various grunts and knocking sounds and rumbling sounds that cod, haddock, pollock other fish and crustaceas produce, and how they experience and orientate themselves through the use of sound’ (Jana Winderen website: releases page).

sight, the two 'distance' senses, Allgood reframes 'empty space' as perceptual space, and then as a perceptual commons.

'Personal distance' was originally defined in the 1960s by anthropologist Edward Hall in the context of animal territories; he analysed the 'spatial experience' of humans as a multisensory experience shaped by requirements akin to the territorial requirements of other animals (Hall [1966] 1990: xi, 10–22, 60).⁸ Allgood takes Hall's concept and combines it with the idea of 'negative space' (Allgood 2010). The different definitions of negative space set out by Allgood include Marc Augé's 'non-place': a place of 'compressed programmed meaning' such as an airport, motorway or shopping mall, in which the individual becomes an anonymous passenger or consumer, a recipient for the sounds and sights of advertising, traffic and commerce. An alternative definition, the 'negative' space separating objects depicted in art, opens up a positive interpretation of empty space as 'the condition for possibility', a distance that joins as well as separating bodies, and allows the possibility of movement. Allgood's analysis moves this combined concept of personal/negative space into the framework of the commons, so that individual perceptual experience is placed within a context of collective responsibility. The perceptual commons within which individual (or shared) experience takes place may be restricted and enclosed, or maintained as a space of movement and possibility. Thus the sound of motor traffic, or advertising in visual or auditory media, become a kind of enclosure, dominating a shared perceptual space for private and commercial ends. For Allgood, this enclosure is what transforms the negative space of possibility into a 'non-place', and acts to restrict the range of experiences and interactions that might otherwise take place.⁹

In this way, using the lens of the commons, and by 'naming a nothing a *something*', Allgood is able on the one hand to suggest a common space of possibility within the perceptual realm, and on the other to define the intrusion of imagery and sound for commercial or

⁸ Hall's book *The Hidden Dimension* (Hall [1966] 1990) uses examples from human behaviours in different countries, and from a wide range of other species, from sticklebacks to walruses, to construct his arguments. There is perhaps a lack of clarity as to how he has decided whether behaviours are species-specific, or indeed specific to males, or have wider relevance.

⁹ Allgood places herself in dialogue with Ursula Franklin, who in 1993 described the use of silence by Quakers 'to let the unforeseen, unforeseeable, and unprogrammed happen'. For Franklin this kind of silence 'is the environment that enables the unprogrammed' (Franklin [1993] 2000: 15).

‘programmatic’ ends as the enclosure of what could otherwise be a common space (Allgood 2010: 2).

The more manipulated, programmed, standardized the space between and around us becomes, we can only expect [...] our relation to be more manipulated, programmed, and standardized. (Allgood 2010: 2)

Allgood’s sense of the space of perception as a holder of potential and a commons will inform what follows, with the emphasis on sound perception. However, while some of the predominant elements of the garden ‘soundscape’, such as mechanised train announcements and ‘a wave of traffic roar’ (Allgood 2010: 7), might fall, for Allgood, into the category ‘privatised perceptual dump’, my approach is indebted also to Pauline Oliveros’s aspiration to ‘listen to everything’ without prejudgment, an approach I explore in section 3.2.

Human intention and the question of what kind of commons we aim to construct is also key to this study. I advocate a more acute awareness of what is both as a change in itself, and as a prerequisite to thinking in an informed way about what else we might change in our actions as humans. In looking for a way to account for human intention as well as attunement I turn to Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing and the concept of ‘polyphony’. In explaining her use of this term Tsing uses the analogy of the polyphonic music of the baroque era in Europe, in which ‘autonomous melodies intertwine’ (Tsing 2015: 23), and moments of harmony and dissonance emerge as the various melodic strands develop. She contrasts this with the unity of perspective that later displaced polyphony in European classical music, and was manifested also in the ‘strong beat, suggestive of the listener’s heart’ of twentieth-century rock music (Tsing 2015: 23). Unlike the individual perspective suggested by the latter, the kind of noticing required by polyphonic music involves simultaneous attention to multiple voices, in their individual melodies and in the overall effect they create together. In the second half of this chapter I explore polyphony as a register of attentiveness applicable to listening and perceptual engagement and as a way of thinking about the multispecies assemblages of the garden.

Tsing demonstrates her ‘polyphonic’ approach in the 2015 book *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, an ethnographic account of intertwined human and nonhuman histories, guided by an investigation into the matsutake mushroom. Prized in Japan, in the twentieth century

the matsutake mushroom began to proliferate in the human-disturbed forests of the Pacific Northwest of the United States. Ecological degradation so bad that areas of this forest were described as ‘festerings sores’ created ideal conditions for the mushroom, so that the same areas became ‘ground zero’ for mushroom pickers who came to seek a livelihood by gathering and selling them on (Tsing 2015: 193). Pines are favoured by eroded soil that broadleaf trees will not tolerate, a capacity enabled by their co-evolution with fungi that make nutrients available to them by breaking down mineral soil. Pines in turn feed these fungi through a web of mycorrhizal connections around their roots, and, in the case of the matsutake fungus, the fruiting body of the underground mycorrhizal web has come to be valued as both gift and food by some humans. Of this collection of relationships, Tsing observes

Indeed one could say that pines, matsutake, and humans all cultivate each other unintentionally. They make each other’s world-making projects possible. (Tsing 2015: 152)

These intertwined strands of ‘world-making’ by different people and species can be considered as voices within a polyphony:

If one imagines a fugue in which matsutake, pines, oaks, and farmers each get to play a separate part, it is the coming together of these ‘voices’ that makes the landscape. (Tsing & Ebron 2015: 686)

The landscapes in which Tsing finds this polyphony tend also to be sites of commoning, *de facto* but without official endorsement in the case of national forests of the United States, and as the survival of traditional practices in the peasant forests of Japan.¹⁰

Tsing follows the stories associated with the matsutake mushroom to uncover ‘human talents for remediation’ (Tsing 2015: 190). Following Tsing, I take the garden as a site for thinking about how to foster these talents, and my engagement with listening is based on the proposition that this form of human attentiveness might be one of the starting points of remediation. In sections 3.2 and 3.3 I look to the practice of Deep Listening in the garden as a way to interrupt the habitual mode of attention of human gardeners in order to attend to

¹⁰ These Japanese commoning rights, called ‘iriai’, can operate separately from other types of ownership, ‘as a layer of use rights on land owned by others’ (Tsing 2015: 184), a description that echoes Lewis Hyde’s ‘rights of action’, explored in Chapter Two. As in the histories of other commons, ‘elites have tried very hard to cut back on iriai rights’, particularly since the nineteenth century, but some iriai rights still survive, as a result of ‘everyday peasant efforts’ (Tsing 2015: 184).

the polyphony of the garden. In viewing the garden as a polyphonic assemblage we can consider the human intentions of gardeners within a context of other voices, both human and nonhuman. My concern with listening is in part a concern with moments of pause before action, which affect the quality of attention humans bring to our behaviours in the world.

Tsing establishes the polyphony in her book through storytelling. 'To listen to and tell a rush of stories is a method' (Tsing 2015: 37). These are stories told through the specificity and detail of how, for instance, fungi and Japanese commoners live, and in making them a method Tsing rejects 'scalability'.¹¹ Tsing's storytelling is also an attempt to show 'landscape as the protagonist of an adventure in which humans are only one kind of participant', and in so doing her method offers subjecthood to nonhumans.

Tsing has been criticised for indulging in 'the exquisite privilege of cultivating vulnerability' through her attention to precarity and unpredictable encounters when the security of so many humans has not been taken care of (Britton-Purdy 2015: n.p.). In so doing, holds scholar and professor of law Jedediah Britton-Purdy, she creates 'a mirror-image of a dominant form of pro-market poetics' entirely compatible with unregulated capitalism (Britton-Purdy 2015: n.p.). I question whether Tsing's examination of insecurity amounts to advocating it. Unlike Britton-Purdy I take from Tsing not an apology for, or promotion of, conditions of precarious living, but a search, in the context of such conditions, for where remediation might start. Moreover, as I will propose through my examination of listening in the garden, a space in which it is safe to be vulnerable is one in which habit may be disrupted and different relations emerge.

3.3 Pauline Oliveros and Deep Listening

'We go into ourselves in order to go out into the world again.' I heard this remark in a group discussion that took place during a 'one-week self-experiment' and residency that I attended at the end of summer 2016. Maria Pecchioli, part of the artists' collective Radical Intention,

¹¹ Tsing refuses the demand 'to make one's research framework apply to greater scales, without changing the research question', likening it to the 'smooth expansion' of commodity crops in colonial and industrial plantations. Tsing's concept of 'nonscalability' has been significant to my methodology in approaching this multistranded study, which is built on practical engagements at a particular, small, scale.

which had organised the residency,¹² was talking with a group of artists and activists who had assembled in the countryside of central Italy for a week. There we undertook a programme of activities and reflection that included reading groups, sensory exercises and collective listening meditation. In a discussion towards the end of the residency, participants expressed difficulties they had experienced, and a debate ensued about the week's exercises, what care-taking should have taken place, and the relevance of individual experience. Maria's comment was a reminder that, although the exercises facilitated self-reflection and discovery, they were also, and intentionally, about how a deeper awareness of self might create outward connections, and action in the wider world. This summed up a dual effect that was to become significant to me, and to the research set out here.

The listening exercises, or 'music rituals' (Service 2012: n.p.) that we were led through on the residency were my first experience of the listening practice of American composer Pauline Oliveros. In the first exercise we followed Oliveros's instruction from a meditation entitled 'Native':

Take a walk at night. Walk so silently that the bottoms of your feet become ears. (Oliveros 1971: meditation V, n.p.)

Walking gingerly across the dark garden next to the old villa where we were lodged, we brought our attention to the soles of our feet, 'listening' to the grit, leaves and twigs we encountered. As I moved, I registered these sensations alongside a questioning alertness to my human companions, sounds that indicated where someone might be, an uncertainty as to who was in which of the garden's spaces. At another time we sat in woodland as a group, and used our voices to alternately 'sound' the noises of our surroundings, and then reproduce the sounds made by other group members, in a variation of the New Sound Meditation created by Oliveros in 1989 (Oliveros 2005: 44). Each exercise had a different effect, but they both brought about a more vivid sense of myself in my body, an intense 'inner' experience, at the same time as an aliveness to both human companions, other sound-making elements around us, and the space between. I experienced a kind of 'bouncing back' directing the inner experience out into the world. Moreover it was my sense

¹² Radical Intention was founded by Aria Spinelli and Maria Pecchioli in order to explore 'the affinity between social-political and artistic practice' (Radical Intention website). As part of this, starting in 2012, they have organised week-long residencies 'of decompression, communal living and group working' taking place in late summer (Corniolo Art Platform website). I participated in the 2016 residency, organised in collaboration with curator Berit Fischer.

that the aliveness to others came about in part *because* of my more vivid sense of myself. While experiencing a heightened sense of my individual body, I felt also that its boundaries had somewhat dissolved, so that in some way I was less individual and more intimately in contact with the sounding world around me.

I took from my experiences on the residency the possibility that Oliveros's approach held a potential for connecting a meditative self-awareness to both a greater awareness of the nonhuman world, and collaborative human action. Attentiveness to self and the sounding world might enhance, or even enable, the kind of polyphonic attentiveness described in the previous section.

Pauline Oliveros called the set of listening practices she developed Deep Listening,¹³ and summarised it as follows:

Deep Listening is a form of meditation. Attention is directed to the interplay of sounds and silences, or the sound/silence continuum. Sound is not limited to musical or speaking sounds, but is inclusive of all perceptible vibrations (sonic formations). The relationship of all perceptible sounds is important. (Oliveros 2005: xxiv)

Having spent a period in the late 1960s teaching first electronic music and then a general music course to university students,¹⁴ Oliveros wrote *Sonic Meditations* (Oliveros 1971), which sets out a body of sound work that can be undertaken by people without musical training. She later described these exercises as the basis of Deep Listening (Oliveros 2005: xvii), although she did not use the term until 1989. In *Deep Listening: A Composer's Sound Practice* (Oliveros 2005), Oliveros set out a more detailed account of the practice and further exercises or meditations. The practice undertaken by the Glazebrook Growers in 2017 was derived from these two publications.

While some of Oliveros's meditations can be undertaken individually, many are designed for groups, and are devised to enable an exploratory, playful relationship with sound. The

¹³ The name (always capitalised) derived from a session of exploratory music-making, that became the album *Deep Listening*, undertaken in 1989 by Oliveros with Stuart Dempster and sound artist Panaiotis in a disused underground water cistern in Washington State. The cistern had a reverberation time of forty-five seconds (Service 2012: n.p.). The improvisational exchange between the three musicians and their echoing environment recalls Tsing's description, in the previous section, of polyphony as the intertwining of autonomous melodies.

¹⁴ At the University of California, San Diego. Oliveros began her musical training playing the accordion, the French horn and composing, before becoming absorbed in electronic music making through the 1960s (Oliveros 2005: xvi). She taught and led workshops from this period until the 2000s.

focusing of attention on other members of the group is a recurring element: Exercise X in *Sonic Meditations*, for instance, requires participants to sit in a circle, gradually form a mental image of one other person in the circle, sing a 'long tone' to them, and then reproduce the pitch sung by that person (Oliveros 1971: n.p.). The practice is also characterised by openness and curiosity: some exercises consist of a series of questions, such as 'Can you hear now and also listen to your memory of an old sound?', or 'What is the meter/tempo of your normal walk? How often do you blink?' (from 'Ear Piece, 1998' and 'Rhythms, 1996' in Oliveros 2005: 34, 48). The imagined sound of memories is acknowledged alongside sound in the present, and dreams and daydreams are regarded as 'a creative resource' (Oliveros 2005: 4, 22).¹⁵

Oliveros was deeply influenced by the nonhuman world, in the form of both living beings and machines:

I grew up in a time when there existed a very rich and dense soundscape of insects, birds and animals in Houston Texas in the 1930s. This soundscape was filled with chirping, rasping crickets, frogs and melodic mocking birds. (Oliveros 2005: xv)

At the same time, as a child in the 1930s and 40s, she loved the 'whistles and pops and things that were in between the stations' on her father's shortwave radio, and the effect when the family's phonograph ran down 'so that the music began to droop' (Baker 2003: n.p.). These two engagements – with the living nonhuman world, and the machines devised by humans – are not contradictory in Oliveros, and both came to be embraced within Deep Listening and her intention to 'listen to everything all the time' (Service 2012: n.p.).

This dual embrace is evident in the instructions given by Oliveros for her listening exercises. Exercise VI in *Sonic Meditations* (Oliveros 1971) asks participants to 'flood a darkened room with white noise for thirty minutes or more' using a white noise generator; alternatively they may find 'a waterfall or the ocean' to provide the sound. These are simply presented as different options with no judgement as to which is better.

Oliveros was a friend of and collaborator with American minimalist composer John Cage. The context in which Oliveros worked was profoundly influenced by both Cage and Murray Schafer, who were key in changing attitudes to the relationship between music and

¹⁵ Oliveros's collaborator and life partner Ione worked on listening through dreaming (Ione 2005).

‘everyday’ sound, and so enabling a greater openness to listening practices such as that developed by Oliveros. Oliveros’s approach had significant differences, however, as scholar and sound artist Adam Tinkle points out. For Schafer, fully attentive listening is a primordial condition that must be recuperated through ‘earcleaning’ exercises and sound pedagogy, which Tinkle finds problematic, since ‘[l]earning about sound from Schafer’s perspective, often seems to mean learning *not* to make any’ (Tinkle 2015: 227). By contrast, Oliveros’s investigation of listening is not an attempt to recuperate a universal capacity now lost, but is rather ‘perspectivally embedded’, constituting a kind of ‘earwitnessing’ from a particular subject position (Tinkle 2015: 222, 229). Oliveros uses an initial quietening of the self the better to hear environmental sound, but places an emphasis on ‘participatory sound-producing activities’ (Tinkle 2015: 229), so that rather than simply silencing humans, her practice also facilitates expression. In relation to Cage, Tinkle argues that she uses ‘a different conceptualization of the very limits of listening itself’ (Tinkle 2006, 228): Oliveros recognises the inner mental voice, dreams and imagined sounds, as well as those outside, as worthy of being listened to. This combination of quiet listening with active expression and acceptance of the inner voice was key to the listening practice explored with the Glazebrook Growers.

While Tinkle sees in Oliveros a ‘dissenting notion of listening’ (Tinkle 2006: 229), some politically-engaged sound artists have seen her as falling short. Sound art collective Ultra-red¹⁶ place their listening practices in a ‘counter-discourse of improvised listening’, in which the histories of struggles for freedom are invoked (Ultra-red 2012: 2). Listening is ‘the intentional task of solidarity’, a practice designed to better support the struggles of anti-racism, gender and sexual liberation, anti-capitalist autonomy and ‘the preferential option for the poor’ (Ultra-red 2012: 2). In their introduction to *Five Protocols for Listening*, Ultra-red acknowledge the significance of Oliveros and her contemporaries, and then state:

As conceptualized by the modernist avant-garde, protocols for listening gave priority to transforming auditory perception. Listening, however, stopped short of taking action to transform the world one perceives. (Ultra-red 2012: 2)

¹⁶ Ultra-red was founded in 1994 by two AIDS activists in Los Angeles, and now works with associates in different parts of the world. They use sound art and music to engage with the formal processes of organising and consider ‘acoustic space as enunciative of social relations’ (Ultra-red website: Mission statement).

While Oliveros and Schafer may not have pursued an emancipatory political project in the same way as Ultra-red, I question the assertion that their work is concerned only with perceiving the world, and not with transforming it. In the context of the Glazebrook Growers, shared political views, and the time or willingness to take on overtly activist roles could not be assumed. A more gentle bringing-together, undertaking actions that do not seem political to begin with, constitutes a transformation of relations in itself, and creates the potential for future action. The quality of our attentiveness is key to guiding what future action might be.

Music journalist Tom Service has remarked that Oliveros's listening was not about 'soft-focused meditation'; rather it 'encompasses the whole world, it doesn't separate you from it, and the noise of politics, identity, and representation is part of what she hears' (Service 2012: n.p.). Oliveros developed some of her practices with the Sonic Meditations group in the early 1970s, and she later associated this developmental phase with the emerging women's liberation movement, noting 'I decided it would be good to have women only for a while. They had been held down musically for so long' (Oliveros quoted in O'Brien 2016).

Oliveros's practice is now being incorporated into the practice of other artists using embodied learning to rethink human ways of being in the face of climate breakdown. In June 2019 US artist Brett Bloom collaborated with Colombian Deep Listening instructor Ximena Alarcón to lead a five-day 'Break Down Breakdown' workshop in London. The aim of the workshop was to explore how to build 'a culture of survival in the face of climate breakdown', and activities including listening were seen as a way of de-industrialising participants' individual and collective sense of self.

In the context of this study, I came to value Oliveros's 'philosophy of listening and sonic exploration' for three reasons. The first was the way in which her exercises could simultaneously enhance the experience of the individual and that of the group. Many exercises are designed for groups and involve a careful attention to other participants, which suited them to our pre-existing group context. This also suggested a parallel to commoning practices, in which each commoner is 'held' by the arrangements of the group, while still retaining a certain autonomy of action within these arrangements. The second was Oliveros's openness to all sound, whether the source is a human, a frog, a machine or the wind, enabling participants to cultivate an alertness to 'everything that is', without requiring categorisation. Oliveros's openness was appropriate to the location of the Glazebrook

Growers' garden, from which trains and traffic were continually audible, as well as people, birds, and wind in the trees. The coming together of human and nonhuman that I have sought conceptually through Donna Haraway, Bruno Latour's ANT and Anna Tsing finds the potential for embodied expression in Oliveros's practices. The potential for expression lies as much in human attunement as in human projection, in an attention to sound perception that could, perhaps, effect some alteration in the relationship between human listeners and the beings to whom they attend. Third, Oliveros allowed space for human participants' thoughts and dreams to be included and valued in the soundscape to which they attend, and for humans to produce sound themselves while performing her exercises, connecting the inner, imaginative and expressive life to outward sound experience.

Like Bernie Krause, Oliveros developed a terminology for her approach to listening. An important distinction was that between hearing and listening:

To hear is the physical means that enables perception. To listen is to give attention to what is perceived both acoustically and psychologically. (Oliveros 2005: xxii)

Within listening, a distinction is made between 'focal' and 'global' attention, and attention to both of these modes is intended to expand consciousness, and 'extend the listener':

Focal attention, like a lens, produces clear detail limited to the object of attention. **Global** attention is diffuse and continually expanding to take in the whole space/time continuum of sound. (Oliveros 2005: 13, emphasis in the original)

This vocabulary provided the starting point for the listening practice I undertook with the Glazebrook Growers.

3.4 Deep Listening in the Garden

In the late summer of 2017, storyteller and student of Deep Listening Beckie Leach helped me plan two Deep Listening sessions for the Glazebrook Growers, that were to take place in the Kitchen Garden. Beckie, who was training with the Deep Listening Institute at Rensselaer as an instructor,¹⁷ worked with me to devise sessions based on exercises from

¹⁷ The institute founded by Oliveros to provide instruction in Deep Listening, and instructor training. It has since changed its title to the Center for Deep Listening at Rensselaer. I refer to Beckie by her first name in recognition of the informality of the sessions, and because this is the convention I adopted with the other participants.

Oliveros's *Deep Listening: A Composer's Sound Practice* (Oliveros 2005) to suit the location and participants.

This section explores these sessions and the reflections contributed by participants, which I link to the recordings and transcripts contained in the Appendices.¹⁸ Using the vocabulary devised by Pauline Oliveros and Bernie Krause to describe experience of the acoustic world, I consider the soundscapes recorded and the experiences of participants during the workshops as an expression of polyphony within a perceptual commons. Reference to contemporary sound practitioners Winderen and LaBelle, mentioned above, helps me to consider the possible implications of the hesitations, frustrations, surprise and pleasure expressed by human participants, and the narratives they brought to their experience.

Invitations to the sessions were issued, by email and face-to-face, to those involved with the garden or connected to the Growers. This included plotholders in the Kitchen Garden, those who had attended workshops and events, participants in nearby gardening projects, and informal participants in gardening activities.¹⁹ I wished to test listening practices mainly in the context of a pre-existing involvement with gardening, and particularly the Kitchen Garden, so that listening methods would work alongside previous experience of the space and of gardening within it.²⁰ Each workshop was planned to run for approximately an hour, around dusk.

In addition to Beckie Leach and myself, there were four further participants at each session.²¹ Beckie led participants through the exercises, and she and I participated in the activities and discussions. Each session started with body work and breathing exercises and moved into quiet listening meditations before introducing listening exercises with elements

¹⁸ Full length recordings and transcripts are provided in Appendices 3a/3b, and links to two short edited extracts are given in the 'Listening' section of Appendix 1.

¹⁹ Some estate residents preferred to participate in the garden with ad hoc support rather than by taking on a plot or attending workshops. For instance, in 2017 one resident gave considerable help in building new raised beds and looking after communal squash plants for the season, but preferred to minimise involvement in group situations and did not want any growing space in the beds.

²⁰ Like all events in the Kitchen Garden, the workshops were open to all, and one participant, 'Tim', had no pre-existing involvement with our garden.

²¹ In several cases my preconceptions as to who would be willing to participate, based on their areas of work, were off the mark. Those gardeners with a close professional involvement with the art world did not become listening workshop participants. One of the most vocal participants in the first session was a self-employed builder of Irish heritage. The others who chose to participate worked in a secretarial role for the NHS, in TV production, carpentry, the charity sector and as a professional gardener.

of voicing or sounding by participants. Exercises were interspersed with opportunities to reflect individually and then enter a group discussion around what had been experienced. Participants were told they could remain quiet and witness if they felt uncomfortable with any of the exercises.



Figure 60: A corner of the Kitchen Garden, August 2017, with a tarpaulin roof installed by one of the listening workshop participants to give shelter from forecast rain. Participants gathered around the table at the beginning of each listening session, and moved out into the garden for some of the exercises.

The careful escalation of participation, from introductions and quiet activities through to sound-making, the alternation of action with reflection, and the emphasis on the option of ‘witnessing’, were designed to bring this group, which had relatively little involvement with music, performance or the art world, gently into the practice. Organisers of Deep Listening sessions that I had attended elsewhere took similar care,²² and I had appreciated the safe and open feeling this had established. Beckie and I were also mindful that the experience might make participants feel the more vulnerable for taking place in this publicly exposed space.²³

²² On the residency mentioned above, and later with the Deep Listening Aphiliate in London.

²³ By contrast, I subsequently took part in a fast-paced artist-led soundwalk in which participants were not introduced to each other and were expected to take part in sound-making exercises from the outset with no preparation and little explanation as to the underlying intention of the walk. This experience, coloured for me

August 2017 was a windy month in London, and the geophony of wind interacting with trees rises and falls throughout the recordings of both workshops. One participant had taken the initiative of rigging up a tarpaulin roof in advance of the workshops, since rain was forecast, and the wind articulated this as well, making the shelter audible with intermittent flaps (figure 6o). The other most consistent element was the anthropophony related to transport. Motor vehicles of different types were frequently audible, but the dominant presence was the railway, with the rush and whine of trains approaching and departing, the beeping and slamming of doors and automated announcements for the roughly ten trains an hour that pass through the adjacent station. A different variety of anthropophony was that produced by the movement and vocalisations of the human body, both from passers-by on the footpath next to the garden and from participants. Each of these categories of sound was to elicit a different type of response from the participants.

Beckie set an opening question for the sessions, 'What are the soundwaves that make up the garden soundscape?', and the first meditations introduced (or reintroduced) participants to the concepts of global and focal listening, setting the aim of trying to maintain global listening for ten minutes. After reflection and discussion each session then moved onto an exercise that involved both listening and sounding by participants. In the first session this took the form of the Extreme Slow Walk, in which 'no matter how slow you are walking, you can always go much slower' (Oliveros 2005: 20). After practicing this for a while participants were asked to add a clap at a certain point in each step. In the second session we used The New Sound Meditation, 1989 (Oliveros 2005: 44), a sounding exercise that Beckie and I anticipated would be more challenging, as it required participants to use their voices to reproduce sounds from our environment and to copy those made by others in our group. Although we had more exercises prepared, the gentle pace of the sessions, and the amount of discussion that was generated meant that the full hour, and more, was taken up by this small set of activities.

Except for workshop leader Beckie, and Tim, all the participants had some pre-existing relationship with all of the others; some were friends, some acquaintances, while some had had disagreements in the recent past. Throughout both sessions there was frequent

by social awkwardness and puzzlement, confirmed the importance of the context in which practice takes place, of establishing trust within the group and carefully pacing the planned activities.

laughter, which seemed to indicate a certain self-consciousness, particularly at the outset, and this was confirmed by participants' comments during discussion. John remarked, 'one thing that really struck me about this experience [...] is that I'm conscious of it' (App 3a/(i) 00:41:53, p. 49), while Cerys revealed that she had thought 'how am I doing compared to everyone else?' during the Slow Walk, a comment that provoked more laughter (App 3a/(i) 01:09:04, p. 62). Laughter and the tone of interactions seemed to relax over the course of each session.

The meditation on global listening, ten minutes of attention to 'all of the sounds' rather than the detail of individual sounds, performed in both sessions, was described by participants in terms of a broadened awareness of the soundscape, the relationship of sounds and of other qualities of the location and time of day. In session 1, Phillip commented that it was 'a very resonant time to be listening' and likened the particular quality of sound at dusk to the intensification of colour of a t-shirt dipped into water (App 3a/(i) 00:44:20, pp. 50–52), while Cerys sensed an 'energy landscape', in which 'lines of everything' were suggested by the sound of wind and trains. The exercise also seemed to stimulate the associative effect of sound. In the second session Clive imagined himself at the centre of 'a kind of Greek amphitheatre' (App 3b/(i) 00:41:39, p. 88),²⁴ while Tim had a dreamlike experience ('I must have gone pretty deep') in which he felt he was transported back to his parents' garden, and heard church bells (App 3b/(i) 00:45:11, p. 91).²⁵

These comments suggest that the apparently simple act of broadening acoustic attention to a 'global' mode had a powerful imaginative effect, even to the extent of blurring the line between dream and waking states. It also acted to break down distinctions between geophony and anthropophony. The sound of trains and wind had certain similarities both in their acoustic quality and in their movement, tracing lines as they travelled and made space audible. I commented that this similarity with the strong wind made the 'rushing trains' sound 'more beautiful' (App 3a/(i) 00:28:29, p. 44), and Cerys also remarked on the 'beauty of the sound' of the trains, which she experienced as 'distinct from the object' (App 3a/(i) 00:49:31, p. 55).

²⁴ Recalling Murray Schafer's comparison of visual and aural experience: 'You are always at the edge of the landscape looking in, but you are always at the centre of the landscape listening out' (Schafer).

²⁵ The bells may not have been imaginary. They are not captured on the audio recording of the session, but Croxted Road Estate lies within earshot of the bells of Dulwich College.

In her instructions, Oliveros emphasises the importance of becoming aware of the ‘interplay of sounds’ (Oliveros 2005: xxiv, 12). Once global awareness had been established in the group an effect that quickly became evident was an intensified awareness of ‘focal’ sound events occurring within the broader soundscape; against a background of rushing wind, anthropophony generated by individual bodies attracted curious attention. The sound of shoes – ‘clipping’ heels, a squeaky pair of shoes passing by (App 3b/(i) 00:24:50, p. 42) – became a focus of enjoyment. They were experienced as ‘playful’ and prompted speculation as to the character of their owners (App 3a/(i) 00:51:36, pp. 97–98). At another moment the jangle of a bunch of keys triggered exclamations: for Beckie they were ‘amazingly melodic’, and for me they became part of a small narrative involving the opening of a garage door (App 3a/(i) 00:27:07, p. 43). This vivid focus on minor sounds that one might usually ignore resulted a heightened, almost joyful awareness of small occurrences in other people’s lives.

However, while the requirement to listen without judgement seemed relatively easy with regard to the anthropophony of the human body, participants voiced difficulty with regard to machine-generated noise. Lauren had struggled with the noise of trains, which she could hear from her bedroom (‘sometimes I’m like “Aagh!”’, App 3b/(i) 00:47:47, p. 93), but blamed herself for ‘wanting to be irritated by it’, since it was no worse than any other sound.²⁶

Another simple exercise, which Beckie and I had not anticipated causing difficulty, provoked some frustration. The Extreme Slow Walk in session 1 was declared by both John and Cerys to be difficult, creating a feeling of impatience (App 3a/(i) 01:09:04, pp. 61–63). The physical engagement with the outside world through movement interrupted their attention to listening. However, while John felt that it was ‘not for me’, he repeatedly returned to the experience to try to express what he had felt, as though encountering this difficulty had made him attend more carefully to it. Patricia, by contrast, who was hard of hearing, found in the physicality of the walk a slow rhythm that contrasted with her usual, more hurried way of moving: ‘under your feet [...] you’re going up and down, up and down’ (App 3a/(i) 01:10:45, p. 63).

Like Patricia, through attention to the soundscape some other participants began to perceive a ‘rhythm’, either in the broad polyphony of sounds or in our own, smaller

²⁶ Suggesting the caveat that Oliveros’s approach might reinforce the status quo with regard to sound, when it could be questioned. In this case Lauren was forced by her circumstances to listen to trains every day and in all likelihood was justified in her desire for less noise.

movements and sound-making. In session 2, after global listening, Tim described an ‘undulating rhythm across different sounds’, adding that it felt as though ‘they’re kind of working together’ (App 3b/(i) 00:45:11, p. 91). When we added clapping to the Slow Walk in session 1, it established an acoustic connection within the group, ‘well out of sync and focus’, in John’s words, but nevertheless a ‘rhythm going on between us all’. This haphazard rhythm was experienced as ‘intimate’ by Phillip, who found ‘there was something really wonderful about knowing where people were’, an enjoyment I shared (App 3a/(i) 01:12:03, pp. 64–65).

The contrast between our own sound-making and ‘the majesty of all these winds’ struck Phillip, and he assigned agency to the landscape, which he thought was ‘asking for’ a more powerful, collective singing rather than our ‘weedy’ claps (App 3a/(i) 01:13:08, pp. 64–65). In the second session there was a discussion about the nature of the sounds produced by different leaves, and Cerys imagined trees as indignantly affirming their specific qualities (‘Of course we’re bloody different!’, App 3b/(i) 01:08:51, p. 109).

At the beginning of this chapter I described the ‘state of permeability, instigated by sound’ experienced through my encounter with a robin. The heightening of imagination and dreamlike associations suggested such a state in participants. There was an openness towards others, both human and nonhuman, when encountered through sound, sometimes expressed in exclamations of surprise or pleasure. Sound events prompted an imagining of narratives in relation to the lives of passers-by, trees, or the landscape as a whole, and in this subjecthood was granted to nonhumans as well as humans.

The final exercise in which we engaged, the New Sound Meditation, demanded the greatest degree of active participation. Participants were asked to alternate breathing with listening for a sound, either from other participants or the environment, and to choose one to imitate. These copied sounds were to be alternated with invented sounds, and all the sounding and listening punctuated with attention to breath.

The exercise began quietly with participants making a series of ‘whistles, chirrups, hisses, shushing vocalisations like the wind’, and a ‘grumbling hum’ (App 3b/(i) 00:55:55, p. 101). As the exercise progressed, echoes and choruses were created as different members of the group imitated each other and the sounds around us, and the sounds grew louder, incorporating quacks, laughs, the automated announcements of train arrivals, and finishing with a farting sound.

Reactions to this exercise encompassed vulnerability and pleasure. Beckie and Tim expressed their enjoyment, saying it was ‘delightful’, while Cerys found ‘a real sense of community’ in it. The echoing of sounds between participants had created a mutual awareness and a ‘reward of play’ that produced pleasure, while the failure of others to repeat sounds that some participants made produced a feeling of vulnerability: ‘But then you’re getting into, like, “Someone else didn’t copy it”, and that sound’s been rejected’ (Cerys, App 3b/(i) 01:08:51, p. 109). The active participation in the soundscape produced some of the narratives of nonhuman subjecthood mentioned above, which seemed to be enhanced by the challenge of reproducing, or sounding alongside, nonhuman sound. Tim’s attention was caught by the interplay of sounds made by leaves: ‘I mean like they don’t have intentions like we have, but it kind of builds up this... this thing like each individual sound is slightly different, but it makes a bigger one, and it’s interesting playing an active role in that’ (App 3b/(i) 01:06:03, p. 107).

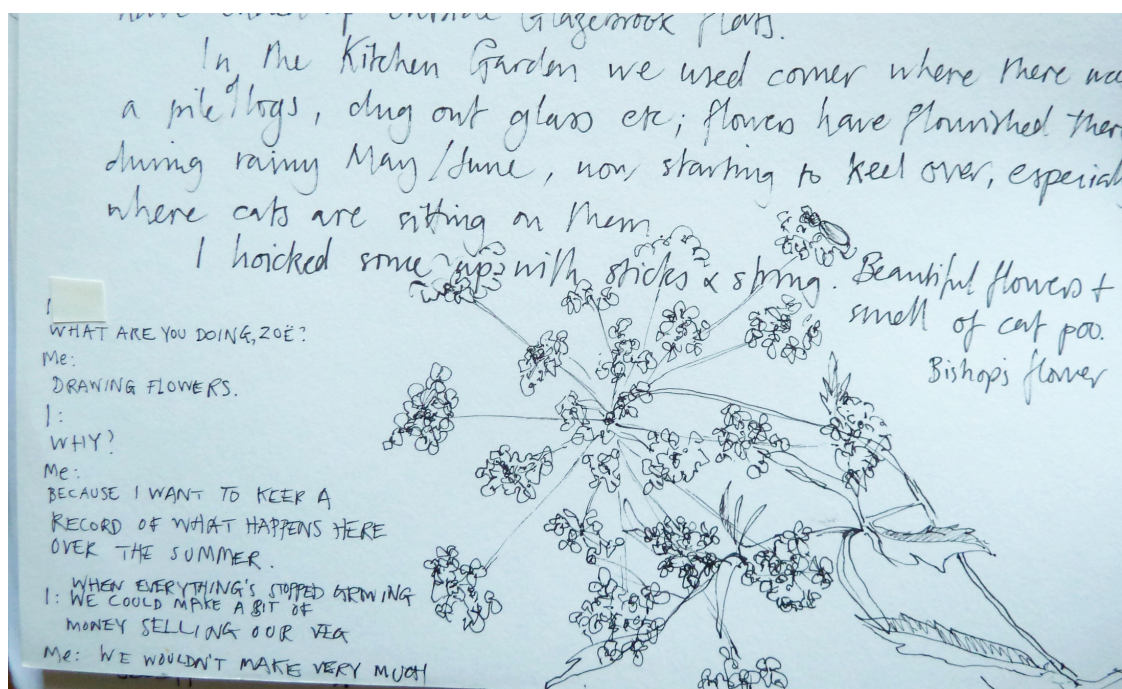


Figure 61: Detail from Reflective Journal 1, 25 July 2016. A moment of reflection in the Kitchen Garden, taking notes and sketching, is interrupted by a small girl who has a proposal that we ‘make a bit of money selling our veg’. Such arrivals followed every attempt at individual reflection in the garden, which instead became conversations.

During the first listening session I had commented on my experience of meditation with the group: ‘It kind of feels like it’s being held by being with this small group of people, in a different way to when I’ve practiced listening by myself’ (App 3a/(i): 00:39:18, p. 48). The contrasting experiences I had in mind were my numerous attempts to engage in solo

reflection within the Kitchen Garden, through meditation, sketching and note-taking (see figure 61). On every occasion these attempts had been interrupted, by neighbours, children or passers-by I did not know, and my notes had instead become records of chance encounters and impromptu conversations. It was not until we organised the Deep Listening sessions and I was 'held by being with this small group of people' that a meditative experience became possible. This garden was a location that seemed to insist on collectivity and communication.

Oliveros gave us a method through which we could, in this location and as a group, slow down and perceive what Beckie called 'the soundwaves that make up the soundscape of the garden', its auditory polyphony. Oliveros's injunction to listen to everything translated into pleasure in the geophony of the winds, as they made audible the spaces about us. It enabled a kind of delight in the ordinary activities of our fellow human beings, as they jangled keys, or walked by in squeaky shoes. In the sound-making exercises participants exposed themselves to the possibility of looking and feeling foolish in front of others, and in doing it anyway found a new and playful way of acknowledging and interacting with each other and the soundscape around us. This helped to consolidate trust within the group, to create what LaBelle calls a 'togetherness' through sound (LaBelle 2018), that extended to the nonhuman world as well as fellow participants. The unfamiliar practice of global listening triggered a more associative experience, and participants drew on dreamlike states and memories in communicating what they had heard.

'Practice enhances openness', according to Oliveros, so that 'the individual may be expanded and find opportunity to connect in new ways to communities of interest' (Oliveros 2005: xxv). Openness, play, vulnerability, trust and a connection between inner life and outward perception all seemed to be activated during the workshops. I argue that these are valuable qualities that constitute a different, more curious, mode of engaging with the world, and might favour different relations with the nonhuman world.

However, if a rich biophony is indicative of a rich ecology, then ours seemed sparse. If we listen again to this soundscape with Bernie Krause and Clarice Allgood we might notice that living nonhumans were relatively absent from the garden soundscape; a few birds could be heard, and they did not figure much in our reflections. Only one, a wren, was named, by professional gardener Clive, who recognised the wren's scolding (App 3b/(i) 00:49:02, p. 95). During these sessions the wind was a strong presence, but the constants in this space, in all

weathers, are the machine-generated anthropophony of trains, planes and cars. These dominate the acoustic bandwidth, overlapping with and frequently drowning out human and other voices. During the Deep Listening sessions we discovered in the auditory spaces around us a ‘condition for possibility’, after Allgood, but arguably these were reduced by the repeated ‘programmatic noise’ broadcast into the garden (Allgood 2010). Our perceptual commons is partially enclosed by automated announcements and passing traffic, its polyphony dominated by a few mechanised voices that never tire.

The polyphonic assemblages described by Tsing are not purely acoustic, however, and the last section of this chapter takes up a broader interpretation of polyphony to explore the intertwining of human and nonhuman lives and activities in the garden.

3.5 What’s in the Bin? Compost as a Polyphonic Commons

In November 2016 the two Glazebrook Growers who made up our ‘Composting Department’ announced our first compost harvest. Kitchen scraps from several households, discarded cardboard and plant matter from the garden had decomposed into a dark humus, which was divided and spread over the garden’s raised vegetable beds at an end of season ‘Garden Celebration’. There was some excitement about the ‘rich mature compost’ generated by the success of the composting system, and a blog post entitled ‘Dishing the Dirt on Compost’ was written by one of the composters to remind garden users of ‘the simple do’s and don’ts of what to put in the bins’ (Glazebrook Growers blog: 17 November 2016 post).

As I draw my argument to a close I return to the compost bin, which I began to explore as a multispecies assemblage in section 2.6. As we have seen, the myriad nonhumans at work in the compost bins were an important support to the self reliance of the Glazebrook Growers, enabling us to transform what would otherwise be regarded as ‘rubbish’ and taken to landfill sites²⁷ into a substance that increased moisture retention and microbial activity in our soil and so helped plant growth. I now investigate these assemblages once more to draw together themes that I have developed through this thesis. I find the bin embedded in the layered commons of the garden, operating as a common-pool resource that is entirely reliant on microbial and invertebrate action for its success. It holds a polyphony of symbiotic relations, and human intention, our desire to create a useful compost to support

²⁷ There was no kitchen waste collection by the council from flats on the estate.

our food cultivation, is accommodated within this polyphony. However, much of the activity within the bins is not easily accessible to human perception, and I finish with a suggestion of how the extension of human perception through technology might open a new avenue for the exploration of our polyphonic commons.

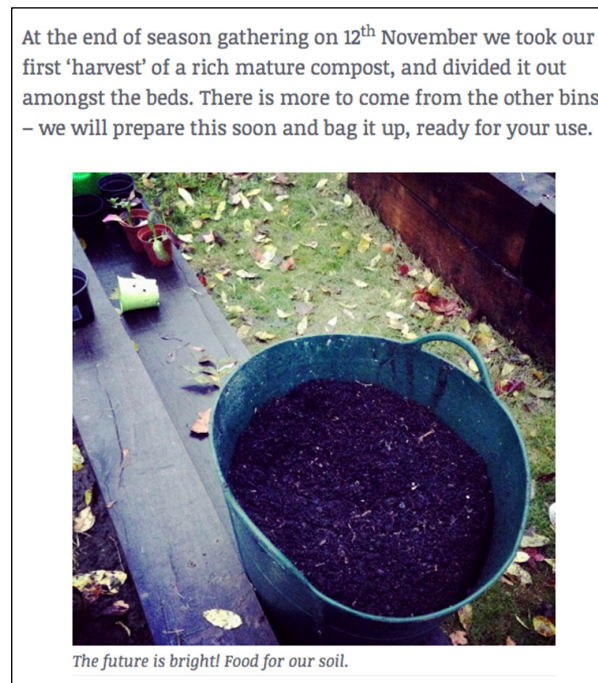


Figure 62: Extract from the blog post marking the first compost harvest in the Kitchen Garden, 17 November 2016

The human commoning practices at work are relatively easy to perceive and describe. The compost heap lends itself to interpretation according to Ostrom's design principles for 'common-pool resource management' set out in sections 1.4 and 1.6. Contained within the very clear physical boundaries of three plastic bins, and with access controlled via the Kitchen Garden gate and the oversight of the Glazebrook Growers, the Growers' composting system satisfied Ostrom's first design principle (clearly defined boundaries).²⁸ Monitoring (design principle 4) was carried out by two members of the group, mentioned above, who kept an eye on the state of the compost and what was going into it. Undesirable contributions were sometimes found in the bins – large quantities of bread that might attract rats, plant material that had not been cut up and made the compost difficult to aerate – but in a common-pool resource on this small scale a Whatsapp message to the

²⁸ Although anyone living on the estate could request a key to contribute to the contents of the compost bins. Those who did not have a growing space were effectively making a gift of their kitchen waste, since the benefits of this common-pool resource were distributed solely to Kitchen Garden vegetable beds.

group and face-to-face conversations appeared to be sufficient sanction to keep the system working (design principle 5). The composting system was nested within the Glazebrook Growers' organisational rules governing 'appropriation' and 'provision' of the resource (design principle 2), with additional rules specific to compost management laid out by the monitors.

The greater challenge, however, is in placing this human-centred commons, which is important in sustaining human cooperation, in relation to nonhuman lives. The compost bins favoured this in that they provided a situation in which humans did not just observe symbiotic relations, but participated actively in them. We contributed food, monitored the rate and nature of the decay, turned and aerated the contents of the bins to encourage the types of nonhuman life most propitious to the creation of useful garden compost. As recipients for human food waste, the bins were intimately connected to domestic routines of cooking and eating. Growers brought scraps from their kitchens to the garden every time their composting caddies filled up, so that opportunities for repeated encounters with our symbiosis with the nonhuman world were generated by our own day-to-day activities. However the creatures at work in the compost had not registered in the Growers' engagement with the acoustic world, described in the previous section. In the polyphony detectable to human ears, our compost bins had remained entirely silent.

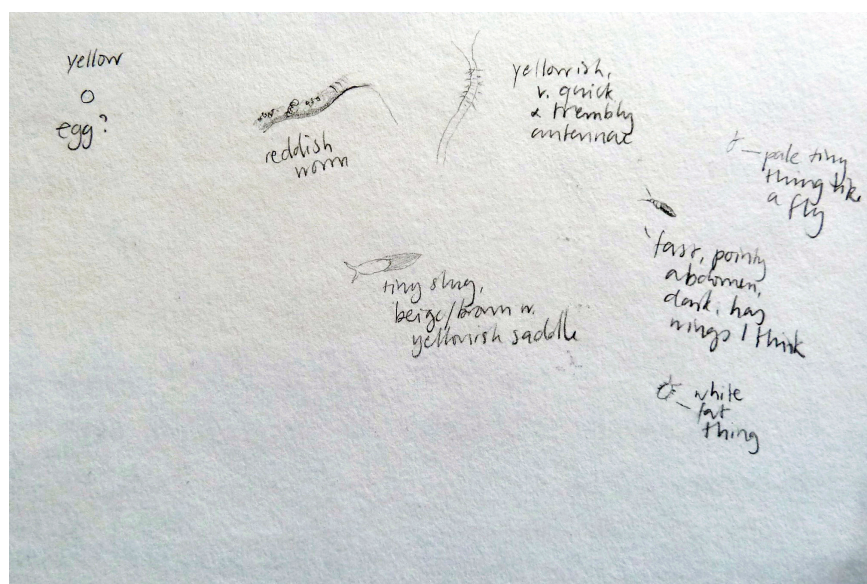


Figure 63: Detail from Reflective Journal 3, May–September 2017: creatures found in a handful of compost from the Kitchen Garden bins, including a brandling worm (*Eisenia fetida*), a slug, a centipede (*Geophilus flavus*) and other unidentified creatures. Attempting this sketch revealed my lack of knowledge of what I was seeing, the limits of unaided human vision, and an aversion to exposure in these creatures, which writhed and scuttled towards new hiding places.

Sensing the nonhuman life of the compost bins, bringing them into perceptual range, could be accomplished in part by engaging senses other than sound. Some of the larger invertebrates, such as the worms and slugs that consume and digest food waste, are visible. However much invertebrate life is tiny, and approaches the limits of human visual perception, while microbes lie beyond it unless they form colonies. It is also visibly distressing to many of these small organisms to be exposed to daylight and possible predators, and they struggle to move away and hide when uncovered. The possibility of unaided visual encounter with life on the micro scale relies on the effects of its actions, as it transforms the contents of the bin. Touch and smell provide other means. As mentioned in section 2.6, worms and different types of bacteria thrive in, and act to maintain, different temperatures. A cool bin may speak of the presence of large numbers of worms, while thermophilic bacteria articulate their presence through a rise in temperature, producing a hot bin which worms will desert. An aerated bin also smells a particular way: while rotting foodstuffs may initially emit unpleasant smells, compost with plenty of air in it does not. A lack of air, on the other hand, favours anaerobic life, microbes that work in the absence of oxygen and produce a characteristic stink.

Technology provides another way round some of the limitations of human perception.²⁹ Turning again to the world of sound practice, practitioners such as Jana Winderen and Jez Riley French have demonstrated how microphones of different sorts can make available to us frequencies, ecologies and living beings that we do not usually hear, and it was these devices I used to investigate how human perception of the garden might be extended.

In summer 2018, I entered the Kitchen Garden with my supervisor Johanna Hällsten to embark on a new avenue of acoustic exploration of the garden. We brought with us a contact microphone, a hydrophone, sound recorders and earphones. The contact microphone is designed to pick up sound vibrations in solid media such as earth, while hydrophones do the same in aquatic or wet environments. We placed these within the compost bins, and the wormeries that had recently been set up in the garden, closed the lids and waited for each environment to settle after our intrusion.

²⁹ Microscopes could of course reveal to sight the microbes at work in the bins, but I chose to continue my investigation of the acoustic potential of the garden.

When we put the earphones on, a soundscape of continual activity was revealed. There was an audibly wet sound in the wormeries; the hydrophone took us to a centre of squelching and oozing movement as the worms travelled through the medium of decaying food and sludgy worm compost. In the compost bins the sound was more subtle, a varied sequence of stirrings, perhaps of centipedes and woodlice as well as worms, though on this early foray we could not tell. The first impact of this mode of listening was profound for me. The use of contact microphones with headphones brought us into the immediate realm of the creatures we were listening to, and created a startling intimacy with nonhuman activity.

Moving out into other areas of the garden brought other surprises. Burying the contact microphone in the dry earth of a raised bed we encountered activity so frenetic it resembled white noise, which we discovered was coming from an ants' nest. Everywhere the soil contained and communicated movement of some kind. Finally a strange coming together of human voices, technology and a living nonhuman was revealed by resting the contact microphone on a pear tree. Through the headphones we heard dance music broadcast by an Asian radio station, which the tree was picking up and transmitting to us as though it were a giant antenna.

3.6 Conclusion

Brandon Labelle has spoken of how sound 'reconfigures the subject less as self-determining and more as never alone to begin with, an interrupted subject always already exposed by and for others' (Labelle 2018). This chapter has sought in soundscapes, listening methods and the multisensorial realm of the compost bin means by which the human gardeners on Croxted Road Estate might perceive our interrelations 'by and for others' and begin to sense how many of these others are nonhuman.

The introduction of the perceptual commons as a field of enquiry brought with it a recognition of openness and vulnerability as important qualities in opening human perception to a greater range of connections. Pauline Oliveros stated that Deep Listening was intended to 'facilitate creativity in art and life', and defined creativity as 'the formation of new patterns, exceeding the limitations and boundaries of old patterns, or using old patterns in new ways' (Oliveros 2005: xxiv-xxv). The use of Deep Listening within a perceptual commons reactivated the 'old pattern' of the commons in a new way, bringing

human and nonhuman lives and activities into the same arena while fostering bonds of play and trust between humans.

Chapter Two focused on science, history, feminist critique, art practices and an observation of gardening practices in considering the capacity of the commons to accommodate nonhumans. This chapter took on the challenge of embodying the lessons drawn from those disciplines, bringing them to life in the experience of the gardeners whose activities have provided the foundation for this thesis. With the move into embodiment, the contribution of arts-based practices, in the form of Deep Listening and acoustic ecology, came into sharper focus, returning to the premise that ‘science tells us things – but it is art that helps us take them on board at a deeper level’ (Allen in Neal 2015: 26).

The dialogical approach, derived from art practice, that has guided my engagement with the Glazebrook Growers took on a ‘participatory’ form through the Deep Listening sessions. Rather than evolving through an ongoing exchange and friction between different people and our context, as we saw, for instance, with the formation of the Glazebrook Growers and the design of the Kitchen Garden, these sessions were devised by me with Beckie Leach in advance, with others invited to participate only after the broad structure had been decided. This moment of participatory practice, devised by artists, was important in moving the practice into new ground that would not otherwise have been explored. Meanwhile the trust and relationships built through long dialogical engagement were essential in enabling this more experimental moment to happen.

I remarked in section 1.1 on the ideological fluidity of gardening, and the importance of the imaginative stories that drive it, which can generate either oppressive or cooperative relations. The imaginative stories revealed by participants in our Deep Listening sessions spoke of curiosity and an associative, ‘permeable’ state of mind characterised by an openness to others. Jeremy Gilbert has proposed affective relations, and ‘sites of collective joy’ as productive of collective agency and creativity (Gilbert 2014: 147, 200). Deep Listening in the context of the gardening group appeared to foster such relations, encompassing both joy and frustration, and nonhuman as well as human activity. I therefore argue that as a practice it supported a perceptual commons incorporating both humans and nonhumans.

We saw, however, that the perceptual commons of the garden was partly ‘enclosed’, dominated by anthropophony, and that the polyphonic commons of the garden was to some

degree inaccessible to human perception. The extension of the perceptual field beyond unaided human listening to an exploration with microphones suggested the potential for a radical enhancement of the perception of nonhuman lives and activities through an expanded approach to listening.

I approach the conclusion to this thesis having moved the argument onto ground where commoning meets human imagination. The arena for this encounter has been modest – a small community garden – but in it the gardeners of Croxted Road Estate addressed human capacities for imaginative and perceptual transformation. A better understanding of these capacities, and their intimate links to our behaviours in the world, is urgently needed in the current context of ‘human-made non-livability’ (Tsing 2015a).

Conclusion

The questions driving this thesis – ‘How might a commons incorporate both human and nonhuman lives and activities? What practices could support such a commons?’ – were selected to enable the investigation of the entangled concerns I encountered on the South London housing estate where I live, and to link this local situation, and those assembled within it, to urgent matters of human solidarity and multispecies flourishing. Over the course of the chapters I have proposed means by which these latter concerns might better be fostered by a combination of attentiveness and action. Anna Tsing has said that ‘if we are to survive capitalist and colonial insults we need a social movement for livability,’ and I propose this doctoral research as a contribution to such a movement (Tsing 2015a).

This practice-based interdisciplinary research began with my lived experience with a gardening group on a particular housing estate, and I have situated each stage of the argument in relation to this site and to my partial perspective as a resident and full member of the Glazebrook Growers. An ongoing exchange between theoretical research and embodied practices took forward the process of research, and as this happened the direction of enquiry shifted. When it became clear that the relationship of nonhumans to the commons would be key to the contribution of my research, other avenues were left unexplored;¹ as I look back the extent to which uncertainty of this sort characterised the research, particularly in its initial stages, becomes clear. While uncomfortable, it was crucial to the methodological approach of listening and allowing the practice to emerge, and it made space for a rich generative process.

Summary of Key Points

The investigation into how a commons might incorporate both human and nonhuman lives and activities took this study on a journey through different manifestations of the commons. Starting with a consideration of traditional commoning practices, and struggles both historical and current to defend the shared spaces of the commons, it arrived at a perceptual commons in which qualities of vulnerability and openness gained significance. Both the

¹ I set some of these out in the thesis Introduction, including my initial interest in an ethic of care as proposed by Carol Gilligan and Joan Tronto, which I had intended to examine in the context of the Glazebrook Growers.

commons and gardening were shown to be essentially human-centred, with the potential to foster and sustain cooperative human relations, but limited in their recognition of the lives of nonhumans. The identification of the realm of human perception as simultaneously problematic for ecological relations and a space of potential in which openness might be fostered, took the argument into the realm of a perceptual commons. Building on this it proposed a 'polyphonic commons' accommodating human and nonhuman activities, as well as human expression and intention.

I used a situated methodology, after Haraway (Haraway 1988), to establish the context for this study and with the first chapter began to answer my first research question by describing some of the 'human lives and activities' that I went on to examine in more detail over the course of the study, and the place in which activities took place. The recent history of Croxted Road Estate and of social housing more broadly were used to both situate the practice and contribute to a positive history of council-managed estates (LCC 1947; Ravetz 1974; Pepper 2015). The Tea and Talk conversations fed into this and brought the voices of longstanding residents into the research, helping to build a description of the estate and of the role gardening practices have played on the site in the past.

The engagement with political ecology, after Demos, was used to argue that a basis of human solidarity was essential to the development of my subsequent argument (Demos 2016). An examination of some of the histories of gardening demonstrated its ideological fluidity – horticulture has been used for oppressive as well as benign purposes – and this confirmed the importance of attending to the human relations in which the garden is held (Crouch & Ward McKay [1988] 1997; Uglow 2004; McKay 2011). Leading on from this, the term 'community' was used as an entry point to consider the importance of properly defining communal endeavours and the dangers of assuming that 'community' is always benign (Nancy [1986] 1991; Delanty 2003; Bauman 2007; Gilbert 2014). Community gardening showed the concept in a positive light as supportive of a local 'ecology' of small organisations and individual gardeners, and a similar dynamic was identified in some community arts of the 1970s. In the current context of social and dialogical art practice, some problematic uses of community came to the fore. Drawing on Grant Kester's identification of an orthopaedic aesthetic, which assigns superiority to the artist (Kester 2004: 88), I examined recent practices that benefited the artist by identifying community as a lack in those participating in their projects (Anna Francis, Fritz Haeg). These were

contrasted with examples of art practice in which artists and mediating organisations situated their interventions with a greater awareness of their own position and used duration to allow the practice to emerge at a pace suited to the relationships encountered (Jessie Brennan, Grizedale Arts).

Misuses of the concept of community, particularly those arising from interpretations of community in terms of fixity, were used to demonstrate the need for an alternative framework for thinking about human cooperation. The argument was made for a version of the communal realised through action and self-organisation, rather than arising from a pre-existing identity, and the commons was proposed as holding this potential.

The struggles of ordinary people to defend the commons were told through the historical commons of England and shown to be ongoing around the world and in new arenas (Humphries 1990; Ostrom 1990; Neeson 1993; Linebaugh 2008; Hyde 2010; Gilbert 2014). The commons was demonstrated to be a conceptual framework that is responsive to local conditions, accommodates heterogeneity and assigns agency to those who take part in it. Ostrom's institution-based Design Principles were shown to be of value in supporting a practical project such as the Glazebrook Growers, and able to be adapted to flexible interpretation on the ground (Ostrom 1990: 90). Commoning was proposed as a form of situated practice, and the commons as a field of live debate within which to build my investigation.

The second chapter continued the response to my first research question – how might a commons incorporate both human and nonhuman lives and activities – arguing that although some commons have relied on an intimate entanglement of human and nonhuman lives, the category of resource on which the commons has relied, and to which nonhumans are consigned, is vulnerable to exploitation (Mies & Shiva 1993; Federici 2011). Human perception was established first as the source of destructive behaviours, and then as the arena for a commons that might incorporate nonhumans as well as humans. Arguing that gardening is a practice whereby the intimate 'living together' of human and nonhuman might be recognised, I began to answer my second research question – what practices might support a commons incorporating both humans and nonhumans – by looking at the opportunities that gardening affords to observe symbiotic relations. The work of Lynn Margulis on symbiosis was proposed as a challenge to human self-perception as separate from the nonhuman world, replacing it with an acknowledgement of intimate and

unavoidable 'living together' with nonhumans (Margulis 1998). This was qualified by the recognition that gardening needed to be combined with other methods in order to challenge humans' perception of our relation to the nonhuman world.

Silvia Federici's work on the impact of the enclosures on women, who were transformed from commoners into common resource, highlighted the problematic nature of the category of 'resource', which seems to be inherent to the commons (Federici 2011). Following on from this the traditional term 'stint' or restriction and Lewis Hyde's 'right of action' were proposed as a tool with which to examine the extent to which nonhumans were incorporated into the Glazebrook Growers' gardening practices (Hyde 2010). These were shown to be essentially human-centred, and I argued that combining two human-centred practices, commoning and gardening, was inadequate to the task of more fully recognising nonhuman rights of action.

An analysis of contemporary discourses of the Anthropocene demonstrated that conceptual hierarchies that grant a special and separate status to humans are still at work in habits of human perception and destructive human behaviours. In the context of current ecological crises Haraway and Tsing's term Plantationocene was shown to better acknowledge human–nonhuman entanglement and the Kitchen Garden was explored as an 'anti-plantation' in demonstrating care for place and a mutual responsiveness between human and nonhuman (Haraway, Tsing & Mitman 2019).

Bruno Latour and John Law's Actor-Network Theory was valuable to the process of thinking through alternative approaches to human–nonhuman relations (Latour 2005; Law 2007). The emphasis this study places on actions rather than things, in order to give agency to nonhumans and change perceptual habits, was demonstrated to be indebted to ANT, but I also found ANT to be at odds with my embedded position in the research. I adopted instead Anna Tsing's concept of assemblages, and her proposal of 'noticing' as a method to build an alternative framework with which to acknowledge more fully nonhuman lives in the garden (Tsing 2015).

A review of examples of art practice that engages with human–nonhuman relations generated an analysis of methodology in this field (Subhankar Banerjee, Mabe Bethônico, Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson). Work that appeared attuned to spectacle and the art world, and to give rise to uneven power relations that privileged the artist (Joanna Rajkowska), was

contrasted with work taking more nuanced approach to both human relations and those between humans and nonhumans. Patricia Johanson's work was argued to achieve a carefully situated approach through the combination of her partial perspective as an artist and mother with scientific and organisational disciplines, thereby creating more 'livable' conditions for both humans and nonhumans. Scale was examined in relation to the ecological engagements of recent art practice, and the small scale of the practice on which this thesis is based – the scale of our day-to-day lives and encounters – was argued to be crucial to its contribution.

Chapter Three moved into the final stage of my investigation, by way of the perceptual commons proposed by Clarice Allgood (Allgood 2010). The previous chapter had identified human perception as key to problematic human behaviours, and Allgood enabled this area to be considered as a commons in which nonhuman activities could be recognised. At this point the contribution of art practice, particularly practices of listening, came to the fore and sound became the main arena for my research. Having experienced myself the potential of sound to intensify individual embodied experience while connecting one to others, I decided to propose experimental listening sessions to other Growers. The Deep Listening practices on which the two listening sessions in the garden were based were relatively new to me, and I was able to share some of the feeling of discovery and newness reported by other participants.

Oliveros's approach of listening to everything, and practicing the different modes of global and focal listening, were proposed as a means of creating a different quality of attention to the garden (Oliveros 1984; 2005). The descriptions given by participants of their experience in the sessions communicated openness and curiosity towards both human and nonhuman sounds, as well as associative and dreamlike elements (section 3.4). Vulnerability and play came with making sounds as well as listening to them and this seemed to prompt a joyful reaction in participants. The more participatory exercises were shown to produce descriptions that assigned agency to nonhumans such as trees and leaves, and there was an interplay between human imagination and soundmaking and the outer soundscape of the garden. Oliveros's Deep Listening enabled humans to participate in this sound-based commons, and the open attentiveness promoted connections between humans and with nonhumans. However, nonhuman soundmaking was shown to be largely absent.

In addition to the terminology of Deep Listening, soundscape ecology and acoustic ecology provided the language with which I could analyse the experience reported by other participants and think about my own experience (Jez Riley French, Jana Winderen; Schafer 1977; Krause [2012] 2013; 2015). Bernie Krause's niche hypothesis contributed a reflection on the domination of the acoustic bandwidth of the garden by machine anthropophony, and this was combined with the perceptual commons to suggest that the garden soundscape had been partially enclosed by mechanised sound.

Analysis of the Deep Listening sessions in relation to Anna Tsing's polyphony generated the concept of a polyphonic commons in the garden, but one that was only slightly perceptible to the human participants (Tsing 2015). Framing the compost bin as a polyphonic commons expanded the consideration beyond sound to encompass sight, touch and smell, in an endeavour to perceive the myriad nonhuman actors at work in the bin. The bin as commons brought together various strands of my argument. It was examined as a common-pool resource as well as a polyphonic commons, and considered as a site at which humans could encounter our symbiotic interdependence with microbial and invertebrate organisms.

A barrier encountered in the exploration of perceptual commons was that of the limits of human sensory perception, since so much lies beyond the reach of both sight and hearing, the two senses on which I have focused. My study closed with a preliminary exploration of how this barrier might be overcome, or at least moved back, by taking a hydrophone and a contact microphone into the garden. The resulting experience of hearing continual activity in soil and compost transformed the way I perceived the garden, creating an impact of great immediacy, and suggested some directions for future research, set out at the end of this Conclusion.

Original Contribution to Knowledge

Croxted Road Estate, the Kitchen Garden and the Glazebrook Growers have been valuable sites for research in part because they are not unusual. As we saw in Chapter One, there are commonalities with other housing estates, community gardens and growing projects, artist-led and otherwise, so that approaches and methods I have found to be of use here might inform those adopted in similar contexts. The use of the commons as a lens through which to examine our activities gave us principles supportive of our survival and equitable organisation (section 1.7) that are of relevance to other small self-organised groups,

particularly those with limited funding. The Deep Listening methods tested in Chapter Three (section 3.4) were shown to be accessible to a group of people from varied backgrounds, but to rely also on a context of trust, established in our case through longstanding relationships, and these lessons can help to guide their deployment elsewhere, and in groups outside the usual arts contexts in which such methods are generally encountered.

However the value of this study lies also in its particularity and what Anna Tsing has called ‘non-scalability’, the refusal to ‘make one’s research framework apply to greater scales without changing one’s research questions’, insisting instead on ‘meaningful diversity’ (Tsing 2015: 38). It considers one place and one set of people, unique not in any one respect but as a specific coming together of place, circumstances and lifeways. The ‘knot of concerns’ on Croxted Road Estate seemed to centre around land use and growing, and so gardening became an important method in the research and part of its contribution to knowledge. The stage before we decided to make a garden was fundamental, however. This was a time during which I attended to the situation – began listening to it – without being sure what was unfolding.

The Lower East Side resident quoted in section 1.6, who asked an artist ‘what are you doing here?’ (Kester 2004: 124), kept coming back to me, as I reflected on my own activities and research, and on interventions by others – gardeners, council workers, artists – at people’s places of residence. Attending a seminar at London’s City Hall on ‘Greening Social Housing’ in 2014, before undertaking doctoral research,² I heard speakers muse on how to achieve ‘resident involvement’; few, if any, of those present appeared to live at the sites they were discussing. My account of my own experience, of a resident-led initiative facing official hostility, met with puzzlement. Later, searching the British Library Sound Archive for the voices of council estate residents I discovered that, compared with those of architects and professionals speaking from the outside, they were hard to find.

This thesis and its appendices make a contribution to remedying the absence of residents’ voices and opinions from the archive. More broadly, and with implications for local government and arts funding policy towards ‘resident involvement’, the practice has demonstrated the value of working from an embedded vantage point – the perspective of

² The All London Green Grid seminar on Greening Social Housing took place at City Hall in January 2014.

those with an intimate ongoing relationship with a site – from the development stage of a project onwards. It has challenged the imposition of solutions devised by ‘external authorities’ (Ostrom 1990: 14), whether local councils, artists or arts organisations, in favour of solutions worked out on the ground and over time.

The movement from community to commons was key to the development of this thesis, which makes explicit the work that goes into ‘community’ and insists that it be taken account of. By framing community as commons, and a commons as a right of action that must be continually performed, after Hyde, I have insisted on the importance of attending to how relations and projects are made and sustained. The relevance of this can be seen in relation to the frequent invocation of ‘community gardens’ by local councils, activists and artists as a benign way of meeting social and ecological ends. As illustrated by Fritz Haeg’s intervention (section 1.6), the focus is often on physical infrastructure and the quick transformation of a physical site, whereas this thesis has placed the emphasis on the relations in which the garden is held, and the practice has demonstrated the importance of doing so.³

I have proposed a dialogical strategy of engaging attentively and elaborating methods in response to a specific situations and sets of relationships. By combining this situated approach, after Haraway, and Tsing’s concept of ‘noticing’, with the accumulated knowledge of the commons my research opens up new possibilities for working methodologies in dialogical practice. Grizedale Arts, mentioned in section 1.6, has championed the value of dialogical projects ‘radiating outwards from local desire rather than any artistic or curatorial proposal’ (O’Neill & Doherty 2011; Grizedale Arts website). Where Grizedale works from the stance of an established arts organisation in a rural setting, the research set out here has taken a similar approach but on a smaller scale and in an urban neighbourhood. It challenges the policy of ‘parachuting’ artists into sites identified as ‘communities’ by arts and other organisations (see discussion of Tate, Fritz Haeg, and Anna Francis, section 1.6). In opposition to this I have demonstrated a commons-based approach in which responsibility was disseminated among residents, and the contribution of the artist took a

³ At the time of writing Southwark Council are consulting on a Great Estates Programme of ‘resident-centred estate improvement plans’ (Southwark Council website: Decision details page), with the Fritz Haeg/Bankside Open Space Trust intervention at Brookwood House featuring in a compilation of ‘excellent case studies’ (Southwark Council undated: 3).

supporting role. Underpinning this approach, I have shown the value of a durational practice in moving beyond quick remedies and looking to the longer term.⁴ The extension of research and practice over time has enabled the development of methods for thinking about ways in which we live in the world.

My own position as initiator of a group was one in which there could be a temptation to accumulate and retain control. With the Glazebrook Growers I instead saw the ‘success’ of the group in terms of dispersing responsibility to many members so that it would not rely too heavily on one or two initiators. The input of others was valued not just in day-to-day activities but at moments of ‘leading’, teaching or initiating new activities, when we sometimes called on those with more specialised expertise. The design skills of carpenters resident on the estate resulted in raised beds well suited to their users (section 1.7), and the teaching of urban gardener Paul Richens gave our group of novice gardeners access to his enthusiasm and knowledge (section 2.7). By enlisting the help of Beckie Leach, a more experienced practitioner, to lead the Deep Listening exercises, the responsibility of introducing the practices to other participants was shared, and I was able to relax in undertaking the meditations, reflections and discussions as part of the group (section 3.4).

Each of these examples of the dispersal of control broadened the pool of expertise we drew on, enriched our time in the garden and strengthened the resilience of the group. The research also gained a wider range of voices and points of view from people well-informed in their respective fields.

Although I did not set out to construct a feminist thesis, I found in feminist theory (Haraway and Tsing); in accounts of women’s commoning and activism (Neeson 1993; Mies & Shiva 1993; Federici 2011); and in a practice devised in the context of the women’s liberation movement of the 1970s (Oliveros’s Deep Listening), the means by which I could both think through human and human-nonhuman relationships, and link these reflections to practice on the ground. The understanding of listening as having multiple registers – as attentiveness in research; as noticing both human and nonhuman lifeways; as acoustic practice – has derived from these different strands of feminism.

⁴ Akin to the longitudinal practice of Patricia Johanson, but in a small-scale context with less institutional involvement.

The scrutiny of human-nonhuman relations enabled by these strategies of listening has supported a contribution to the field of political ecology⁵ in which the commons both supports human solidarity and self-organisation, and opens up to the nonhuman world. Within the Kitchen Garden the Glazebrook Growers were shown to be part of a symbiotic commons in which humans participated alongside plants and microbes in ‘making livability’ (Tsing 2015: 263). Building on this by means of Deep Listening practices that enable human expression as well as attentiveness, the ‘polyphonic commons’ contributes a novel formulation for thinking about and enacting human-nonhuman relations in a context of ecological crisis.

Inevitably, at times the practice did not proceed as anticipated. The Tea and Talk sessions were envisaged as conversations facilitated among older residents, but low attendance meant that in practice they were more like interviews, relying on my questions to elicit the participants’ reflections. The contrast between this experience and the easier interactions of the Deep Listening sessions reflected the greater trust and longer familiarity that I had established with those involved with the Kitchen Garden. It was also the case that I began research at a point when we were losing an older generation on the estate, as they died or moved into care homes.

Next Steps

The garden warrants further exploration as an arena for encounters with the nonhuman that is easily accessible to many humans, and it is conducive to practices that are simultaneously gentle and challenging to habits of perception, both in myself as an artist and potentially to others that I will work with. I regard this as an ongoing project to foster a more open and responsive attitude to the nonhuman world through perceptual work.

My practice with the Glazebrook Growers was conducted largely, and deliberately, for the benefit of residents on Croxted Road Estate, myself among them. The initial phase of establishing our group and its ethos has been negotiated and we have completed several seasons of growing in the Kitchen Garden. At the same time my own phase of doctoral

⁵ While it can be understood in terms of the broad field of ‘environmental humanities’ that has brought different arts and social science disciplines to the understanding of ecological questions, I position my contribution within the field of political ecology, a term that more explicitly places questions of human organisation and power alongside those of ecology.

research approaches completion. Space now opens up in which to consider the visibility of the growing project and associated research, and its communication to a wider secondary audience.⁶

The micro-level soundscape that was the subject of initial exploration in section 3.5 invites further investigation, and a consideration of how this experience might be shared with others. I anticipate devising expanded listening workshops encompassing both Deep Listening and listening with technological aids. This approach could be explored with other community growing projects, as well as on Croxted Road Estate, and opened to wider audiences interested in listening practices and ecology.

In March 2020 I presented the paper ‘Listening as Multispecies Commoning’ at the Animal Gaze Constructed symposium at London Metropolitan University and anticipate further submissions at conferences concerned with the environmental humanities, and specifically animal-human studies, eco-aesthetics and political ecology.

Postscript

In the middle of March 2020, as my work on this thesis neared completion, I was curious to note that, although I was apparently well, my senses of taste and smell had entirely vanished. I was soon to discover I had been caught by the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic as it hit London.⁷ Once lockdown measures were in place, the domination of the Kitchen Garden’s acoustic space by ‘mechanised voices that never tire’, noted in section 3.4, melted away and birdsong took on a startling clarity.⁸ The roads around Croxted Road Estate emptied of traffic and filled instead with people, including many children, walking and cycling. Although people on foot and birdsong were again crowded out as the strict measures of lockdown relaxed, we have now experienced and will remember different ways

⁶ The Glazebrook Growers do have an online presence (principally a blog and Instagram account) and a lively WhatsApp group, which support communication within the group and give our activities a certain level of visibility, mostly to those interested in community gardening. See for instance figures 58 and 62.

⁷ Like many others, I lost both livelihood and health and went on a strange sensory and perceptual journey. Waves of fatigue floored me for six months, while both memory and coherent thought became elusive. Time slowed down but slipped through my fingers. When fatigue receded smells and tastes once delicious to me – coffee, chocolate, basil, coriander – brought with them a whiff of decay.

⁸ Conversations about birdsong became common among friends and in the media (see for instance Guardian Editorial 2020), and reports from the UK and the United States have since noted benefits to people and to other species of the months of reduced noise (Derryberry et al 2020; Lemney 2020).

of being in these shared spaces. What we will make of this time is under negotiation. It is an opportunity to advocate for listening, noticing and commoning.

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