

**Cultivating Everyday Life:
Yards, Nature, and Time in the City**

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*This dissertation is dedicated
with love
to my parents*

*Gretchen Chesley Lang
&
Jeffrey William Lang*

ABSTRACT

This dissertation focuses on everyday practices in residential yards, in the context of recent shifts towards urban sustainability policies and projects. Yards, and the variegated access to these private landscapes, are deeply political, and shaped by fundamentally racialized histories of home ownership and urbanization in US cities and suburbs. Yards are also an arena in which people are confronted with an array of contemporary social and environmental issues. Through qualitative and ethnographic fieldwork with residents in three diverse Minneapolis neighborhoods, I studied how yards are inhabited, experienced, and cultivated. I also analyzed municipal sustainability policies and environmental advocacy projects, to situate residents' experiences within regimes of urban governance. I found yards are experienced and understood by residents in much more diverse and complex ways than is generally considered from scholarly and policy perspectives. Engagement with yards often involves decades of maintenance, cultivation, and care. I have found a surprisingly diverse range of informal property arrangements and sharing economies, with varying forms and meanings across and within study areas. Engagement with yards also depends on embodied skills, socioeconomic positions, and capacities to pause and attune to more-than-human rhythms.

I argue yards and yard practices contribute to the reinforcement of certain fundamental urban logics such as private property and the production of a discrete and manageable nature. But everyday yard practices also provide disruptions to these logics and create the conditions for new social relations to emerge, such as urban commons in variegated forms. Furthermore, cultivating yards entail affective attunements between human practice and encounters with more-than-human organisms, within the context of sociopolitical relations at multiple scales. Thus, the research contributes to debates about urban environmentalisms by considering sustainability in terms of experiential and affective registers beyond best practices and measure. The research also reveals diverse and collective practices of property ownership and stewardship, in the midst of what is often considered the most iconic landscape of American private property – neighborhoods of single family houses. Finally, the research contributes to recent calls within geography about the possibilities and limitations of a renovated phenomenology in the ways geographers study and represent diverse human experiences.

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PROLOGUE
WHAT YARDS DO



Figure 1. Yards connect lives. Photo from the Minnesota Historical Society (MNHS) Collection (see Appendix II for full information).

Yards connect lives.

Two women talk over a fence, kids in clean white dressing gowns on hips. Hair tied back as they carry out their work. It is 1925, and these are Italian American women. This is a kind of everyday moment seldom captured in photographs of this era. The invisibility of these moments which we make, and which, in turn, make us. It is drudgery. It is inequity. It is another day, with possibility.



Figure 2. Yards are more than human. Photo from MNHS Collection (see Appendix II).

Yards are more than human.

In a backyard in St Paul, around 1920, three girls stand amidst a flock of chickens. A woman stands just out of frame, with a bonnet and long skirt. She looks like a domestic worker, a hint of the class and power circulating in this space. She looks on at the girls from a distance. Their stark white clothes stand out against the cluttered surroundings. A tall and rather ramshackle picket fence forms a backdrop to the activity in the frame. The earth shows through tamped down grass, a work surface. All of these things tell a story of utility, habitat for livestock, a place of work and growth.



Figure 3. Yards are seen by others. Photo from MNHS Collection (see Appendix II).

Yards are seen by others.

This photograph has a caption, which tells a story together with the image: “An example of extremely poor outdoor housekeeping and drainage problems in a residential lot on Queen Avenue North, Minneapolis.” The date is September 1960. The expert gaze sees health concerns in standing water, and resident neglect manifested in an abandoned Christmas tree, detritus dotting the puddles. And are these renters? Barrels overflow with trash and a muddy expanse leads to a garage in the background, rutted with tire tracks. It is the era of urban renewal, in all of its many meanings, and Near North is slotted for plans and projects. Yards are caught up in these visions. As potential vectors for disease, stagnation, yardsticks for residents’ capacities to maintain these spaces. Reflections of a neighborhood’s worth.



Figure 4. Two images of the ways people live with yards through material engagements. Photos from MNHS Collection (see Appendix II).

People live with yards through material engagements.

The two women complete their tasks. In 1910, in Minneapolis, Abby Foster reaches into her garden, pulling a weed or perhaps picking a flower. Her eyes squint, as she surveys the garden before her. Across time, in 1979, another older woman is doing a task in the yard. She is unnamed and without a specific place. But still she sweeps a concrete pad, near a porch and steps. It is spring or fall, the leaves are coming or going depending, and the sky is filled with branches. Her house is modest, one decorative and worn filigree band stands upright while the other waits to be replaced or repaired. In both images, labors of maintenance and care occupy these women. Relationships can be seen between their bodies and tools, between architecture and the out of doors, between experience and task.



Figure 5. Bodies in the landscape, of the landscape. Photos from MNHS Collection (see Appendix II).

Bodies in the landscape, of the landscape.

She leans casually, an older woman in the sun, one hand on her hip, the other arm along the top of the fence. Her smile competes with the stark white pickets for attention, echoed behind her in another fence. Her feet in dark shoes are hidden behind the grass. Property owned. Property bound. Her smile is infectious, in high relief by the shadow across half her face. There is joy, pride, and a sense of ease in her. She is of this landscape of pickets, it is hers in a sense, and she is its. It is also about 1910, and Marie Madison King stands behind an outrageous shrub filled with blooms. She is almost entirely obscured by these. Just the length of her checkerboard skirt can be seen below, her face smiling but a bit skeptical. Maybe it's the sun. A glimpse of her checkerboard right shoulder just beyond the blooms. Both of these women have been captured in a moment when their bodies are of their surroundings.



Figure 6. People come together in yards. Photos from MNHS Collection (see Appendix II).

People come together.

The frothy white dresses stand out in each image. Two weddings. Separated in time and space. One, a wedding in North Minneapolis in 1985. In a front yard a small crowd sits on folding chairs, some perched on a parked car beyond, and smile as the bride comes forth, her white high heel marks the way. Her face is obscured by the veil caught in a breeze. In the other image made in 1955, a bride and groom sit with attendants in a backyard, under an especially festive umbrella, maybe rented for the occasion, and eat the celebratory feast. Just out of frame, a man sits at a nearby picnic table. Special events mark the use of these yards, settings for one of life's great rituals. Furnishings are carried outside, dishes lined up on tables. Grass forms a carpet for the festivities. People gather.



Figure 7. Yards measure rhythms. Photos from MNHS Collection (see Appendix II).

Yards measure rhythms.

People inhabit yards by sitting, reading, reflecting, thinking, simply being outdoors. A similar affective energy circulates within these two images, made sixty five years apart. A quiet calm pervades both. People sit, on cushions, on an old wooden chair, recline in a hammock, legs crossed. They read, books rest in laps at the moment when they look at the camera. It is 1899. The yard a place of leisure. A place to listen, to smell, to touch. In the other image, a woman contemplates the camera, the person photographing her. A work day? A pause. The caption says “Life comes easy, June ’64.” This time the fence is not painted bright white and it rolls gently with age and the sloping ground where dandelions grow. The yard as a place to pause.

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The space between a house and property bounds, a house and street, a house and alley. A yard is a territory. A yard is a memory. A yard is everyday. A yard is a special day. Yards are designed, and yards are maintained, cultivated and inhabited. Yards are owned, yards are regulated. A yard makes ground to the figure of house. A yard is figure made of intention. A yard is made up of its inhabitants and what they do, how they live. People, animals, plants, fungi. A yard grows, adapts. Yards are moments quick in passing, which can happen again and again. And so, perhaps it is useful to ask slightly different questions. What do yards make possible?

This is not an historical study, and the particulars of these yards will not appear in the pages that follow. But shades of these relationships reverberate in everyday yards.

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In one sense there is nothing more simple and more obvious than everyday life. How do people live? The question may be difficult to answer, but that does not make it any the less clear. In another sense nothing could be more superficial: it is banality, triviality, *repetitiveness*. And in yet another sense nothing could be more profound. It is existence and the 'lived', revealed as they are before speculative thought has transcribed them: what must be changed and what is the hardest of all to change.

– Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*

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But look at those trees, those lawns and those groves. To your eyes they situate themselves in a permanence, in a spatial simultaneity, in a coexistence. But look harder and longer. This simultaneity, up to a certain point, is only apparent: a surface, a spectacle. Go deeper, dig beneath the surface, listen attentively instead of simply looking, of reflecting the effects of a mirror.

You thus perceive that each plant, each tree, has its rhythm, made up of several: the trees, the flowers, the seeds and fruits, each have their time. The plum tree? The flowers were born in the spring, before the leaves, which will survive the fruits and fall late in the autumn and not all at once.

In place of a collection of fixed things, you will follow each *being*, each *body*, as having its own time above the whole. Each one therefore having its place, its rhythm, with its recent past, a foreseeable and a distant future.

– Henri Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis*

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION EVERYDAY URBAN ENVIRONMENTS

This is where I *live*.

- Wanda in her yard, North Minneapolis

All the while the honey bees keep on / with tireless fructation.

- Aimee Norton¹

Introduction

Urban environments have become a primary place for rethinking relationships between people and our more-than-human surroundings in the contemporary context of environmental change and calamity. Municipal policymakers and planners, as well as environmental advocates, have increasingly tried to rethink urban environmentalism beyond green spaces (such as parkland), in terms of sustainability, adaptation, and most recently, climate change and resilience. Furthermore, the city itself is now imagined from these perspectives in terms of its capacity to affect, and even remediate, negative environmental impacts. A diverse range of sustainability policies and projects have been taken up in a twofold way by cities across the United States – through regulation, as well as motivation towards quantifiable metrics and goals. In so doing, the city is imagined as a series of discrete and manageable systems – often void of, or reducing, complex social processes through which urban environments are made.

At the same time that these applied renderings in formal plans and diverse projects try to imagine more sustainable cities, there has been much recent conceptual interest in rethinking cities in more-than-human and posthuman terms. Geographers and

¹ Norton, A. “No Sin Like Arson.” *Really System*. Issue Two: Sly Early Stem. (2014)
<http://reallysystem.org/issues/two/>

allied scholars have recently deployed a variety of concepts in order to reimagine these relationships – and their implications for sociopolitical processes – including: assemblage, network, cyborg, hybridity, and affect. Writing nature “back in” to the city is not a new story, but has become a focus of renewed energy in the past three decades as geographers and other urban scholars see more and more the urban nonhuman in terms of agency, politics, and society.

All the while, cities thrum with the routines and habits through which these urban environments are constituted and constantly reshaped by inhabitants. People make their worlds in some capacity in and through their everyday lives. This daily life contains within it a double nature of a kind of rote repetition that reproduces dominant sociospatial relations, but also a repetition that makes possible difference to emerge, through which social transformation may be possible. These repetitions render urban environments full of sedimented routines, shared meanings, as well as possibilities for reconfiguring socionatural relations. These everyday practices, so often overlooked and undervalued to varying degrees by practitioners and scholars alike, make a place and time for *inhabitation*, a place and time for world-making. Thus, temporalities and rhythms comprise essential ways of understanding lived experience. And these repetitions always hold within them the possibilities for sociopolitical and socionatural transformation.

At the heart of this dissertation is one kind of this everyday world-making common even across diverse residential landscapes in the United States – the cultivation of yards. Yards are the outdoor space around usually single family houses, sometimes duplexes and apartment buildings. Yards are in front between house and sidewalk or street, to either side between houses, and in back stretching to an alley or property line.

Tied up as these spaces are with segregated and exclusionary histories of urban and suburban development in the United States, access to yards has been highly uneven. Firmly lodged within these processes of past and continuing urbanization and suburbanization, every yard is at once a physical, imaginary, ideological, social, emotional, biological, and political place. In this project, the yard provides a faceted lens through which to see multiple and sometimes contradictory perspectives on urban environments. Each of these views supplements, undermines, and reinforces one another: municipal environmentalisms, embodied engagements in everyday practice, affective experience, social life and living in common. Through these refractions, fundamental questions emerge about how people live in urban environments, and about how we collectively know urban environments.

Drawing on phenomenology, theories of environment, and studies of everyday life, I ground my investigation in an ethnographic approach to better see diverse lived experiences with yards in three study areas in Minneapolis, MN. I contextualize these findings with a study of contemporary sustainability policies and projects organized around urban gardening. The central argument of this dissertation project is that people live with their yards through diverse material engagements – as inhabitants, property owners, environmental stewards, commoners, and caretakers.

Inhabiting yards involves a broad range of embodied engagements beyond cultivation, and through which affective attachments and social relations circulate. Multiple rhythms and temporalities interact through these yard engagements, shaping experiences of home, neighborhood, and city. Yards also make possible moments outside the constraints of linear time. They are landscapes of pause and rest, pleasure, feeling,

and the senses. Yards embody socionatural burdens and pressures, frustrations, and places where limits are reached – of time, skill, money, or energy. And yards have been shaped within social and economic structures with highly uneven and unequal access to such engagements. All of this is felt materially and emotionally. Beyond the capture of narrowly defined quantitative sustainability metrics or capitalist logics of value in private property, all of these attachments and relations provide the significance, and perhaps transformative possibilities, of yards. In the pages that follow I mobilize yards as an analytic to better understand relationships between city policies and lived experiences with urban environments.

In particular, drawing on theories of everyday life, I build on a distinction from Henri Lefebvre between *the city as habitat* – known and designed by experts in largely physical and economic terms; and *the city as inhabited* – lived and experienced by people in everyday life. I argue inhabitation must be understood in terms of the physical habitats in which it occurs. But this is not enough, and inhabitation must also be understood in conjunction with the many embodied practices, affective attachments, and collective meanings which shape and are shaped by such spaces. Furthermore, in the contemporary moment of urban environmentalisms, yards are at the interface of rethinking relationships between water, city infrastructure, native species, chemical pesticides and fertilizers, and sources for growing local food. If urban environments are to be better understood by planners, designers, and scholars in their fullness – through all the uneven power relations, and mutually entwined social and spatial processes – we must draw from yard experiences all that we can. This project explores what can be found out from the diverse ways yards are understood in urban environmental policies and projects, as well as how

they are experienced and shaped in everyday life.

Theorizing Everyday Life

Walk along almost any residential block in Minneapolis, and you are surrounded by yards. Front yards stretch in either direction along probably a linear city block, with a concrete sidewalk and a narrow boulevard. The block might be punctuated by driveways, or back alleys might provide access for cars. The northern continental climate is lush and green in short summers, brown and snowy in long winters. Along the rectilinear streets first built along streetcar lines in the 1910s and 1920s, yards are very often similarly shaped – long lots approximately forty feet across and one hundred feet deep, with a single family house set back from the sidewalk and situated slightly to the north of the property to allow for a sunny side yard to the south. The financial value and size of homes varies significantly across the city, as does the presence of a mature urban forest canopy, and proportions of renters to owners. Although the yards are similar to one another, somehow it's easy to see where the property lines are drawn. Plants make boundaries, just as edges of mowing do, or the degree to which lawns are manicured – weeded, lush with fertilizers, littered with fallen leaves. But in most cases, these spaces provide a kind of connective green space along blocks and neighborhoods. Yards constitute one kind of utterly ordinary urban space in many North American towns, cities, and suburbs. As such, the life of yards is often overlooked, simplified, or reduced.

At least four ways of thinking about yards as everyday urban spaces can be drawn out as a place to start. First, yards can be simple and obvious. They are the outdoor space around homes. Grass grows there, sometimes trees and other plants. These are natural

yards, their very presence naturalized and particularities overlooked by a general observer. A second approach to yards focuses on these sites as a place to display and reproduce cheap everyday banality and triviality – the nylon flag with a symbol of the season, the most boring hostas framing the bounds of private property because that’s what a homeowner does. These are yards filled with consumerism and a kind of market induced predictability. A third approach looks at yards as habitats, shaped and planned by market forces, expert knowledge, uneven power, and state control. These are yards as gridded parcels of private property defined by city streets and alleys. Originally laid out across the land in the dreams of development along streetcar lines, now these yards are regulated by an apparatus of city codes and enforcement defining the setbacks, contents, types and extents of plants, and assessing the maintenance of screens, doors, paint, and address numbers. Increasingly, though many argue not fast enough, these are yards governed by shifting ideas about environmentalism and climate change. These aspects of yards are not always easily seen by inhabitants, though they profoundly shape the kinds of everyday encounters people have with such spaces.

But a fourth approach looks for yards as a place of lived experience and the making of meaning, where bodies and landscapes interact through practice and affective attachments. This is the yard where someone bends over a garden bed, reaching to pull weeds as they have done a hundred times before, because they want to cultivate sensations like blooming plants or different textures for neighbors to see and experience. This is a yard where women might stop to talk over a blooming plant, and those blooms bring back a past for one of them. Or maybe this is the yard that shows to others the inhabitant can’t maintain their home, through the scruffy grass, the garden beds

overgrown, trees which need trimming. In this yard, maybe there will be a fine to pay the city for letting things go. Maybe the inhabitant struggles to pay the mortgage. These are inhabited yards, constantly made meaningful, physically shaped and reshaped, and places where different organisms, histories, skills, and bodies all come together.

These dimensions of everyday yards are captured in a quote by Henri Lefebvre, from the second of his three volume, *Critique of Everyday Life*. He writes,

In one sense there is nothing more simple and more obvious than everyday life. How do people live? The question may be difficult to answer, but that does not make it any the less clear. In another sense nothing could be more superficial: it is banality, triviality, *repetitiveness*. And in yet another sense nothing could be more profound. It is existence and the “lived”, revealed as they are before speculative thought has transcribed them: what must be changed and what is the hardest of all to change.²

The everyday is the central concept of this project, around which satellite concepts such as habitat, inhabitation, affect, and commons orbit. This is an everyday with a double nature – a repetition that becomes linear time in the service of the making of dominant capitalist values, and a repetition with rhythms that exceed these constraints and make possible difference and transformation to emerge. This is an everyday which is a habitat, and which is inhabited.

In this heart of the Introductory chapter, I take four slices into theorizations of everyday life as an entry point to the rest of the chapters, where yards will be examined and explored as one kind of everyday urban environment. First, I discuss general approaches to theorizing the everyday, ranging from an emphasis on social structures which shape possibilities, to the radical creative possibility in everyday practice. I then draw out two aspects of everyday life particularly important to the life of urban yards:

² _____. *Critique of Everyday Life, Vol. 2: Foundations for a Sociology of the Everyday*. Translated by John Moore. New York: Verso Books, 2008 [1957], 47, *emph. orig.*.

rhythm, time and repetition; and built environments, with a focus on two scales: home and everyday urbanism.

Defining Everyday Life

Everyday life is a concept whose precise meaning can be hard to pin down. One of the unifying ways everyday life has been understood is through the idea of practice – all the activities, routines, habits, and gestures through which people are engaged with their surroundings. In daily life, many of these are taken for granted, and it is this aspect of a kind of naturalized practice which has been of interest to many scholars working on questions of the everyday. How do particular practices become so familiar as to rarely be noticed? What is the relationship between individual activity and collective social norms and structures? How do these practices change over space and time? And what possibilities are there for new practices to emerge?

Practice in relation to structure

From Bourdieu's background in anthropological ethnography, his perspective focuses on how people as individuals live within their own social worlds. For Bourdieu, practice is produced through the *habitus*. The habitus produces both individual and collective practices, through the "system of disposition" produced and reproduced through practices as history. The *habitus* cannot be fully accounted for either by looking at purely external forces to subjects, nor their own internal drives. Practice is produced through the dialectical relations between two systems – one that is seen as a deterministic and "mechanistic sociology", and the other a purely internal "voluntarist or spontaneist

subjectivism.”³ The *habitus* relates these two areas *through practice* – “history turned into nature, i.e. denied as such.”⁴ Bourdieu brings both the bodily and subjective experience of individual agents together with the ordering structures of social worlds that are being continually produced and reproduced through daily practices (e.g. capitalist production). For Bourdieu, the individual is an agent, working within a particular field of social relations (often determined by economic class), embodying through practices “real” material and social effects. Subjects can only ever be understood within their own universe of practice.⁵ Bourdieu situates individuals within their own contexts of meaning.

Bourdieu argues that the dichotomy between the economic and non-economic limits the way that practices can be understood. Rather than looking at these specialized areas of social life, Bourdieu argues for a science that is able to see all practices as economic. He writes that symbolic capital, “a disguised form of physical ‘economic’ capital only produces its proper effect...inasmuch as it conceals the fact that it originates in ‘material’ forms of capital which are also, in the last analysis, the source of its effects.”⁶ While Bourdieu focuses on expanding economic understandings into realms of practice previously considered non-economic, this more generalized science of practices also leaves open the possibility of seeing economic practices as more than just economic – as embodying other social relations beyond the use value, exchange value, and value of commodities and commodity exchange. While using the dialectical approaches to everyday practice, Bourdieu does not limit the analysis to purely economic terms. His

³ Bourdieu, P. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. New York: Univ. of Cambridge, 1977. 82.

⁴ Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 78-9.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 110.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 183.

interest lies in the gaps between the dualities of dialectical relations, and how those gaps and differences articulate with social structures and relations.

While Bourdieu does take into account both structure and individual action, the habitus remains as something always exterior to daily life, producing both individual and collective practices. Although Bourdieu seems to want to grant more creative powers to his agents, the habitus looms overhead, and a sense of inevitability always hangs in the air around the subjects. While this recognizes not all practices in daily life are rational choices, it also constrains possibilities for radical social transformation. Michel de Certeau further develops individuals and their creative potentials in everyday life.

Making creative practices

Michel de Certeau locates the everyday in relation to “the everyman” and “the anyone”, as produced through the advent of capitalist industrial production, and the forces of modernity. de Certeau’s everyday is hidden from analysis – the practices that constitute the everyday cannot be easily understood within existing concepts of individuals and society. Drawing on Lefebvre, the Situationists, and British popular culture studies, de Certeau situates his arguments about everyday life within the context of a reimagining of these figures of “the everyman.” de Certeau’s everyday is populated not with passive consumers, but with people who creatively assemble their lives through practice in a sort of *bricolage*.⁷ Through the creative, subversive, and hidden practices of the ordinary, de Certeau’s subjects actively engage in *making*. This making of lives through practice sees great potential for reimagining and imagining how social worlds

⁷ de Certeau, M. *The Practice of Everyday Life, Vol. 1*. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1984, xviii

might be, empowering individuals. de Certeau's development of Lefebvre's *strategies* and *tactics*, aligns practices of individuals as tactics – in relative motion and resistance to static social structures. Unlike Bourdieu and Lefebvre, de Certeau's relentless focus on the creativity and innovation of everyday practices paints a world where a mobile practice always resists immobile and unchanging social structures and institutions. There seems to be little room within practice for the kinds of complexities described by Lefebvre.

The point of analysis for de Certeau is not an external or totalizing view of society, and as such, allows room for relative fragmentation of experience and understanding.⁸ Drawing on Wittgenstein's analysis of ordinary language, de Certeau argues there is no outside of the ordinary. To undertake this analysis, even while in the midst of the everyday, is to “grasp it as an ensemble of practices in which one is implicated and through which the prose of the world is at work.”⁹ Bourdieu, and Lefebvre (next section), both attempt at understanding the totality of modern society, approaches from which de Certeau distances himself.¹⁰

Possibilities for social transformation

Lefebvre's approach to everyday life draws closely on critical analysis from Marx and Hegel, using dialectical relations to describe the overlapping aspects of lived experience, possibilities for social transformation, and critique of itself that he argues is immanent in the everyday. For Lefebvre, everyday life is intimately caught up with the

⁸ de Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, 11.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁰ Highmore, B. “Michel de Certeau's Poetics of Everyday life.” Chapter 8. In *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory: An Introduction*, Chapter 8. New York: Routledge, 2002b.

advent of industrial capitalist production of the nineteenth century, growing out of the emergent interests in the mundane repetitiveness of new production techniques, new ways of experiencing urban life, and new relationships within the family. The ordinary-ness of modern everyday life is seen by Lefebvre as an inauthentic way of living, but with remnants and potentials from outside this inauthenticity. Broadening concepts from Marx such as alienation and production beyond their economic dimensions, Lefebvre finds alienation one of the central experiences of modern everyday life – workers have increasingly become alienated in terms of both individual (private) and social (public) elements of everyday life. Lefebvre argues social relations must be understood through the minutiae of everyday life – not an approach with which classical philosophy has engaged up to this point. Lefebvre insists on hopefulness about processes of “disalienation” operating in everyday life all the time, in and amongst the more dominant alienating forces, and looks for the inherent contradictions working away within the apparent wholeness of social life. For Lefebvre, these possibilities for radical social transformation remain always within the everyday, and shape the most important way in which studying everyday life is meaningful.

Lefebvre argues everyday life cannot be defined as *praxis*. Lefebvre sweepingly defines praxis as the equivalent of “totality in action, it encompasses the base and the superstructures, as well as the interactions between them.”¹¹ If everyday life were as straight forward as praxis, we would need only record the minor details of daily life, Lefebvre says.¹² From a dialectical viewpoint, this approach focuses only on the reverse image of a social totality, and would rely on existing categories, rather than seeing the

¹¹ Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*, Vol. 2, 45.

¹² *Ibid.*, 43.

creative potentials of the everyday. By focusing only on praxis, Lefebvre sees everyday experience reduced to pain, suffering, alienation, and would overlook the creative potential of everyday life. Instead, Lefebvre argues everyday life must be seen as a level within praxis, a third way of understanding in addition to positivist science (that sees *nothing* of interest here) and metaphysics (which sees *everything* of interest).¹³ The *something*, that is neither nothing nor everything, is “a mixture of nature and culture, the historical and the lived, the individual and the social, the real and the unreal, a place of transitions, meetings, interactions and conflicts.”¹⁴ In this dialectical attempt at a definition of the everyday, Lefebvre circles around both the implications of how concepts take form, and also the relations between them.

The everyday is the meeting of creativity and repetition. Lefebvre writes, “Praxis is not confined to the everyday, nor is the everyday confined to a mechanical and unlimited recommencement of the same gestures and operations.”¹⁵ Both the repetitive and exceptional characteristics of everyday life constantly reactivate each other, which can only be seen in a dialectical view of the everyday.¹⁶ Lefebvre thus places creativity *within* the everyday, not as a force outside of it.¹⁷

The relatively expansive writings of Lefebvre on everyday life span six decades, and provide a way to understand the internal complexities and contradictions within practices of daily life. For Lefebvre, the everyday is a complex and simultaneous world, with aspects intricately and dialectically involved with one another. Lefebvre’s everyday always holds out possibilities for radical transformation, with an openness to unforeseen

¹³ *Ibid.*, 46.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 47.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 239.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 45.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 240.

endpoints and relationships. However, Lefebvre also sees the dominant ideologies of collective life as participating in individual and particular lived everyday life. As different from de Certeau and Bourdieu, Lefebvre leaves more room for the participation and influence of these structural and collective forces, in an ongoing and mutually shaped dialectic relation.

Repetition, time, and rhythm

As Rita Felski aptly points out, “Everyday life is above all a temporal term.”¹⁸ In this section, I discuss daily life in terms of repetition, time, and rhythm. In addition to questions about the roteness of repetition, embodied practice emerges as people engage with gestures, habits, and learn skills which become second nature.

Repetition, rhythm and rhythmanalysis

Lefebvre offers the most comprehensive analysis of repetition, through his unfinished work on *rhythmanalysis*, addressing space, time and everyday life through *rhythm*.¹⁹ Lefebvre uses an analysis of rhythm to get at the processes of commodification and alienation integral to modern capitalist production, and the everyday lives of people caught up in those processes. Lefebvre specifically addresses *repetition* as a central way to understand *rhythm*. Repetition introduces and produces *difference* into sequences and

¹⁸ Felski, R. "The Invention of Everyday Life." *New Formations* 39 (1999), 18.

¹⁹ *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life*. Translated by Stuart Elden and Gerald Moore. New York: Continuum, 2004.

series. These differences in turn give rise and context to event.²⁰ Analytically, Lefebvre sees two distinct types of repetition. The first, *cyclical*, embodies the recurring repetitions of natural life, originating in the cosmos. The second, *linear*, originates in social practice and human activity. The two are brought into an antagonistic unity, through “constant compromises, contradictions and disturbances, pulsing throughout everyday life.”²¹

The introduction of linear time to daily life through modernity disrupts and displaces the cyclical repetition of nature. However, fragments hold on, which can be seen in Lefebvre’s notion of *polyrhythmicity*. In polyrhythmic interactions, analysis and critique is immanent within our own bodies, our own everyday. Lefebvre draws on an example of polyrhythmia from his own garden – the polyrhythmia of trees, flowers, birds, and insects for a simultaneity of the present that appears as immobile. In this way, rhythmanalysis alters the dominant conceptions in classical philosophy that there is a difference between inert objects and things, and animate entities. Lefebvre argues there are no things, only “very diverse rhythms, slow or lively (in relation to *us*).”²² This contributes to a rethinking of time and space, as well as environment. Surroundings that seem solid and static are actually also energy of space and time, moving at a very slow rhythm in relation to us. For the Rhythmanalyst, “nothing is immobile.”²³ This recognition requires a new listening to houses, trees, wind, stones, bodies. Lefebvre brings together temporalities and spaces through rhythms, reconstructing the separation and alienation of the two that has emerged with modern capitalism. This approach to rhythms of entities in the environment, and the polyrhythmicity of daily life, provides

²⁰ Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis*, 5.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 8.

²² *Ibid.* 17, *emph. orig.*

²³ *Ibid.*, 20.

powerful understandings of spaces that include nonhumans. Throughout all of this, Lefebvre insists that everyday repetition can produce difference, and this difference is produced through the persistence of old, and the emergence of new, rhythms which cannot be captured by time.

Although Lefebvre locates the experience of these rhythms through the body, Giard and de Certeau offer a more detailed account of *how* body memory and the senses reproduce domestic routines such as cooking. Michel de Certeau's collaboration with Luce Giard and Pierre Mayol, in the second volume of *The Practice of Everyday Life*, focuses on living and cooking as two aspects of everyday life.²⁴ Giard's section of the book looks at cooking through the lens of her own experiences, as well as in-depth interviews with "friends or with women who might have become so."²⁵ Giard's accounts of the practices of cooking in general draw on analyses by Levi-Strauss, Mary Douglas, and Pierre Bourdieu. Of these perspectives, she draws out the relational qualities of practices, and argues that what she calls the *doing-cooking* of daily repetitive food preparations (largely done by women) operates as invention and creation within a "network of impulses", with respect to culturalized and historicized strata of orders and counter orders.²⁶ These stem from "an ethnohistory, a biology, a climatology, and a regional economy, from a cultural invention and a personal experience."²⁷ Giard presents Levi-Strauss' account of cuisine as revealing (unconsciously) society's structures, and the (unseen) coherence of the seeming incoherence of food rules – exclusion, choice, prejudice. However, when juxtaposing Levi-Strauss with Bourdieu, Giard rejects the

²⁴ de Certeau, M., L. Giard, and P. Mayol. *The Practice of Everyday Life, Vol. 2: Living and Cooking*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998.

²⁵ de Certeau, et al. *The Practice of Everyday Life Vol 2.*, 161.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 185.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 185.

immobility of Bourdieu's social stratification through class position, and the dependence of Bourdieu's analysis of individual taste and means of distinctions between classes on the circulation and behavior of capitalist exchange. For Giard, social structures, however, do remain, and form the spaces in which individuals make their everyday lives through *doing-cooking*.

Bodies, routines, and the matter of everyday life

Giard's chapter on *gesture sequences* offers a rich account of the body memory involved in cooking, and of the combination of techniques with memories of previous generations' cooking practices.²⁸ Earlier in the text, Giard uses her own experience as she recalls avoiding direction instructions on cooking from her own mother, only to realize as she began cooking for herself years later, how much of the body movements and gestures she had absorbed from her mother, and how all aspects of her senses recalled the practices of her mother's cooking.²⁹ Giard finds the gesture to be "an orderly sequence of basic actions, coordinated in sequences of variable duration according to the intensity of the effort required, organized on a model learned from others through imitation, reconstituted from memory, or established through trial and error based on similar actions."³⁰ These basic actions add up to a sense of *skill*, tested and adapted in the course of practice. Routine here offers a distinctly embodied experience, worked through encounters between the body and environment of not only the social relations of family, but *also* senses of cooking smells, sounds, touch, and movement.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 199.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 153.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 202.

In a similar way, Bourdieu locates the practical and effectual activities of daily life outside of an explicit mentality, or intentionality, on the part of social actors. By arguing for taking seriously the material and effectual aspects of everyday practices, Bourdieu leaves room for this more implicit and tacit action, as well as his arguments about a more explicit mentality. In this way, Bourdieu works on anthropological claims about daily practices as purely symbolic, that overlook their material effects. Bourdieu's example of the Kabyle woman weaving on a loom in a corner of her home describes this:

The Kabyle woman setting up her loom is not performing an act of cosmogony; she is simply setting up her loom to weave cloth intended to serve a technical function. It so happens that, given the symbolic equipment available to her for thinking her own activity – and in particular her language, which constantly refers her back to the logic of ploughing – she can only think what she is doing in the enchanted, that is to say, mystified, form which spiritualism, thirsty for eternal mysteries, finds so enchanting.³¹

Methodologically, this requires an approach that pays attention to *what people do*, as well as *what people say*, folding in with Bourdieu's arguments about the habitus as the “universalizing mediation which causes an individual agent's practices, without either explicit reason or signifying intent, to be none the less ‘sensible’ and ‘reasonable.’”³²

In this example, Bourdieu's emphasis on the material effects of individuals' actions, as well as the development of a sense of limits. Bourdieu argues that it is not possible to cut off actions from the real, functional conditions of existence, as is the tendency of ethnographers who ascribe a “mentality” and meaning to all actions, as a result of their position as a removed observer.³³ Instead, Bourdieu writes about the sense of limits, as both a function of and producer of the objective relations that structure

³¹ Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 115.

³² *Ibid.*, 79.

³³ *Ibid.*, 115.

particular practices. In this way, these practices that fulfill functional requirements and considerations, also are thought about in ways based on the limits within which the practices develop.

Everyday spacetimes

Felski goes on to argue that while the temporal character of the everyday is one of repetition, the *space* of everyday life often is left implicit, and often considered undifferentiated.³⁴ In this section, I discuss the spacetimes in which routines, and other ways of experiencing everyday yards, are lived. I follow the introductions to space through Bourdieu, de Certeau, and Lefebvre, with a more detailed discussion of everyday built environments, especially architecture and home.

The principles of Bourdieu's *habitus* can be seen in the use of, and construction of, space. Bourdieu has an explicit development of how time fits into both collective and individual (and objective and practical) relations. Time is something relative, framed and recognizable through group meanings. However, timing is also something individual agents can control (for example, in the timing of particular gift exchanges). Bourdieu argues within the predictability of structures of social norms of behaviors and actions, it is the individual agent who controls the timing of particular actions. Temporality, according to Bourdieu, needs to be reintroduced into theoretical representations of practice; science detemporalizes when it "forgets the transformation it imposes on practices."³⁵ At several points, Bourdieu likens space to time, but does not flesh out this

³⁴ Felski 1999, 22.

³⁵ Bourdieu 1977, 9.

connection.³⁶ Ian Burkitt explores the time and space of everyday life through Bourdieu's social fields, arguing that official (codified and normalized) and unofficial (experience) practices both must be brought together in everyday life.³⁷ Burkitt argues everyday life is the "single plane of immanence" in which these two sorts of practice interact. Drawing on Bourdieu, he writes that the gaps and differences that arise between agents, that make up social space, cannot be easily placed onto geographical space, or the built environment in which practices and social relations take place.³⁸ Bourdieu's contributions to understandings of spacetimes centers around the social relations that may be invisible, but are lived through behaviors of individuals and groups.

de Certeau draws on Lefebvre's distinctions between tactic and strategy, and writes that the *strategy* is a Cartesian space – static and a triumph of place over time.³⁹ The *tactic* is "a clever utilization of time" and "the play it introduces into the foundations of power."⁴⁰ Intellectual creativity in this case always moves throughout a "terrain of the dominant order."⁴¹ This reading limits the ways in which both of these categories can be discussed and conceptualized. de Certeau's rendering of tactics and the temporal as mobile, and strategies and the spatial as immobile may codify the built environment and invest it with a degree of power that disempowers inhabitants, by making its potential for plurality and political mobility impossible. While this allows for resistance and subversion of dominant norms, in grafting these relationships directly onto space and time, de Certeau reifies built environments (space) as immobile and dominant, while

³⁶ e.g. Bourdieu 1977, 163.

³⁷ Burkitt, I. "The Time and Space of Everyday Life." *Cultural Studies* 18, no. 2/3 (2004): 211-227.

³⁸ Burkitt 2004, 213.

³⁹ de Certeau 1984, 34.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 38-9.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 38.

action and motion (time) become the domain of a relentless innovation and subversion. For the study of everyday residential yards, while certainly some forms of resistance and regulation operate here, these conceptions of space and time are not particularly helpful. However, de Certeau's active and creatively making individuals do highlight the ways in which place may be actively constituted through practice.⁴²

For Lefebvre, there exists a prior unity of temporality and space in the cyclical repetitions, interrupted by the modern dominance of linear repetitions and linear temporalities. Lefebvre's unfinished rhythmanalysis project attempts to analyze the ways in which rhythms of people, things, spaces, and times interact in everyday life. As with his other work, Lefebvre argues for a dialectical approach to rhythmanalysis – an approach that “does not isolate an object, but tries to understand moving complexity determinate complexity.”⁴³ Rather than dualities, three terms constitute dialectical relations (as first introduced by Hegel, and developed by Marx, and others): thesis-antithesis-synthesis. Lefebvre argues that this type of analysis can understand “different relations in different settings,” and the “complex realities” in everyday life. Lefebvre offers several takes on a triad of terms: melody-harmony-*rhythm*, or time-space-energy.⁴⁴

Built environments: everyday architecture and home

The everyday provides a way to counter theoretically driven Architecture (with a big “A”) through the experiences of the spaces of daily life, architecture with a little “a.” As Mary McLeod argues, this takes into account a new set of subjects, such as women

⁴² Felski 1999, 24.

⁴³ Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis*, 11-12.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

and minorities, often excluded from the discussion.⁴⁵ Rather than seeking the “other” through disruption, deconstruction, and rupture, McLeod argues that theorizations of the everyday provide a way to think about the other that can be found within daily life. The potential within everyday life for political and social transformation, as seen by Lefebvre and de Certeau, may be a way to approach architecture through a more populist lens, rather than a deconstructivist avant garde approach that results in the exclusion of many important others.

McLeod traces the lineage of architecture interested in an “intensification of the everyday,” through the Situationists, the Independent Group in London (most notably the Smithsons), Venturi Scott Brown, and Jane Jacobs.⁴⁶ Especially for spaces of neighborhoods, Jacobs has made possible the inclusion of new subjects through her investigations into how people experience spaces new to architectural analysis – the dry cleaner’s, the corner store, the playground, the stoop. McLeod argues all have explored “the gap between architecture and what people make of it,” as well as made possible new social and cultural formations.⁴⁷ She argues that deconstructionist architecture’s own commodification requires some sort of antidote that may be found in rethinking the everyday beyond pure negation, and in terms of “pleasure, comfort, humor, and emotion.”⁴⁸

Dell Upton argues that to draw on Lefebvre’s arguments about the everyday requires not just a discussion of the categories of Architecture and architecture, but the

⁴⁵ McLeod, M. "'Everyday' and 'Other' Spaces'" *Gender Space Architecture: An Interdisciplinary Introduction* edited by Jane Rendell, Barbara Penner, and Iain Borden, 182-202. New York: Routledge, 2000.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 189.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 193.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 202.

linking of these through the dialectical social relations so central to Lefebvre's insights.⁴⁹ Upton shows that the entanglement of seemingly oppositional categories and concepts has been overlooked by architectural theorists, and has resulted in models of the everyday that are largely rhetorical and not based around embodied "action-based" political and social interpretations of architecture. For Upton, architecture provides a way to specify through materiality the theorizations of the everyday that have been limited by their vague-ness.

Upton proposes architectural thinkers use the power of theories of the everyday in seeing how much categories usually held as opposed actually depend on one another. He sees this as an opportunity to look at the cultural landscape without the hierarchical and judgment-laden categories of "high" and "low," and instead see both approaches together with their own goals, values, and methods. It also allows, according to Upton, for architecture's materiality to become a "natural conduit" of the study of everyday life. Upton shows well how the constraints of the field of architectures preoccupations have limited the view of the everyday to a formal category, rather than a set of social relations. This is perhaps the most salient point of this paper, as it underlines the power of theories of the everyday based on dialectical relations between seemingly oppositional categories and concepts. Similarly, the paper also demonstrates that architecture does have a sort of special kind of access to the specificities of the spaces of daily life.

McLeod draws on theories of the everyday from Lefebvre and de Certeau, and in so doing, emphasizes the paradoxical relations of the everyday. However, she overlooks the dialectical relations that connect the creative tensions within daily life, and as such, is

⁴⁹ Upton, D. "Architecture in Everyday Life." *New Literary History* 33 (2002):707-723.

less able to articulate the social relations that may be constructive and productive in moving past the negation she finds so problematic. In this chapter can be seen some of the tensions within architectural theory discourse as discussed to some extent by Upton. Both McLeod and Upton attempt to make room within Architecture for the recognition and more fruitful relationship with architecture. Upton, takes a more accommodating view, less specific to particular moments within architectural theory discourse. McLeod, on the other hand, responds more directly to the neo-avant garde who draw specifically from Derridean deconstructivism and notions of Foucauldian heterotopia – especially to the exclusion she sees for stratifications of power in terms of class, gender, and race. McLeod also more readily recognizes the dangers and limitations of homogenization and rationalization for market forces in the name of populism such as the “common sense” of everyday architecture.

Deborah Berke calls for architects to rethink their conceptions of an architecture of the everyday in a provocative essay, geared toward those within the field of architecture.⁵⁰ Throughout, she focuses on the resistance of the everyday to commodification, the market, and the constraints of “good” taste and the fashionable. In many ways, her eleven tenets, graphically set off the page in bold capitals throughout the chapter, counter many of the unspoken ideals incorporated into architects’ worldviews through architectural training (in school and in practice). As such, they strive to give permission to architects to think about architecture as being sensual, banal, common, surreptitiously generic, and even *domestic*.

Most powerful of all, she writes:

⁵⁰ Berke, D. and S. Harris. *Architecture of the Everyday*. Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1997.

THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE EVERYDAY IS BUILT.

This holds a set of different interpretations within its concise and direct wording, some directed at architectural theorists for which actual buildings are often not a primary interest or concern. It also, however, implies much about the materiality and inhabitation of everyday architecture. It is architecture made out of materials. It is architecture that is lived by people. It takes up space in particular places. It is connected with other architectures, systems, and environments.

This raises an interesting point about the limitations of architects and architecture “proper” in the ways everyday built environments become inhabited over time. Many of the single family homes and residential landscapes which comprise much of the territory of United States cities, towns and suburbs were built many decades ago, and have been continually altered since then. On the whole, this kind of adaptation was not carried out with stamped architectural plans, but self built, the work of builders and contractors, and likely incremental in scope. Everyday built environments hold these layers within them, material traces of past inhabitation.

Home and house

Studies of the everyday have often focused on spaces outside of the work of capitalist production – sites of consumption, or public streets. The everyday is usually conceived as stretching across different kinds of spaces. The home, and house, has received surprisingly little direct attention in the context of theories of everyday life.⁵¹ In the following section, I focus on moments that address the domestic everyday – first in

⁵¹ Felski 1999, 22.

the way home, imagination, and experience come together in Bachelard's rendering of the house, then in the ways home and city relate to one another, and next in the way home participates in the practices of everyday life. Finally, I discuss critiques of essentializing and flattening woman, the domestic, and the everyday.

There is arguably no more evocative a rendering of experiences with domestic space than Gaston Bachelard's enormously influential *The Poetics of Space*, in which he takes up questions of inhabitation, memory, and experience through a phenomenological account of the spaces of literature, and in particular poetry.⁵² He centers his investigation on *the house* as a means to understand intimacy, from cellar to garret, and moves through the rooms of experience and ideas with a focus on the image and imagination. Bachelard proposes to take images emerging from poetry, day dreams, dwelling, seriously as an essential part of understanding lived experience – not, as he describes the rationalist view of images, as mere flights of fancy to be ignored or dismissed.⁵³ Bachelard's phenomenology hinges on the ways memory and inhabitation intersect in space, and the house holds a special place because it is where man first feels at home in the world. He writes,

Past, present and future give the house different dynamisms, which often interfere, at times opposing, at others, stimulating one another. Within the life of a man, the house thrusts aside contingencies, its councils of continuity are unceasing. Without it, man would be a dispersed being. It maintains him through the storms of the heavens and through those of life. It is body and soul. It is the human being's first world.⁵⁴

Some of the limitations of this focus on man's universal experience are clear in this passage. Bachelard describes his approach as valorizing the spaces of intimacy as those

⁵² Bachelard, G. *The Poetics of Space*. Translated by Maria Jolas. Boston: Beacon Press, 1994 [1958].

⁵³ Bachelard, *Poetics*, xxxiv.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

of attraction and well being, and this kind of affirming, positive link between house and dwelling can be seen above.⁵⁵ But more broadly, so too can be seen the call for a phenomenology of the ways places are meaningful to people with experiences of multiple temporalities and relations not always easily explained as rational thought. This is the broad phenomenological disposition which informs later ideas of Lefebvre, and geographers such as Yi-Fu Tuan (discussed further in Chapter Two). Perhaps it is enough to acknowledge through Bachelard's work that home and the landscape of home are powerful, intimate, and embody multiple temporalities. People in Bachelard's formulations interact with their built surroundings – rooms, wardrobes, cellars. And through this interaction emerges dwelling and imagination. Bachelard focused in part on the house and home as a domain of intimacy, experience, and memory, that, he argues, must be taken into account in addition to more rationalist renderings of conscious thought.

In de Certeau's few moments of recognition of domestic spaces in the first volume of *The Practice of Everyday Life*, the home is characterized as the last "special" place, in the context of the drive of totalitarianism to eliminate "local legends" and particularities based on social relations.⁵⁶ For de Certeau, habitability is embodied in the "rich silences and wordless stories," that offer ways of entry and exit, and make possible hidden places, shadows, and voids. The habitable city is systematically "annulled" through the relentless "logic of the techno-structure," of functionalist numbered

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁵⁶ de Certeau 1984, 106.

addresses.⁵⁷ In contrast to this, de Certeau locates the home as a last space of memory and story, and a space in which a person can *believe* rather than know.

Mayol, in the second volume of *The Practice of Everyday Life*, focuses on aspects of dwelling, or living, in the Croix-Rousse neighborhood in Paris, from the perspective of one family, Family R.⁵⁸ Throughout this exploration, the family's experiences are framed in terms of the concepts of neighborhood, propriety, and the social in relation to the individual. Mayol situates the history of this neighborhood in Paris and the housing types and spaces within the neighborhood in terms of capitalist production. The apartments were built especially tall to accommodate looms. Mayol also situates Family R. in terms of spatial practices within this neighborhood (especially trips to the grocer, café, and visits between family members). Although it is not clear how many of these particularities directly relate to the general claims about everyday life Mayol makes, the close ethnographic study of one family show the ways their everyday spaces reach back into particular moments of capitalist production, and forward in continuing to shape their daily lives.

Although women (and children, elderly people) inhabit the spaces of the everyday (as do men), gender is oddly absent from the above theorizations of daily life. de Certeau briefly mentions a female flaneur, but the most explicit discussion happens in Giard's chapters on cooking, and even then, women's experiences with kitchens and cooking seems to be taken for granted and naturalized. Rita Felski traces the multivalence of "the everyday," as well as argues for an understanding of everyday through repetition, home,

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 106.

⁵⁸ de Certeau, M., L. Giard, and P. Mayol. *The Practice of Everyday Life, Vol. 2.*

and habit.⁵⁹ Felski looks at the range of different approaches to the everyday – from what she considers an overpoliticized celebration of the subversion of the everyday, to everyday life seen as crushing drudgery. Felski finds feminist responses to the everyday to “continue a tradition of thought that has viewed the everyday as both the most authentic and the most inauthentic of spheres.”⁶⁰ The concrete and the particular have long interested feminists, and yet theories of the everyday attempt to generalize these aspects of daily life. Felski shows the ways feminist approaches have pointed out the power relations produced through the everyday, as well as celebrated the everyday as a feminine realm with (often unseen) value. Although theorists of the everyday, including feminists, have inscribed particular identities with the everyday (women, working classes), Felski argues all individuals experience the ordinary through their own lived practices. While certain socio-economic classes may be able to transcend this ordinary-ness more easily or more often than others, everyone’s lives include aspects of the mundane, repetitive, and ordinary. Felski argues for an approach to the everyday that certainly recognizes the pervading assumptions about gender in theorizations of daily life, but that does not reproduce linking women with the everyday, in the context of being in tune with a more authentic life.

Everyday urbanism

Shifting scale from home to the urban, I discuss here how one critique and approach from within urban design aims to reconfigure relationships between built forms, social processes and ideals mobilizing the concept of everyday. In *Everyday Urbanism*,

⁵⁹ Felski 1999

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 30.

Chase, Crawford and Kaliski articulate an approach to the design and planning of cities built around the ways people actually inhabit and make these spaces meaningful through everyday practices and experiences.⁶¹ Although this sounds like appropriate guiding principles for most urban design projects, in reality, urban design is often caught between interests, led by professionals that be quite removed from the places in which projects are located, and driven by abstract principles. Crawford writes of everyday urbanism:

We believe that lived experience should be more important than physical form in defining the city. This perspective distinguishes us from many designers and critics who point to the visual incoherence of everyday space as exemplifying everything that is wrong with American cities. Like Lefebvre, Debord, and de Certeau, we understand urbanism to be a human and social discourse. The city is, above all, a social product, created out of the demands of everyday use and the social struggles of urban inhabitants. Design within everyday space must start with an understanding and acceptance of the life that takes place there. This goes against the grain of professional design discourse, which is based on abstract principles, whether quantitative, formal, spatial, or perceptual. Whatever the intention, professional abstractions inevitably produce spaces that have little to do with real human impulses.⁶²

Crawford argues the way people use and inhabit the spaces of the city are far more important than any set of physical forms in defining and making urban space. She frames the project around Lefebvre's notions of the everyday, what she calls the "utterly ordinary," in addition to recognizing the always contested nature of what she writes as the "broad discursive arena" of urbanism.⁶³ From a starting point in the spirit of Lefebvre, Debord, and de Certeau, Crawford reworks debates about urban forms by paying attention to the possibilities of overlooked and marginal spaces in the city and how people are always already actively engaged with them.

⁶¹ Kaliski, John. "The Present City and the Practice of City Design." In *Everyday Urbanism*. 2nd ed., edited by John Leighton Chase, Margaret Crawford, and John Kaliski, 88-109. New York: Monacelli Press, 2008.

⁶² Kaliski et al. 2008, 7-8.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 6.

Crawford's accounts of everyday publics shows the many ways residents of Los Angeles 'blur the boundaries' of public and private space.⁶⁴ Following Nancy Fraser's opening up the concept of public to include marginalized and counterpublics, Crawford translates thinking through public into spaces beyond the monumental. Public space is often translated directly into a monumental space, with an implied sense of universal capacity for involvement on the part of residents. However, as Crawford points out, meaningful public uses of space are not limited to grand governmental spaces, and are often constrained there. Instead, "everyday space" might better embody the "connective tissue that binds daily lives together."⁶⁵

In the case of Los Angeles, where Crawford bases her analysis, these everyday spaces are often seen as empty, void, and in between. This aspect of Crawford's everyday space is perhaps especially useful when thinking about the connective nature of yards, whose material and organic qualities can stretch across property lines, city blocks, neighborhoods, and cities. Because yards are positioned between houses and streets (and in other configurations), the space lends itself to be practiced in a variety of ways that might be considered more public and more private. Crawford argues these "remainder" spaces can be reconfigured through people's activities, giving them new meanings that become reinforced through repetitive use.

As the varied essays, designs, and built projects in *Everyday Urbanism* illustrate, there are no stock spatial solutions to design challenges when existing practices and the potential of non-experts to intervene in their surroundings are taken seriously by designers. Working in part in response to urban design 'solutions' such as New

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 25.

Urbanism, Chase et al.'s everyday urbanism often does not provide the quick legibility or familiarity of Duany's picket fences or front porches. Conceptions of space and time in everyday urbanist approaches usually rely less on nostalgia and the making of environment as a thing, and more on environment as a process. At the heart of everyday urbanism is "everyday space," a fundamentally social understanding of space as the "connective tissue that binds daily lives together," with an emphasis on cyclical temporalities to do with meaningful social practices.⁶⁶

Everyday space-times may be invisible to professional urbanists, and may not be accommodated seriously in planning or design visions of urban environments. As Kaliski writes: "The present city demands to be the starting point" to an everyday urbanism.⁶⁷ He develops a theoretical understanding of 'the present city' by putting the grand bird's-eye view of cities from urban design traditions into conversation with the architectural view of the urban from the intimate physical spaces in daily life. Furthermore, Kaliski adds into this mix the activities of city inhabitants, as inventors and reinventors of the intentionally designed "strategic city." The present city is one that emerges from the everyday. Small scale and incremental physical development and adaptation may be the most concrete directions for everyday urbanism to take in this formulation. But even more different from the dominant modes of planning for the future than these spatial directions is the insistence on an expanded sense of the temporal experiences significant within the present city.

From an everyday urbanism, it becomes possible to see how important the concrete material aspects of daily life are for social relations in urban environments. To

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 109.

understand these relations, it is necessary to understand and see the particularities at a very fine grain. To intervene in transforming such relations, especially for experts, it is necessary to understand how urban environments are already sites of ongoing formation through these social and natural relations.

Knowing Urban Environments, Knowing Yards

I study these issues through a detailed case study approach in which I examine how people practice and experience urban landscapes in Minneapolis, MN, with a focus on residential yards. Using multiple methods centered around ethnography, in this project I offer a textured analysis of people and their home environments. I also examine sustainability through analyzing municipal policies and metrics, conducting expert interviews. In order to understand opportunities and challenges in environmental advocacy relevant to yards, I conducted participant observation and interviews with landscape designers at a nonprofit organization that promotes residential rain gardens throughout the metropolitan area. Throughout all of this research, I link scales of body, home, city block, neighborhood and city, through the study of embodied yard experiences and practices.

Ethnography allows me to learn about what residents say about yard spaces, in relation to what they actually do, make, and feel in these spaces. This approach allows me to be in the time and space of study participants, in order to approach some understanding of their lived experiences with yards over time. Throughout the project, I have approached all data collection and analysis as a dynamic and recursive process, informed

by existing concepts and theories, as well as insights which emerge during the field research.

Empirically, Minneapolis, MN provides a fruitful setting in which to study the intersection of urban sustainability policies and residential practices due to its urban morphology, progressive neighborhood planning tradition, and forward-thinking sustainability efforts. Residential landscapes within Minneapolis may be considered fairly typical in terms of urban and suburban forms throughout much of the Midwestern and northern United States. Developed as a network of streetcar suburbs, with rectilinear streets and alleys, Minneapolis' median density single family housing is largely comprised of lots with house, yard, and garage – even across diverse neighborhoods.⁶⁸ Minneapolis is known as a politically progressive city, with innovative approaches from neighborhood to regional scale planning.

Since 2003, the City of Minneapolis has implemented a range of sustainability-related initiatives, hired a Sustainability Coordinator, and integrated sustainability goals into both policies and city business across department. The City now tracks more than thirty sustainability indicators, and produces an annual report summarizing efforts to improve sustainability metrics. The City has also worked hard to brand itself as a 'green city', and sustainability constitutes a major element of these efforts.⁶⁹ While the above programs often do not explicitly mention domestic yards, the City's sustainability agenda intersects with yards in several ways: water quality improvement goals; native wildlife habitat; and local food production.

⁶⁸ Martin, J. and P. Pentel, P. "What the Neighbors Want: The Neighborhood Revitalization Program's First Decade." *Journal of the American Planning Association* 68, no. 4 (2002):435-449.

⁶⁹ City of Minneapolis 2011

In addition to these activities on the part of the City of Minneapolis, there is an active and growing world of gardening promoted by nonprofit organizations, community groups, and for profit businesses – some of which overlap with yards and yard practices. Their focus is also on improving water quality through storm water runoff management in the form of rain gardens, diversifying wildlife habitat, and developing increased local food production through community gardens and private fruit and vegetable cultivation. This range of sustainability discourses and projects sees yards through multiple prisms, and likewise interprets urban sustainability and the role of sustainability in cities in multiple ways.

One nonprofit organization, Metro Blooms, has focused in the past ten years on water quality across the metropolitan area, and developed a series of workshops and information sessions, as well as design services, geared towards residential and commercial rain gardens and other sustainable landscape design approaches. As a component of this project, over the course of two growing seasons, I conducted participant observation volunteer work with Metro Blooms as they embarked on expanding their “Neighborhood of Rain Gardens” program into an area overlapping with my Northeast Minneapolis study area. This provided me with some insights into how the expert landscape design knowledge is promoted to urban residents with diverse gardening skills, interests, and past experiences. I was able to talk with residents about their rain gardens, as well as get a sense for how the environmental advocates and experts communicated visions of more sustainable urban yards.

My research centers around visiting yards with involvement from participants in several primary ways. First and foremost, I conducted in-depth *yard visits* with residents

in approximately forty five yards in three study areas, following ethnographic methods developed in my pilot study (2008), as well as Head and Muir 2007, and Arnold and Lang 2007. These yard visits were comprised primarily of semi-structured and unstructured *interviews* during yard tours led by residents. I start the yard visit with some basic background questions about the yard, house, and household, as an opportunity to establish some rapport with participants and to ensure I have some baseline data to characterize yards/homes for analysis.

Then, I ask residents to show me their yards. As we walk around the yard, I look at both the physical characteristics of yards (e.g. how physical boundaries are made, species that inhabit the yards (especially plants and trees), structures such as houses and garages, connections to neighboring properties), as well as how people talk about and inhabit these spaces. I document the yard visit as we walk and talk – taking photographs and recording the conversation for transcription. Detailed field notes were recorded immediately following the yard visit. Documentation of the outdoor spaces is a major component of the project, including photographs, drawings, and diagrams made by myself and sometimes with participants.

For general background about the yard and gardening scene in different areas of Minneapolis, I participated in a range of local events about yards and gardening – for instance, gardening fairs and neighborhood garden tours, sustainability events and local conferences, and rain garden information sessions and workshops. I also visited nurseries with a range of specialties throughout the metro area. Such places and events provided context about attitudes and practices to do with yards and gardening.

Overview: The Everyday Lives of Yards and Satellite Concepts

I conclude this chapter on the everyday with a discussion of satellite concepts orbiting around everyday life, of import to contemporary urban environments, and which shape the trajectory through the following chapters. *Cultivating Everyday Life* is divided into six chapters, following this Introduction. Although yards and yard practices serve as the major lens of the project, at its heart is an interest in the possibilities and limitations of everyday urban life more generally, as it is planned and inhabited in the contemporary context of environmental sustainability. As I have discussed above, satellite concepts orbit around the central critique of everyday life as having a double nature.

In the next chapter (Chapter Two), I discuss how yards offer particular possibilities to better understand urban environments – yards as urban analytic. The majority of scholarly work on yard and garden spaces around homes has come from the fields of landscape architecture history, cultural landscape studies, and architecture history. Such studies have often pointed out the constructed nature of landscapes, and the ways changing aesthetic ideals become inscribed in particular landscapes. In these accounts, nature is understood to be contemplated visually, tamed and shaped. Geographers have begun to complicate these perspectives by pointing out the agential capacities of more than human organisms, as well as the underlying relations of capital and labor which take shape through imaginaries of nature as separate from culture or society. However, focus on home landscapes has remained narrowly on lawns and gardens, overlooking the broad array of activities and experiences which actually take shape in these spaces. Thus, the second part of the chapter examines a recent renewed

interest on the part of geographers to take up questions of human experience, practice, and affects in understanding environments – a recuperated phenomenological approach.

The next chapter is built around Henri Lefebvre's notion of a dialectic relation between urbanists and the technocratic planned physical environments they imagine and build, *habitats*, and urban inhabitants, whose everyday practices and experiences constantly make and remake the city in ways which cannot be captured by planning and design knowledge, *inhabitation*. The chapter introduces this dialectic and goes on to focus on urban sustainability policies and projects as one contemporary iteration of knowing the city as habitat. Empirically, the chapter is based on fieldwork with urban planners and environmental advocates in Minneapolis, MN. The chapter asks how dominant techno-practices which know the city in particular ways – whose recent iteration comes together as the sustainable city – take into account the ways people actively make, do and feel a meaningful common life through their urban environment. As the techno-practices of city regulations and plans transpose inhabitants' practices and experiences into its material effects, inhabitation itself is largely written out of official imaginaries of future sustainable urbanisms. At the same time, these official visions are only one part of a complex terrain of sustainable urbanism, involving much broader practices and projects than are usually considered in official plans or critiques which focus solely on those plans.

The ways of knowing everyday urban environments through inhabitants' practices and experiences unfolds across the next three chapters (Four, Five, and Six), and together emphasize dimensions of habitat which exceed those imagined by urbanists. These entail highly intimate, creative, complex, and communal capacities which shape, and are shaped

by, residential yards. In Chapter 4, I draw on a wide array of individual experiences of living with yards to develop an understanding of inhabitation as meaningful through embodied and material engagements with surroundings over time. The kinds of everyday bodily practices invited and demanded by urban yard spaces, and the social meanings of such practices within the context of a city block, provide ways to experience rhythm and time – as paces set by more than human forces, as points of pause, and as past or future.

Throughout these encounters, affective attachments circulate, and it is these elusive atmospheres of feeling and attachment – not always affirming or positive – forged through relations of response which Chapter 5 explores and attempts to capture. The chapter asks, How are yards felt? In attempting to answer this, in Part 1 of the chapter, I discuss the possibilities and limitations of how to study affects. In Part 2, I invite the reader to be affected by interwoven images and text from the project in the form of three thematic photo essays.

In the last of these three chapters exploring dimensions of inhabiting yards, I present an examination of the diverse ways people make a common urban life with others. Even in these most iconic of American landscapes of private property – neighborhoods of single family homes with yards – there can be found particular urban commons through shared territories cultivated together, and through shared practices of plant exchange, gardening knowledge and skills. Such urban commons complicates the ways commons have been considered through a focus on clear distinctions between public and private urban space. These findings reinforce arguments that even the act of looking for commoning practices widens the cracks in dominant logics of thinking about urban space.

Taken together, what I hope this work will show are the ways habitats and inhabitation supplement and exceed one another, with an emphasis on critically assessing what a better understanding of urban inhabitation might offer and provoke. For contemporary debates about environmentalism, knowing more about experience in everyday life affords ways to reinforce resonance between shifting environmental impacts with the sociopolitical meanings of how people live. To move towards more sustainable ways of relating to our environments in its fullest sense – including the social justice and equity dimension which so often drops out of plans in practice – it will be necessary to add to narrow quantitative metrics. This might be done by better understanding relationships with environment which include aspects of love, care, labor, memory, and enjoyment. Beyond environmental concerns, the following chapters intend to broaden conversations about how scholars in urban studies and geography know cities, and in particular how we know yards.

CHAPTER 2 YARDS YARDS AS URBAN ANALYTIC

Introduction

Yards are shaped by a mix of organisms, patterns of urbanization, climate, governance, social relations, and everyday activity. Access to these spaces is deeply political, and remains bound up with fundamentally racialized geographies in US cities and suburbs. Yards are also an arena in which residents are confronted with an array of social and environmental issues. Somewhat surprisingly, yards have often been overlooked by geographers and scholars in allied fields. The majority of scholarly work on yard and garden spaces around homes has come from the fields of landscape architecture history, cultural landscape studies, and architecture history. These approaches tend to look at the history and meaning of gardens, lawns, and turf. Such studies have often pointed out the constructed nature of landscapes, and the ways ideologies of labor and capital become inscribed in particular landscapes - for example, the development of green turf on 18c. and 19c. British country estates.⁷⁰ Vernacular residential landscapes in the United States have generally not received the same scrutiny or attention.⁷¹ When they do, the focus often remains on the phenomenon of *the lawn* (often understood through popular culture references), rather than a more inclusive look at all the different materials, activities, and meanings of yards as they are actually

⁷⁰ Tessytot, G. *The American Lawn*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press with The Canadian Centre for Architecture, 1998; and Jenkins, V. S. *The Lawn: A History of an American Obsession*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994.

⁷¹ But see Groth P. "Lot, Yard, and Garden: American Distinctions." *Landscape* 30, no. 3 (1990): 29-35; as well as Harris, D. *Little White Houses: How the Postwar Home Constructed Race in America*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012.

practiced by residents.⁷² In these accounts, nature as the lawn is often understood to be contemplated, tamed, nurtured, and cultivated by people, much like a raw material to be given shape and form. Or the tendency is to see spaces such as yards as static realms reflecting aesthetics of designers, mass market forces, or individual idiosyncracies.

Given the ways geographers and others have seen yards thus far, there is rich potential in better seeing these familiar, ordinary spaces in order to address some of the most fundamental questions in urban geography. How do we know the city? How do people make meaningful lives together in urban environments? What kinds of relations exist, and might be imagined, between people and their more than human surroundings? Who has access to a space like a yard, and how might we expand such access? In this chapter, I argue yards can serve as a useful analytic through which to see some of these relations and forces at work in contemporary urban environments, including urban environmentalisms. To do so, I argue scholarship on yards may be productively extended toward a phenomenological approach in conversation with the affective force of everyday encounters in yards.

This chapter is comprised of two major parts. First, I examine the literatures on urban political ecology and relational urbanism approaches, especially as these have studied and critiqued contemporary sustainability efforts. Second, given the potential to focus more on everyday lived experience in these approaches *and* critiques, I ask what is required to take seriously the everyday lives of yards. In response, I offer directions towards a turn to phenomenology, with a focus on embodied practice and affects. This recuperated phenomenological approach of the project overall, grounded in ethnography,

⁷² e.g. Jenkins 1994; Robbins P. *Lawn People: How Grasses, Weeds, and Chemicals Make Us Who We Are*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2007.

contributes dimensions of lived experience with yards hitherto unseen and underappreciated. In following chapters, I flesh out this approach to yards in three diverse neighborhoods in Minneapolis, MN, in the context of sustainability projects and policies.

Geographers in the Garden, Geographers on the Lawn

Although the familiar yard spaces from everyday residential landscapes in the United States have not been studied all that much, in the UK, Australia, and New Zealand, increasing attention has been paid to the encounters and practices that participate in the making of these often quite mundane spaces. While the tendency has been to reinforce and reproduce the distinctions between nature and culture by considering gardens and yards as ‘natural’, in the last decade studies have begun to question more conventional understandings of who and what participates in the shaping of these spaces. These efforts follow a diverse range of social scientists and critical theorists concerned with refashioning nature-society relations.

Russell Hitchings has focused on the person-plant encounter in the private domestic garden. He brings Latourian actor-network theory and non-representational theory to bear on private domestic gardens in the UK.⁷³ So far, studies of this sort are limited primarily to Hitchings’ work, although an interest in looking to these sorts of everyday home environments does seem to be on the rise, especially in the UK. Hitchings attends to the encounters between a small number of expert gardeners and the plants in their residential gardens. He uses the device of perspective to write the paper in two

⁷³ e.g. Hitchings R. "People, Plants and Performance: On Actor Network Theory and the Material Pleasures of the Private Garden." *Social and Cultural Geography* 4, no. 1 (2003): 99-113; Hitchings R. and V. Jones. "Living with Plants and the Exploration of Botanical Encounter Within Human Geographic Research Practice." *Ethics, Place and Environment* 7, no. 1-2 (2004): 3-18.

ways: focusing first on the person, and then on the plant.⁷⁴ While this is helpful in expanding the conventional social science perspective that would likely skip over connections between people and plants, the study side-steps many situational forces and presented individuals in their gardens with almost no hints or discussion about class, gender, race, or neighborhood. The attempt is to focus attention on the moment of encounter, to speculate from multiple perspectives (human and plant). The emphasis here on the encounter is beautifully rendered, but remains quite isolated. More productive trajectories might be imagined that would include more than the touch between person and plant. Perhaps a broader approach, more open to investigating the identities and subject positions of residents in the study, may yield additional insights into practicing gardens through person-plant performances. In a subsequent paper, Hitchings studies plant nurseries and commercial garden centers, in an effort to understand the hesitations, silences, and ‘awkwardness’ of person-plant encounters.⁷⁵ This becomes more interesting than a focus just on the encounters of the private garden, as people are considered in terms of their class positions, geographic locations in respect to London, and circuits of capital and commodities participate in making sense of people’s experiences in garden centers. Even if left largely implicit, the locating of the study to incorporate a more complex and by nature social terrain offers up more nuanced possibilities for human-plant interactions.

Australian geographers Lesley Head and Pat Muir expand dominant environmental planning approaches by including specifically residential and ‘everyday natures’ into the picture of wildlife conservation. They have written several papers that

⁷⁴ Hitchings 2003

⁷⁵ Hitchings 2007b

address these issues in the context of Australian conservation efforts and everyday yard spaces, using a range of methods that include spatial analysis, detailed interviews and garden visits with residents, and an interest in how people practice relationships to nature.⁷⁶ Especially in the island nation of Australia, where the issue of native species has become so important to environmental politics, understanding how suburban and fringe urban areas intersect with bushland is complex. Head and Muir's work across a series of papers involves qualitative ethnographic work with residents, and brings this into conversation with conservation and planning issues at larger spatial, natural and social scales. Head and Muir's work on residents' relationships to their 'backyard gardens' provides an excellent model that engages with a range of methods. As they explain, the perceived boundaries and ruptures between native and invasive species provide a lens through which to look at the distinctions between nature and society.⁷⁷ Head, Muir, and their team of researchers visited with more than two hundred households during the course of this project. The richness of even the handful of households profiled in detail can offer interesting texture and insights into conservation questions that loom large in present day Australian suburban landscapes.⁷⁸ Head and Muir trace ideas and practices that make certain boundaries in the yards through residents' life histories, understandings of self, and social positions. In so doing, they add richness to environmental politics and conservation issues, rather than reduce them to straight forward planning directives.

⁷⁶ e.g. Head, L. and P. Muir. "Nativeness, Invasiveness, and Nation in Australian Plants." *Geographical Review* 94, no. 2 (2004): 199-217; Head and Muir, "Edges of Connection: Reconceptualising the Human Role in Urban Biogeography." *Australian Geographer* 37, no. 1 (2006a): 87-101; Head and Muir, "Suburban Life and the Boundaries of Nature: Resilience and Rupture in Australian Backyard Gardens." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 31, no. 4 (2006b): 505-524; Head and Muir, *Backyard*. Wollongong, Australia: University of Wollongong Press, 2007.

⁷⁷ Head and Muir 2006b

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*.

Political ecology - lawns

Political ecology specifically dealing with yards revolves around Paul Robbins' work on lawns.⁷⁹ This work focuses on middle class suburban landscapes in the United States, and specifically the use of chemical inputs like fertilizers and pesticides in cultivating turf grass lawns. Robbins traces the particular material characteristics and needs of turf grass plants, as well as the complex and interwoven histories of the development of these plant varieties, chemical industries, flows of capital and everyday practices like weeding and mowing. In so doing, Robbins attempts to bring more agency to human-nonhuman relationship through drawing on Althusser's notion of ideology in everyday life. He argues that certain demands are not only placed on the grass by human "owners" (i.e. being green, lush, and weed-free most of the year), but also on residents by the turf grass organisms (i.e. demanding certain levels of water, mowing, and aeration at particular times). Residents are hailed by the turf grass plants themselves (as well as their long and complex history of development) to a "lawn person" subjectivity. Robbins found that although knowledge about the risks of chemicals was high among the group of homeowners he studied, this did not quell their anxieties or predict whether they used lawn chemicals. The higher socioeconomic level of residents, the more likely they were to know about the risks, but also to engage in these behaviors.

Robbins comes to these conclusions through a mixed methods approach studying one cul de sac in a nondescript suburban development somewhere in middle America. He and his team of researchers conducted interviews, visits to homes and lawns, surveys, and

⁷⁹ Robbins, *Lawn People*, 2007.

they also looked at aerial photographs to quantify average proportions of lots that are constituted by open lawn, house and garage structures, and paved driveways and sidewalks. Although the excerpts in residents' own voices most clearly expressed the anxieties and worries experienced by them, this study that includes studying larger areas through surveys and photographs points to the potential of combining ethnography with other approaches, especially spatial data sources.

The focus here on the lawn highlights a common thread throughout much of the work on North American yard spaces, especially histories of how these spaces have changed over time. This limits the potential to see the dynamism of these outdoor spaces, as well as to consider the broad range of organisms that might inhabit these spaces, and social meanings in and through other kinds of organisms. Lawns often dominate norms about what yards should be, and it is essential to think through the industries, circuits of capital, and agencies involved in the development of the present day lawn. However, the popular images of manicured expanses of lawn are often dismissed as being self evident and easily explained. A focus on the yard as a more complex mix of forces offers up more opportunities to think through what these spaces are doing for humans and nonhumans, communities, and places.

Constructing identity and meaning through cultivating nature

A range of work considers the way residents communicate and construct identity and meaning in the spaces of their front and back yards. This often focuses on the consumption and arrangement of material goods, and on yards as spaces of inert matter to

be controlled and shaped as a reflection of self.⁸⁰ Distinctions between nature and society tend to remain intact in these studies, and nature is considered something without much agency or creative force.

Bhatti and Church draw on some of the recent nature-society work in geography, and try to understand both how people make meaning and practice gardens in the UK.⁸¹ They argue there are two types of meanings involved with gardens. First, an industry-driven capitalistic consumerism articulates and disseminates what gardens should be, and how they should be meaningful to people. Second, more personalized meanings come from reconnecting with nature, as well as through social relations. It is in this second area of meaning that the tendency on the part of the researchers to consider nature as ontologically separate comes through. Nature is understood to be accessed, a realm separate from the social and cultural surroundings of participants in the study. In a way, Bhatti and Church sidestep issues of culture-nature relations, and focus on the social and personal meanings expressed through survey results and qualitative answers. Bhatti and Church, across several papers, conduct research as part of the Mass Observation Project, and use a variety of survey and interview techniques associated with this larger project. These studies could benefit from further qualitative, open-ended ethnographic study, in an effort to better understand the way residents practice their yards – not just in terms of meaning or action, but in the relationship between the two.

⁸⁰ Bhatti, M. and A. Church A. "I Never Promised You a Rose Garden': Gender, Leisure and Home-Making." *Leisure Studies* 19, no. 3 (2000): 183-197; Bhatti and Church, "Home, the Culture of Nature and Meanings of Gardens in Late Modernity." *Housing Studies* 19, no. 1 (2004): 37-51; Chevalier, S. "From Woolen Carpet to Grass Carpet: Bridging House and Garden in a British Suburb." In *Material Cultures: Why Some Things Matter*. edited by D. Miller, 47-72. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.

⁸¹ Bhatti and Church 2000.

Sophie Chevalier's work on gardens in Britain and France makes an important opening between thinking of the garden as a reflection of the self and also as an affective environment – a place of “passions.”⁸² In her chapter looking at the relationships between inside and outside domestic spaces in the UK, Chevalier situates the garden as an extension of interior domestic space, drawing parallels between “garden” and “lounge” through the imagery of grass and woolen carpets. In conducting interviews with residents, Chevalier raises a host of rich questions. Her main argument centers around how people construct their home environments through appropriation⁸³, and that gardening as an appropriation of nature. Throughout this chapter, Chevalier treats nature as “nature”, but does not elaborate on how she uses the term. Nature is something to be transformed (appropriated) through residents' activities (gardening), but it is unclear how Chevalier and the residents she interviews make sense of nature. Because of her insistence on drawing fairly neat parallels between garden and interior space, I think there is less conceptual room for seeing the nonhuman worlds of the yard as more participatory and active. Chevalier's argument that for Britain, land (the garden) is what appropriates nature also has implications for our understandings of what land and property are, and what they do in the world.

The last paragraphs of the section entitled “Conclusions: about passions” find that land and gardening are “sheer passion and attachment in Britain,”⁸⁴ and that this

⁸² Chevalier, 1998, 67.

⁸³ Here Chevalier refers to “appropriation” in terms of work on the consumption of mass produced objects in the vein of British study of material culture (she cites: Miller 1987, Putnam and Newton 1990, Chevalier 1993, 1994, 1995). She counterposes this approach to French anthropologists' focus on technology (see Chevalier's essay).

⁸⁴ Chevalier's larger comparison with France draws parallels between the kitchen and cooking as transformation of nature in France, and the garden and gardening as transformation of nature in Britain. The chapter addressed here focuses mainly on British home gardens.

constitutes a “strong affective dimension” to gardening. Where does this take us next? What do we learn by seeing yards and gardens as affective realms? Although Chevalier does not address these questions, she closes by quoting a resident who says, “I like everything. Even cutting the lawn...I quite enjoy. To me, it is so relaxing, after gardening I feel good...I just enjoy, digging...Just enjoy.”⁸⁵ This points towards looking more closely at the importance of embodied practices, at sets of movements and actions that have effects on the body, on the surroundings, and on social relationships.

It is clear from these works there is much more that can be productively added to the conversation about yards and private gardens, especially in terms of how people live with, and feel about, these spaces.

Relational Urbanisms and Planning the Sustainable City

Urban yards also form an interface between expert knowledge about cities and everyday lived experiences of the people who live with these spaces. Yards are not quite wild, rarely tamed. They are outdoors, but often closely associated with home interiors. Yards are private property, but also form a backdrop for many social encounters with people passing by, often with few close ties. Yards are spaces of human cultivation and care, but always in conjunction with the liveliness of matter – which can be unpredictable, disruptive, and finicky. Yards are associated with residential landscapes of exclusion and privilege, even those whose inhabitants command modest financial means. For all of these reasons, yards provide a generative intersection of such concerns. In this

⁸⁵ Chevalier 1998, 67.

section, I present relational approaches to understanding cities, and discuss the ways several bodies of theory have grappled with urban environments and environmentalisms.

Geographies of lively cities

As the burgeoning critical geographic literatures on human-environment relations have shown, there are myriad ways to conceptualize urban areas as ‘more than human’ (Braun 2005) – as cities of flows of resources, people, and knowledge;⁸⁶ of animals and animal subjectivities;⁸⁷ as cyborg cities constituted through converging infrastructure and humanity;⁸⁸ as cities of hybridity.⁸⁹ To some extent, all of this work attempts to reveal socionatural processes that move beyond a simple dichotomy between city and nature, between humans and their surroundings.

Building on the fundamental view of city as process, recent geographical work on cities has emphasized a variety of relational perspectives. Amin and Thrift offer a compact overview of much of this work, and highlight several major shifts.⁹⁰ Cities are seen as spatially open – beyond a bounded territory with clear limits, and with forces and flows contingent on the organisms, practices, and experiences of relevance for a specific avenue of inquiry. Cities are constituted through a wide variety of mobilities – flows of people, capital, materials, information, organisms. These flows inevitably entail mixture

⁸⁶ e.g. Kaika, M. *City of Flows: Modernity, Nature and the City*. New York: Routledge, 2004.

⁸⁷ Wolch, J. and J. Emel. *Animal Geographies: Place, Politics and Identity in the Nature-Culture Borderlands*. Verso, 1998; Philo, C. and C. Wilbert, eds. *Animal Spaces, Beastly Places: New Geographies of Human-Animal Relations*. New York: Routledge, 2000.

⁸⁸ Gandy, M. *Concrete and Clay: Reworking Nature in New York City*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002.

⁸⁹ Whatmore, S. *Hybrid Geographies: Natures, Cultures, Spaces*. Washington, DC: SAGE Publications, 2002.

⁹⁰ Amin, A. and N. Thrift. *Cities: Reimagining the Urban*. Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2002.

and encounter. Finally, following Deleuze, cities may be conceived as virtualities – as sets of potential configurations, encompassing both problems and solutions. It is here politics may be most significant, as these singular configurations come together - always with unforeseen and unpredictable effects. Amin and Thrift call this a “new kind of urbanism,” based around “the transhuman rather than the human, the distanced rather than the proximate, the displaced rather than the placed.”⁹¹

Within this notion of the relational city, regulation and control through urban policies and institutions such as planning play a role, but one in conjunction with an expanded sense of politics for Amin and Thrift. This is a politics beyond the discursive register, a broader range of inhabited urban practices – to do with bodies, marginal spaces, and a prior-ness to forms of representation.⁹² Urban areas provide distinct opportunities to build individual and social capacities across differences. Amin and Thrift draw on several modes of thinking about potential beyond redistribution of resources – the building of individual and social capacities across differences. The role of institutions such as planning would here be involved with education and experimentation as means for city inhabitants to move beyond urban politics mediated by design and professional mediation. The underlying argument for a radically expanded notion of politics in urban life based on how cities are inhabited and practiced, both individually and collectively, points towards critiques that might be made about recent shifts toward “green” sustainable urban planning which attempt to quantify and manage urban environments in remarkably narrow terms.

⁹¹ Amin and Thrift, *Cities*, 4.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 130.

Planned cities / lived cities

Urban and regional planning operates as part of a larger apparatus of how we think about and shape our cities. Planning can be largely regulatory, restrictive, and some argue, exclusionary. And yet, as both an intellectual and applied practice, urban planning has the charge to envision collective possibilities. At its best, perhaps, planning as a field endeavors to ask: What can collective urban life be, and how might we get there? In the contemporary moment focused on shifting towards new ‘green’ ways of living in cities, it is important to ask how urban planning and green urbanisms articulate with one another.

In this section of the chapter, I explore how cities are planned through contemporary green urban visions. First, I discuss key geographical perspectives on planning. This includes thinking about planning beyond applied approaches, in terms of its philosophical roots as a field. I identify conceptions of the city as a thing, and the city as a process, as a central theme around which recent shifting urban geographies and planning ideas intersect. The notions of space and time in planning future urban worlds entails both of these dimensions. Finally, I discuss the narrow ways in which urban sustainability policies frame the problems and solutions to contemporary environmental challenges. I argue that one important direction to move these debates is towards better accommodating existing lived urban space-times.

Philosophical roots of planning: the good city as good society

In a central work on the history of ideas within urban planning, *Cities of Tomorrow*, Peter Hall presents key central visions of the early planning movement.⁹³ Hall's main argument is two part: (1) twentieth century planning is a response to the evils of the nineteenth century city – to 'the plight of millions of poor trapped in Victorian slums' that emerged with the rise of industrial capitalism (10); (2) a few key ideas in 20c planning reverberate again and again over time and space, and each stems from visions of "the good city" as visions of "good society." Hall's analysis of planning acknowledges both the philosophical and practical threads running throughout the profession. But he emphasizes the importance of the philosophical roots of planning, and in particular the planning perspectives that have tried to imagine not just alternatives for building the good city, but through these visions of the city, what a good society might be.

Planning as a philosophical and also more applied endeavor cannot be separated from the rise of modern industrial capitalism in Anglo-American settings. In geographical accounts of cities and planning, Marxist historical-materialist perspectives have been very influential, and continue to permeate analyses and critiques of urban areas (also discussed further below). Hall situates his approach well within the basic contours of such analyses which study the social processes and material worlds bound up with capital accumulation. However, Hall resists predictable Marxisms that see the central dramas of capital flows unfolding in straight forward ways. In these accounts, the role of planners in particular have often been cast as complicit facilitators of economic strategies and projects that perpetuate inequities and injustices inherent to capitalism. Hall sees this, but

⁹³ Hall, P. G. *Cities of Tomorrow: An Intellectual History of Urban Planning and Design in the Twentieth Century*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2002.

also emphasizes the potential and aspirations of planning. He sees a much more nuanced and interesting confluence of decision making and creative potential, worthy of inquiry.

Early planning visions of urban and suburban life must be understood with an appreciation for the alternative social relations also proposed in these spatial solutions. One of the first and most influential of these visions is Ebenezer Howard's Garden City plan.⁹⁴ Hall argues Howard's proposed alternative social relations have often been completely overlooked: cooperative ownership of land and resources, small scale economies with investment back into communal projects, and paying for a shared local welfare state. Instead of these key social aspects of his plan, planners and developers alike have emphasized the physical characteristics (also incorrectly interpreted, according to Hall) of low density suburbs situated in green natural settings. The way this example has been taken up by planning illustrates a central conundrum in planning and urbanisms between physical worlds, and the social relations that inhabit and shape them.

Several major ontological shifts during the second half of the twentieth century shaped how human geographers have studied urban environments, and considered the role of urban planning in particular. In brief, understandings of cities shifted from places that could be scientifically surveyed and studied by experts, to complex systems of moving parts requiring models and simulations to understand and manage, and to nodes of the impacts of capital accumulation resulting especially in uneven urban geographies.⁹⁵ Similarly, as Hall shows, planning moved from an emphasis on intuition and judgment in the making of land use plans and blueprints for cities through the 1950s, to the

⁹⁴ Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow*, 2002

⁹⁵ Harvey, David. "Possible Urban Worlds." In *Justice, Nature, and the Geography of Difference*, Chapter 14, 403-438. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1996.

understanding in the early 1960s of cities as dynamic systems that could be modeled and controlled, much like the large scale Cold War weapons systems also developing at the time. By the late 1960s, it became increasingly clear that the magnitude and the complexity of these ‘systems cities’ could not be predictably managed like closed loop systems.⁹⁶ Geographers and planners were closely associated during the 1950s and 60s.

By the 1970s, the understandings of planning and the urban settings in which it took place shifted again. A new emphasis on local urban politics and experimentation in terms of incremental, partial, and “bottom-up” ideas about urban spaces resulted in skepticism of external, large scale, “expert” planning knowledge. Varying roles for planners— as advocate-planners, players in local politics, facilitators of ‘down on the ground’ debate and consensus – resonated with urban challenges experienced at the time. However, it also resulted in a widening alienation between theories about planning and the ‘practical’ work of planning right through into the 1990s. During these decades, broader shifts at work in human geography and Marxist theories of urbanization also produced this distance between the academy and urban planners.

As the end of Anglo-American manufacturing loomed, and with it also the demise of urban areas as they had been conceived, planners became increasingly engaged with questions about economic development and “redevelopment” for urban areas. This shift in planning style resulted in public-private “urban revitalization” schemes, with a host of proponents and critics embroiled in debates about gentrification and redevelopment projects. Often few strings were attached to the private entities involved. American projects such as the Baltimore waterfront redevelopment reverberated around the UK.

⁹⁶ Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow*, 2002, 330.

These changes reinforced many Marxists' critiques: planning changes shape as new contradictions and opportunities emerge in the capitalist urban economies. Publics and the politics of planning become ever more important here. At the heart of these urban politics lies how we understand what cities are, and what they might become.

City as thing, city as process: a plan, to plan

Harvey proposes a historical materialist approach to the city, focusing on ways the urban is actively produced (and consumed) by dominant processes in capitalism.⁹⁷ Harvey echoes Lefebvre's perspectives on cities as objects, understanding cities as being embroiled in ongoing "process-thing relations," and arguing the *thingness* of cities has so often obscured the potential of what cities might be. As a thing, it becomes possible to see a city – especially by urbanists (architects, planners, urban designers) – in terms of engineering problems and solutions rather than through the multiplicity of processes that make up the larger process of urbanization. In seeing the city instead as a *process*, Harvey argues, the social relations that inhabit and shape capitalist processes have the potential to be transformed towards more equitable and just ends.

The spatiotemporalities at work here emphasize the city as a sort of residue, building up layers in some places, fewer layers in others, taking away layers in others still. Harvey writes an evocative discussion of the city as palimpsest, as composite and additive layers of traces piling up again and again over time.⁹⁸ In this understanding of cities, the fixing of capital flows in urban spatial forms presents a problem for urbanists: "how to plan the construction of the next layers in the urban palimpsest in ways that

⁹⁷ Harvey, "Possible Urban Worlds", 1996

⁹⁸ Harvey 1996

match future wants and needs without doing too much violence to all that has gone before.”⁹⁹ Here, the temporalities between more fluid social processes and more stable material environments presents one way to see the challenges of process-thing relations and the role of urban planning, urban design, and architecture. These fields that are often preoccupied with the space of cities must grapple with present and future simultaneously (this will be further discussed below in several examples from urban design).

This notion of a city as understood through process-thing relations echoes in Hall’s definition of planning based on the inherent tensions embodied within the meanings of *plan* as both a noun (*a plan* as a physical representation of something) and a verb (*to plan* – a method and an orderly arrangement of parts – not necessarily a physical thing.)¹⁰⁰ However, physical plans often eclipse the methodological and ordering aspects of planning in the imagination of both planners and broader society. In the sense of planning as a general activity, Hall writes: “[planning] is the making of an orderly sequence of action that will lead to the achievement of a stated goal or goals.”¹⁰¹ Urban planning often becomes understood as spatial planning through physical designs, however, and the broader sense of planning as a collective method and set of objectives can be overlooked. While processes and change may be emphasized to make the production of the urban more visible, and perhaps alternatives more possible, there is a stubborn thing-ness to aspects of urban environments. Urban planners and designers participate in important ways in the collective decisions about how such environments are made.

⁹⁹ Harvey 1996, 417.

¹⁰⁰ Hall, *Urban and Regional Planning*. 3rd ed. (1992) New York: Routledge.

¹⁰¹ Hall, *Urban and Regional Planning*, 3.

In conclusion to these investigations into geographical perspectives on urban planning, it is clear these spatialities of planning and planning perspectives on the urban cannot be separated from notions of time. Cities are understood across the above perspectives as sites of continual change. This change is constituted through continually laying down, and sometimes attempting to erase, material layers. The field of urban planning is situated in a very interesting position between managing and planning physical worlds and future worlds – both of these intrinsically social and political. The future inherent in the project of planning cities cannot be thought about without some visions also of future societies, and some future casting of differences between uses of cities, activities across urban areas, as well as differences amongst people. How these differences will be negotiated and accommodated is perhaps at the heart of how urban planning efforts come to be significant to urban inhabitants.

Planning green urbanisms: possibilities and limitations

Whereas the urban concerns that initially shaped modern planning endeavors had to do with impoverished industrial material conditions of nineteenth century Anglo-American cities, planners and planning more broadly is now engaged with questions of the role of cities in twenty first century environmental crises, and vice versa. The degree to which these questions differ significantly from those that have already emerged in the past hundred years is perhaps up for debate. However, it is clear the contemporary moment in planning for green urbanisms raises important questions about how we know about the world, and what is taken into account by urban planners and policymakers. In this section, I discuss dominant characteristics of green urbanisms in urban planning,

including urban sustainability, as well as outline critiques of such efforts. I conclude this section with a discussion of how green urban planning and projects frame urban environmental problems and solutions.

Green urbanisms & urban sustainability

As central sites for much recent environmental discussion and action, contemporary cities also provide ways to think through how environmental governance and urban planning come together. The theoretical and applied dimensions of contemporary green urbanisms raise fundamental questions concerned with how we know what we know about urban environments, and how we think about, enact, and experience collective urban futures.

Beatley calls “green urbanism” an umbrella term that delineates “the important role of cities and positive urbanism in shaping more sustainable places, communities, and lifestyles.”¹⁰² Implicit here, argues Beatley, is the need for a new urbanism – a new way of imagining the city in relation to surrounding ecological resources and landscapes, with a sense of ecological limits driving the way decisions are made about the functions of the city. Cities have become a central site for environmental action and management, often seen as consumers of the environment,¹⁰³ or, increasingly in urban planning rhetoric, as potential solutions for environmental degradation and offering opportunities for more sustainable futures. Urban sustainability emerged in the last three decades most visibly from the often cited series of international development reports about sustainable

¹⁰² Beatley, T. *Green Urbanism: Learning from European City of the Everyday*, edited by S. Harris and D. Berke. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999.

¹⁰³ Low, N. and B. Gleeson. "Cities as Consumers of the World's Environment." In *Consuming Cities: The Urban Environment in the Global Economy after the Rio Declaration*, edited by N. Low, B. Gleeson, I. Elander, and R. Lidskog, 1-30. New York: Routledge, 2000.

development, framed as a means to “balance” the three e’s: environment, economy, and equity.¹⁰⁴

Urban sustainability has since become a central concept around which planning is organized in cities of all sizes across the United States and beyond.¹⁰⁵ As sustainability has now become an increasingly mainstream planning concept, a host of new concepts, terms, and principles continue to emerge as important to the larger sense of green urbanism, including: climate change in terms of carbon and the new carbon economies (see more below), resilience and adaptation, and transition planning. Although each carries with it particular implications for our understandings of cities, and templates for political action, they can be considered closely related aspects to the shift towards green urbanism currently underway in many different cities and towns.

While conventional planning literatures have focused primarily on how to plan for “more sustainable” design of the physical environment with an emphasis on spatial planning, as well as plans and policies such as local ordinances, critiques have attempted to shift analysis towards seeing sustainability as a “more complex social process,” that questions the fundamental premises built into sustainability discourses, and that warrants study from a variety of perspectives.¹⁰⁶ A substantial amount of work has since looked critically at conceptions of sustainable development and sustainability, showing the ways in which balancing the three e’s can tend towards conventional market definitions of

¹⁰⁴ WECD 1987, UN Habitat 1996

¹⁰⁵ Portney, K. *Taking Sustainable Cities Seriously: Economic Development, the Environment, and Quality of Life in American Cities*. Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. Press, 2003.

¹⁰⁶ Krueger, R. and E. Gibbs, eds. "Introduction." *The Sustainable Development Paradox: Urban Political Economy in The United States And Europe*, edited by R. Krueger and D. Gibbs, 1-12. New York: Guilford Press, 2007, 4.

perpetual economic growth overtaking investigation and action towards more equitable and socially just futures in a variety of contexts.¹⁰⁷

Sneddon shows how sustainable development becomes taken up by conventional economic models that call for ever increasing growth, privileging notions of global environmental problems in the abstract, and seeing environment as a static resource (2000). Sustainability, Sneddon argues, diverges from these limitations by requiring context-specificity, and by encompassing more political potential in its malleability. He writes that sustainability at least demands, “What exactly is being sustained, at what scale, by and for whom, and using what institutional mechanisms?”¹⁰⁸ However, is this demand adequate to counteract the tendencies of the market, and how does the potential of this malleable term actually play out?

A vast world of studies in urban planning and design discuss how to find the best indicators, how to best measure sustainability, and how these processes of measure might work from place to place. These often gloss over the meanings of sustainability initiatives in broader contexts, and instead jump to a focus on how to mobilize programs, implement best practices, and otherwise improve the urban environment.¹⁰⁹ In these kinds of papers and articles, the complexity of how to define what is sustainable in a particular place is often acknowledged at the start, but discussion quickly turns to questions of measure, indicators, and best practices – rather than the more complex issues of how to plan for a more just and significant sustainability within the power relations of urban politics. This

¹⁰⁷Sneddon, Chris. "'Sustainability' in Ecological Economics, Ecology and Livelihoods: A Review." *PHG*. 24, no. 4 (2000):521-549; Low and Gleeson 2000; Aguirre, B.E. "'Sustainable Development' as Collective Surge." *Social Science Quarterly*, 83, no.1 (2002): 101-118; Krueger and Gibbs 2007

¹⁰⁸ Sneddon 2000, 525

¹⁰⁹ e.g. Maclaren, V. "Urban Sustainability Reporting." *Journal of the American Planning Association* 62(2) (1996):184-202.

tendency carries with it implicit understandings of urban environments as manageable, either through (1) a set of knowable systems to be mapped, managed, and measured, or through (2) adaptive strategies that are understood as flexible, resilient, and responsive.

Stronger critiques of both sustainable development and sustainability have emerged, especially from political ecologists concerned with the ways power relations and natural resources intersect within dominant capitalist relations. In these critiques, green global capitalism appropriates symbolic and material practices of sustainability and ecomodernization.¹¹⁰ This appropriation becomes central to the new green urban entrepreneurialism intended to attract capital investment – an “environmentalist” iteration of the familiar urban competitiveness scenario. Sustainability becomes yet another means to brand the city, in part mobilized through the efforts of urbanists such as planners and urban designers. As such, planning for this kind of sustainability is wholly inadequate from urban political ecologist perspectives which focus on how capitalist social processes create and recreate uneven socioecological urban landscapes.¹¹¹

Sustainability as empty master-signifier

In one of the clearest discussions of the way that sustainability acts as a term that means, all at once, everything and nothing, Davidson mobilizes Laclau’s empty signifier and Zizek’s reading of Lacan’s master-signifier through an investigation into

¹¹⁰ Keil, R. "Sustaining Modernity, Modernizing Nature: The Environmental Crisis and the Survival of Capitalism." In *The Sustainable Development Paradox: Urban Political Economy in The United States And Europe*, edited by R. Krueger and D. Gibbs. New York: Guilford Press, 2007; Krueger and Gibbs 2007; Jonas, A. and A. While. "Greening the Entrepreneurial City? Looking for Spaces of Sustainability Politics in the Competitive City." In *The Sustainable Development Paradox: Urban Political Economy in the United States and Europe*, edited by R. Krueger and D. Gibbs. New York: Guilford Press, 2007.

¹¹¹ Swyngedouw, E. "Impossible 'Sustainability' and the Postpolitical Condition." In *The Sustainable Development Paradox: Urban Political Economy in the United States and Europe*. New York: Guilford Press, 2007.

Vancouver's adoption and engagement with social sustainability.¹¹² Davidson argues it is through the lack, or void, of such a term as social sustainability that meanings become not just indeterminate and hard to pin down, but that in this naming of the void, chains of equivalencies are made. Using the notion of a quilting point, Davidson tries to show how the nominal, naming, function of a term such as social sustainability brings together at one point a set of equivalencies that are inherently unstable and full of tensions. He argues in the Vancouver case, he found a cynical acting out of a sustainability agenda whilst still recreating an ideology of sustainability. Rather than refinement or further development, Davidson argues (social) sustainability must be reimagined altogether. Pointing out the failure of sustainability is not enough – this is already part of the term itself. Instead there must be an imagination of another mode of politics.

In terms of his empirical research approach, Davidson conducted interviews and focus groups amongst planners, policymakers, and activists involved in social sustainability efforts in Vancouver. He identified how (social) sustainability was defined, employed in practice, and reflected upon.¹¹³ Davidson found the mobilization of social sustainability did have effects on the practices of those involved in sustainability efforts. First, the term was understood to bring together a group of diverse practitioners, with a new sense of coherence across diverse interests. And yet, Davidson also found that practitioners used the term self consciously as a means to obtain funding and support for their programs – while acknowledging the limitations of the term to have any transformative value whatsoever, in their eyes. In many cases, practitioners felt they had

¹¹² Davidson, M. "Sustainability as Ideological Praxis: the Acting out of Planning's Master-Signifier. *City* 14, no. 4 (2010):390-405.

¹¹³ Davidson 2010, 395.

been engaged in activities that would fall under ‘social sustainability’ already. Perhaps these responses led Davidson to also fairly quickly dismiss the transformative potential of sustainability.

Davidson draws heavily on Gunder and Hillier’s interpretations of planning as a profession repeatedly rallying around such empty signifiers, reiterating many of their main points.¹¹⁴ In the book, *Planning in Ten Words or Less*, Gunder and Hillier argue that planning “often attempt[s] to achieve impossible end-states without possibility of clear definition, let alone material achievement, constituting a supposedly ‘better’ social reality and spatial order.”¹¹⁵ By looking at the ways terms such as sustainability constrain and exclude potential alternative responses, Gunder and Hillier hope to provide lines of inquiry into the hegemonic capacities of these usually un-interrogated and orthodox terms. Like Hall’s work, the strength of their discussion comes from an engagement with planning as both a philosophical and more practical endeavor. However, Gunder and Hillier stress the importance of language in planning as “ideological deployment,” and as a means to “structure cities within wider social reality.”¹¹⁶ While Hall may be prone to see the good intentions embedded within the aspirational “cities of tomorrow,” Gunder and Hillier argue against such “transcendental ideas” that limit, enclose, and exclude towards one “idealized... end state.”¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ Gunder, M. and J. Hillier. *Planning in Ten Words or Less: A Lacanian Entanglement with Spatial Planning*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009.

¹¹⁵ Gunder and Hillier 2009, 18.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 21.

Ways of knowing green urban environments

Dominant urban sustainability discourses continue to articulate with notions of the city as an entity knowable through measure and manageable through policies aimed at rational individual choices. Two major themes emerge from the recent sustainability-related work above. First, what is at stake in the framing of sustainability questions around rational choices and individual behaviors? Second, what are the ways of knowing and experiencing urban environments that come to matter in the discourses and practices of green urbanisms?

The first focuses on the ways policies aimed to change individual attitudes, behaviors, and rational choices limit the potential for major changes in the way we live. Elizabeth Shove presents a critical account of the distance between, on the one hand, recent policy-related reports and recommendations about climate change, and on the other, theories of social change from the academy that may provide intellectual resources to such reports and recommendations.¹¹⁸ Shove asks why the “ABC” model – Attitude, Behavior, and Choice – has had such strong purchase on questions in sustainability and climate change policy discourses about collective patterns of consumption that are fundamentally unsustainable. Framing the problem of climate change in this individualized and market-based way obscures the role that governments currently – and potentially might – play in “structuring options and possibilities.”¹¹⁹ The questions asked in terms of rational choices from economic perspectives, as well as the many investigations from psychology that try to identify significant factors and barriers to

¹¹⁸ Shove, E. "Beyond the ABC: Climate Change Policy and Theories of Social Change." *Environment and Planning A*. 42 (2010):1273-1285.

¹¹⁹ Shove 2010, 1273.

particular behaviors, frame an understanding of climate change such that policy recommendations are consumed with “encouraging and persuading citizens to opt for pro-environmental rather than anti-environmental behaviors.”¹²⁰ Shove points out these recommendations cluster around very few goals that largely reinforce existing modes of consumption and conventions.

Central to the analysis of how social science may or may not fit within policies and programs focused on climate change is Shove’s observation that the dominant ABC model is not just a way of understanding the world, but also, of course, a

template for intervention which locates citizens as consumers and decision makers and which positions governments and other institutions as enablers whose role is to induce people to make pro-environmental decisions for themselves and deter them from opting for other, less desired, courses of action.¹²¹

From the dominant modes of data currently considered relevant to such policies, Shove writes: “useful data are specified in ways that *rule out* historically grounded analyses of how relevant social practices, systems of practice, and related infrastructures and institutions evolve.”¹²² There simply isn’t room for these sorts of explanations, when the conversation is framed as how to make the best lifestyle choices – as is usually the case in urban sustainability rhetoric.

Shove concludes the piece with this insight about the whole notion of “manageability” that runs as a thread throughout policy goals. She writes,

A move beyond the ABC would have to go hand in hand with the emergence of new genres and styles of policy which were both more modest than at present, harboring no illusions of manageability, and at the same time more ambitious –

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 1277.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 1280.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 1280, emphasis mine.

recognizing that policy interventions across the board have effect in shaping ways of life whether recognize it or not.¹²³

One of the significant challenges that emerges from this paper can be characterized as a question of how intellectual resources from the social sciences might be better mobilized in discourses underway about collective life (even beyond climate change).

The second theme to emerge from recent conversations around environmental governance and experience in the present era of climate change has to do fundamentally with how we know about and experience environment. The new era of science and policies of climate change is rife with opportunities to explore scalar spatialities and subjectivities, as understandings of “global” climate intersect with policies and programs focused on “local” actions. Jasanoff argues climate disrupts and produces new ways of understanding how we know and experience our worlds, in particular the relationship between humans and nature.¹²⁴ These recent shifts provide ways for interpretive social scientists to explore issues of scale, political work, and governance.

While science presents representations of the world as it *ought* to be, this is not, Jasanoff argues, the whole story. Just as important are the ways people and societies collectively make environments meaningful – the “mutually sustaining interactions between our senses of the *is* and the *ought*.”¹²⁵ Jasanoff sets up a relation between *common sense* and *climate science*, arguing the disconnect between these ways of knowing relies on divergent relationships to immediate, embodied experiences. On the one hand, common sense in everyday life can be understood as drawn more directly from experiences close at hand. On the other, climate science relies on abstracted and distant

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 1283.

¹²⁴ Jasanoff, S. "A New Climate for Society." *Theory, Culture, and Society* 27, no. 2-3 (2010):233-253.

¹²⁵ Jasanoff 2010, 236, emphasis orig.

relations with the world. Jasanoff writes: “Environmental knowledge achieves robustness through continual interaction – or conversation – between fact-finding and meaning-making.”¹²⁶ Climate change in particular, because of the specific qualities of carbon molecules, global scale of the atmosphere, and the framing of individual actions, challenges how these interactions and conversations take place. The role for social scientists, then, becomes one that draws on understanding the “interpretive, sense-making capacities of human societies.”¹²⁷

The climate situation, with a spatiality that is both everywhere and nowhere, radically repositions human activity. Jasanoff sees potential here for rethinking fundamental questions of rights, responsibilities, citizenship, and building new norms in response to a universal threat. To do this, it seems imperative to move conversations beyond the ABC questions, and towards a more sustained effort to question how we know about the world through knowledge and experience.

Lived Experiences in Urban Environments

Throughout these various perspectives on yards, gardens, and sustainable cities, there remains a remarkable absence of attention towards how people live. In this section of the chapter, I look toward ways of knowing lived experience, in an effort to contribute more about these perspectives to the foregoing debates. As discussed in more detail in Chapter One, Lefebvre has argued the realm of everyday life remains one of the most important modes of the social production of space and time. This is clearly supplemented by the emerging work discussed above of geographers theorizing more than human urban

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 248.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 249.

environments. To fully take up the challenge from Lefebvre to understand, and perhaps inform change in, daily life, it is necessary to supplement theories of lived experience further. Geographers have begun to call for recuperating phenomenological perspectives, bearing in mind the possibilities and pitfalls of this approach as it was influential in the humanistic geographies of the 1970s. To this discussion, I offer further elaboration in the form of recent scholarship on affects and emotions in public and political life. Taken together, these approaches supplement ongoing discourses about yards and sustainability by taking seriously lived experiences.

Recuperating phenomenology: possibilities and pitfalls?

In the 1970s, one strand of geography was consumed with questions of how people find and making meaning in place, what human experience is all about, and how space, place, and time are lived realms of meaning. One of the most important geographers in this register interested in the intersections of space, place, and experience is Yi-Fu Tuan, whose many writings on the meaning of place and experience range incredibly broadly. His perspectives on the nature of experience are helpful in giving some sense for this broader humanistic project in geography. Embedded within his discussion are many themes which resonate with what is lacking in some of the approaches discussed in this chapter thus far. However, it is also possible to begin to see some of the pitfalls of an approach which relies on a sometimes unitary perspective, seemingly separate from some of the social relations and structural forces which geographers since have argued must be prioritized to understand, and ultimately work towards constructing more just, societies. Tuan writes,

Experience is a cover-all term for the various modes through which a person knows and constructs a reality. These modes range from the more direct and passive senses of smell, taste, and touch, to active visual perception and the indirect model of symbolization.¹²⁸

Tuan emphasizes that people are human animals, that bodily postures and inhabitation are essential components to understand experience of a place, and that it is the general human dispositions, capacities, and needs which take precedence over cultural differences (variation of which and its physical expression was a major focus of earlier work in geography). Further, he writes, “Experience... implies the ability to learn from what one has undergone.”¹²⁹ Together with Tuan’s work as a whole, it’s possible to see resonances with an interest in everyday activities, and with the importance of duration and time in our human engagement with surroundings. He also highlights encounter with difference, though he terms this “the new”:

To experience in the active sense requires that one venture forth into the unfamiliar and experiment with the elusive and the uncertain. To become an expert, one must dare to confront the perils of the new.¹³⁰

This resonates strongly with apprehending the other through encounter, as this becomes embodied through perception for Merleau-Ponty. Finally, this last excerpt is helpful in seeing the possibilities of more closely relating feeling and conscious thought:

Experience is compounded of feeling and thought... It is a common tendency to regard feeling and thought as opposed, the one registering subjective states, the other reporting on objective reality. In fact, they lie near the two ends of an experiential continuum, and both are ways of knowing.¹³¹

This is one of the most directly useful ways of conceiving how body, affect, and thought come together. Still, there is also the sense throughout this and related writings, of one

¹²⁸ Tuan, Y. *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997, 8.

¹²⁹ Tuan, *Space and Place*, 9.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 10.

universal human condition of experience. Although at times a stunningly beautiful narrative voice, Tuan's approach is so singularly literary, it is hard to know just *how* he knows what he argues.¹³²

Further critiques of these earlier humanist strands in geography focused on the one objective viewer from which terrain such as a landscape could be read.¹³³ This landscape studies branch, influential also during the 1960s and 1970s and in contrast to the quantitative revolution underway these same years, has since been largely dismissed with the turn towards structural Marxism and subsequent iterations of critical geographies concerned with unevenness, difference, and power. Henderson provides a detailed review and critique of how the concept of landscape has been taken up.¹³⁴ Rather than finding landscapes endlessly interesting, Henderson argues we must be able to envision the underlying social relations which shape those landscapes, especially in ways which are unequal, unjust, and exploitative. In a sense, Henderson levies the critique that an approach without some sense of how things might be different, how landscapes could be more egalitarian, or how the forces we as societies have set in motion might be changed for the better, is not adequate to the tasks at hand.

Simonsen's recent call for a return to a phenomenology grounded through the body outlined several key nodes around which geographers might extend investigations into posthumanism back towards experience of social difference and encountering others.

¹³² Of course, his work has inspired a whole generation of scholars. For a range of geographical work motivated by Tuan's perspectives, see the edited volume, *Textures of Place: Exploring Humanist Geographies*, 2001. Adams, P., S. Hoelscher, and K. Till, eds. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

¹³³ For an overview of some of these key debates about landscape, see Don Mitchell's *Cultural Geography: A Critical Introduction*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000.

¹³⁴ Henderson, G. "What (Else) We Talk About When We Talk About Landscape: For a Return to the Social Imagination: Cultural Landscape Studies After J.B. Jackson." In *Everyday America: Cultural Landscape Studies After J.B. Jackson*. Groth P, Wilson C, eds. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003.

Her account beings not with these earlier geographers' interpretations of phenomenology which she argues are largely centered around an "autonomous, rational subject," but Merleau-Ponty's rendering of bodies as spatial, temporal, reflexive, powerful, but also fragile. She quotes both Merleau-Ponty and Lefebvre in the ways bodies can be seen to *inhabit* both space and time:

The body is not merely "in space" or "in time," but inhabits space and time (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 139); "each living body *is* space and *has* its space: it produces itself in space and it also produces this space" (Lefebvre, 1991, 170).¹³⁵

Simonsen argues that by this "new humanism" can provide insights into "the experiential dimension of social life, the acknowledgement of the other and significance of human agency," areas where the "new materialism" and posthumanism work has fallen short of adequately accounting for how people live in and with others, and the world.

Affects, bodies, practice

In conjunction with a focus on lived experience broadly, affect and emotion are key registers through which people know and feel their surroundings. Theorizations of affect and emotion afford not just strengthening the link between meanings and practices, but provide a productive complication that might lead to seeing how intertwined the two become in daily interactions between humans and their surroundings. Meaning and practice are often considered separately. Meaning tends to be thought of as encompassing the power of representations, experience as understood through cognitive thought and imagination, and often entails social and cultural constructions. Practice is often shorthand for actions, movements, and habits that 'go without saying'. It seems

¹³⁵ Simonsen, K. "In Quest of a New Humanism: Embodiment, Experience and Phenomenology as Critical Geography." *Progress in Human Geography* 37, no. 1 (2012):10-26, 16.

approaches that remain attentive and open to emotional and affectual registers, while also keeping these situated within larger social and political contexts, can offer useful ways to think through yards and gardens.

How and what do we feel?

The question of how and what we feel has long been posed in philosophy, as well as fields such as psychology, sociology and anthropology, and areas within the natural sciences. In this essay, I engage primarily with the following thinkers on affect and emotion, within – and influential to – human geography: Nigel Thrift, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Brian Massumi, Sara Ahmed, and Elizabeth Grosz. I sketch out the broad approaches each takes to understand how and what people feel, and some of the implications for politics and society. I develop these approaches in three sections that address key aspects of how affect has been understood in recent work. First, across the diverse views on affect, the circulation between bodies, objects, and places characterizes affect. Second, affect is integrally tied to the material and the body, because it is through the body that affect and emotion are felt and produced. These readings resonate in their approaches that avoid the reduction of feeling explained *only* through a bodily molecular autonomic response, *or* an internal reaction of the subject to an exterior force. Third, explorations of affect have developed connections to difference and politics that complicate understandings of subjectivity, self, and collective social life. For instance, Sara Ahmed shows that through these “affective economies” of value, collective political relations take shape.

Circulating affects and emotions

Affect circulates between organisms, objects, and places in encounters. Human geographer Nigel Thrift provides the broadest outline of four major theoretical threads engaged with affect. In two key papers, and in a recently compiled edited volume of his own writings on non-representational theory (NRT), Thrift discusses four approaches to affect. First, stemming from phenomenological traditions, affect can be understood as a set of embodied practices that produce observable changes in behavior. The setting and objects are considered the source of emotions in these configurations, and as such are key to understanding how emotions take shape.¹³⁶ Second, affect has been thought through Freudian drives, associated with the unconscious, and the “present absence” of the subject in life’s activities. Third, Spinoza’s monist philosophy proposes that there is only one substance in the universe (God or Nature), and so “everything is a part of thinking and doing simultaneously.”¹³⁷ Deleuze and Guattari take up this approach to explore how this theory of affect involves encounters between “manifold beings,” always a part of their surroundings and always in the process of becoming. Finally, the fourth approach Thrift outlines has been understood through neo-Darwinian terms, and focuses on the expression of affect and how this relates to an organism’s actions in the world.

By far the most influential avenue of thought around affect stems from Deleuzian interpretations of Spinoza’s theories of affect. Deleuze and Guattari discuss affect in a chapter from *What is Philosophy?* entitled “Affect, Percept, Concept.”¹³⁸ In this chapter, Deleuze and Guattari discuss art in terms of percept, affect, and concept. In the course of

¹³⁶ Thrift, N. "Intensities of Feeling: Towards a Spatial Politics of Affect." *Geografiska Annaler, Series B: Human Geography* 86, no. 1 (2004a 12 01): 57-78, 60.

¹³⁷ Thrift 2004a, 61.

¹³⁸ Deleuze, G. and F. Guattari. “Percept, Affect, and Concept” In *What is Philosophy?*, 163-200. Translated by H. Tomlinson and G. Burchell, London and New York: Verso Press, 1994 [1991].

traveling through these ideas, they emphasize sensations, becomings, the material, and the different planes that territorialize, deterritorialize, and reterritorialize the chaos of the world from vantages of art, science, and philosophy.

For Deleuze and Guattari, *the thing*, or *the work of art* in the case of this chapter, takes shape as “a bloc of sensations – a compound of percepts and affects,” independent of those who experience them. *Affects* are no longer feelings or *affections*, as they have moved “beyond the strength of those who undergo them”; in a similar way, *percepts* are no longer *perceptions*.¹³⁹ In the example they provide of a statue, the work of art is no longer dependent on the artist, model, time or place in which it was produced – “a gesture that no longer depends on whomever made it.”¹⁴⁰ Deleuze and Guattari underscore the circulatory nature of these affects, through the movements across and between the planes that come together and move apart in the configurations of territory. Affects and percepts move between that which becomes affections and perceptions. Distinct from phenomenological understandings of relations between subject and object, which find affects to be a subjective response to characteristics of objects, it is the connective tissue in between the two in which affects (and percepts) reside and exert their force.

It is the *nonhuman becoming* that figures centrally in Deleuze and Guattari’s chapter. Deleuze and Guattari specifically link affect and percept to nonhuman becomings in the landscape and man. This is best captured in their example of Herman Melville’s famous novel, *Moby Dick*:

Characters can only exist, and the author can only create them, because they do not perceive but have passed into the landscape and are themselves part of the compound of sensations. Ahab really does have perceptions of the sea, but only

¹³⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, “Percept, Affect, and Concept”, 164.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 163.

because he has entered into a relationship with Moby Dick that makes him a becoming-whale and forms a compound of sensations that no longer needs anyone: ocean. . . . *Affects are precisely these nonhuman becomings of man*, just as percepts are *nonhuman landscapes of nature*.¹⁴¹

It seems the nonhuman here may be a way to show the continual becoming *with* the world that is so much more than just human. Deleuze and Guattari always situate affects in relation to percepts, and in the movements between the planes that come together and become territorialized in singular events. Domestic gardens, parks, boulevard trees all form a connective tissue of everyday life. From it arise unexpected encounters, unpredictable results, and interruptions in social relationships. For example, residents of one yard on a block unabashedly grows perennials in wild cacophony, while all around that yard residents trim back grass, maintain several foundation shrubs, and worry over brown patches in the lawn. Each yard is a singular event in the landscape. Not a particularized instance of larger structures, but the intersection of forces, some of which may exert influence over many yards.

In an approach focused on the implications for collective political life, political theorist Sara Ahmed argues for an understanding of emotion not as encased within the subject or the object, but as that which circulates between objects and subjects in “affective economies.” Not only do emotions circulate, but it is this very movement that shapes subjects into collective groups. While Ahmed relies on *emotions* as her central concept, she nonetheless works in parallel with some of the work on *affect*. She shares much with previous and subsequent writing on affect, in that she emphasizes the circulation of feeling beyond individuals. However, Ahmed differs in two important ways. First, she refuses to give up on *emotion* itself. Ahmed argues that the dismissal of

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 169, emphasis orig.

emotions as somehow trapped or limited within personal experience misses the potential that emotions may have for understanding how differences are made between bodies. Similarly, this dismissal also has the tendency to reinforce distinctions between feminine and masculine that often center around the weakness of emotions and their associations with the feminine.¹⁴² For the most part, Ahmed uses affect and emotion fairly interchangeably, but uses “emotion” and “feeling” much more frequently throughout her writing. Second, Ahmed is interested in how the sociality of emotions does work on individuals, objects, and groups of people – not as psychological dimensions of experience, but as social and cultural practices.¹⁴³ Rather than say that emotions are *both* individual *and* collective, or psychological *and* social, Ahmed argues that it is emotions that *produce* these delineations *as if* they are objects.¹⁴⁴ Instead of asking what emotions *are*, Ahmed is more interested to think through what emotions *do*.

Different bodies

Throughout all of this work on affects and emotions, the body is conceived as more than the counterpoint to the mind and its internal reason, and more than a lump of tissue responsive to outside stimuli. It is through the body that affects and emotions are felt and made meaningful. Similarly, it is through the materiality of bodies that individuals affect their surroundings. Although Elizabeth Grosz’s important work on the body is less explicitly focused on affect, it is useful here to discuss her foundational insights drawn on the work of a range of philosophers and theorists. Following the

¹⁴² Ahmed, S. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. New York: Routledge, 2004a; Ahmed, S. "Collective Feelings or, the Impressions Left by Others." *Theory, Culture and Society*. 21, no. 2 (2004b): 25-42.

¹⁴³ Ahmed 2004a, 8.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 10.

discussion of Grosz's ideas about bodies, I move through Massumi's links between body and affect and Ahmed's conceptions of bodily space.

Feminist theory has focused on bodies and the differences between them, and one of the most important works on the body was written by Elizabeth Grosz in 1994, *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism*. Influenced by Deleuze and one of the few feminist theorists to engage directly with his ideas (and others'), Grosz develops a way of understanding the body in several key and innovative ways. First, in response to second wave feminist theory that tended to make distinctions between sex as biologically determined, and gender as culturally constructed, Grosz argues the body itself is culturally produced, *including its materiality* – rather than existing objectively prior to its gendered inscription. Second, she writes about the body as a sort of Mobius strip, pushed and pulled by both exterior forces, and also interior forces, and all the infinite positions in between. The forces that push and pull on the body are not only cognitive, intentional, or discursive, but also material. This is especially helpful in opening up the possibilities of connection and impact between individuals and their environments.

Grosz travels through Spinozist monism, Freud's and Lacan's psychoanalysis and body images, the 'lived bodies' of phenomenology, Nietzschean conceptions of a body produced by powers and procedures from its exterior, the body as inscribed, Deleuzian intensities and flows, and finally, sexual difference. Rather than reduce the world to the body, to the abandonment of the psyche, Grosz is interested in looking at how corporeality participates in the world of subjectivity, and how this might open up discussions of sexual difference. It is this sexual difference that motivates Grosz' explorations, in order to try to explain all the various "effects of subjectivity... using the

subject's corporeality as a framework [in a way as adequate as] using consciousness or the unconscious."¹⁴⁵ Although Grosz does not engage in extended discussions of affect and emotion, she insists on taking into central account the materiality of the body in relation to cultural, social, and psychical forces. Her attention to affect is largely implicit, but her work on the materiality of the body has been taken up within affective geographies.

In a similar vein to Grosz, Brian Massumi starts with the movement of the body, arguing not for a linguistic model of culture, but for the relation of a body to its own indeterminacy.¹⁴⁶ Massumi tracks back and forth between the corporeality of the body, and the body as more than corporeal. Following Deleuze, Massumi is interested in process and what happens when things and bodies undergo the constant modifications that are a part of the becoming of that object or body. Massumi argues that critical theory has overlooked the movement/sensation relation, and so missed aspects parallel to both change and the body. The body has been seen in opposition to the mind, and change has been considered only in terms of dramatic rupture – e.g. from one square to another on a grid of subject positions. Massumi's interest lies in constant modification and augmentation rather than rupture, and this focus on the "ontogenetics" of emergence may be very helpful for such everyday spaces as yards that often change slowly over time.

Like Grosz, for Ahmed the differences between bodies is a key motivation to understand the work that emotions do. Although she does not delve at length into the relationships between body, mind, and emotion, she does argue for the conception of

¹⁴⁵ Grosz, E. *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994, vii.

¹⁴⁶ Massumi, B. *Parables for the Virtual*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002, 5.

impression to capture the push-pull of emotions on the surfaces of bodies and objects. These impressions cannot be separated out into bodily sensation, emotion, and thought, but together form acts of perception, cognition, and emotion.¹⁴⁷

This sense of impression can be seen in the way that Ahmed stresses *the work that emotions do* in the apprehending of objects. Ahmed repeatedly draws on concepts of social and bodily space. Although Ahmed does not unpack these terms in detail, social space seems to depend on relationships of difference among bodies. Bodily space seems to be physical proximity between individual bodies, that comes to be the focus of the work of emotions. For example, she argues in the discussion of “Hated Bodies” that in the example of Audre Lord’s subway ride as an African American child, social and bodily space became organized in such a way that the border between herself and the white woman in a fur coat became an intensification of feeling that produced a reformulated social space based around the ‘apartness’ of the white body in bodily space.¹⁴⁸ In this example, space becomes the object on which emotions work. Emotions produce a distance between bodies.

Although recent work has been enamored with “the body,” much of the attention focuses primarily on the body as *non-conscious*. If anything, the work on affect, especially Deleuze and Guattari, points to the fact that, as Massumi argues, context and situation always have to be thought together. Grosz argues that the corporeality of the body may be understood as neither fully conscious, nor fully unconscious, and always in concert with the body’s larger milieu. This has direct relevance to people’s activities in their yards, and the ways that these outdoor spaces around homes are imagined and

¹⁴⁷ Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 2004a, 6.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 54.

experienced. As discussed in Part I, and as Chevalier points out, people's physical activities in their yards can be linked with their feelings about the yard, as in the case of the resident who "just enjoys" the feeling after gardening, and the actions of mowing and digging.¹⁴⁹ Chevalier links this "sheer passion" for gardening to a particularly British relationship to land and nature. However, it's not hard to imagine different groups of people, even within the same city, would have distinctive ways of inhabiting these spaces, and also the bodily actions through which these yard spaces are made. This should be investigated not just by talking with residents and participating in yard activities, by observing cultural forces in a particular area, and also through representations of outdoor spaces circulating in popular culture and policy.

Politics of affects and emotions

Two areas within this literature explicitly make extensions towards politics. The first is Thrift's work on the relationship between capitalism, affective environments, and political action in everyday life. The second is Ahmed's cultural politics of emotions. In both cases, theories of politics and space that rely on discursive understandings of identity, position, and the subject are troubled by attention to felt and lived affects and emotions.

Thrift's major contribution may be his attempts to link the recent interest in affect to forms of politics that are directly related to everyday actions and practices. He argues that because capitalism increasingly depends on affective encounters in the engineering of responses to particular environments, the need for developing a counter politics of

¹⁴⁹ Chevalier, "From Woolen Carpet to Grass Carpet", 1998, 67.

affect that deals with this part of human life is critical. Thrift goes on to propose extensions of these accounts of affect towards changing politics, in the areas of the form of politics, the mediatization of politics and especially the screen, new ways to quantify and calculate changes in sensations, and the design of urban space to produce particular political responses. These “new intensities and speeds” must be considered, in order to work on the spatial politics of this time of heavily engineered “regimes of feeling.” Thrift’s breadth and engaging turns of phrase point towards how affect might be taken seriously, even as many of his ideas are not fleshed out.

Non-representational theory has been an area initiated by Thrift, and put simply, is an attempt to take practice seriously, as opposed to understandings of meaning and representation that have dominated theories of society and culture. An emphasis on affect and the ways embodied practices engage with surroundings through encounters has been key to NRT approaches. Thrift lists five areas for “reformulation” involved in NRT approaches: (1) the world understood as made up of momentary events; (2) society understood as networks of heterogeneous actors (as in actor-network theory); (3) the world is not primarily discursive, but arises “through interaction between elements”; (4) time and space arise out of those interactions, not vice versa; (5) NRT entails an “anti-epistemological” approach, that is engaged with the world actively, and remains “determinedly partial.”¹⁵⁰

Ahmed’s notion of *affective economies* attempts to bring together Marxist political economy with psychoanalytic frames, in order to explain the way that feelings are produced through the effects of their circulation. From the starting point of Freudian

¹⁵⁰ Thrift, N. “Non-representational Theory.” In *The Dictionary of Human Geography*, edited by R.J. Johnston, D. Gregory, G. Pratt, and M. Watts. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2000, 556.

psychoanalysis in which the subject is never entirely present, and the unconscious works as an “absent presence,” Ahmed argues that this affords a theory of emotion as economy.¹⁵¹ Affects do not exist within subjects or objects, but come to acquire their value in the circulation between these – in a way similar to the circulation and exchange of money that becomes capital through its movement. In this way, differences are not inherent within the subject, but are integral to the movements of emotions that are always social, material, and psychic.¹⁵² I think Ahmed’s approach is most important in that she shows how ‘personalized emotions’ are not personal or limited at all. In fact, they are central to forging the surfaces between people, objects, and places that affect all aspects of collective life. This is not necessarily in tension with Deleuze and Guattari’s writings about the importance of keeping processes of territorialization and deterritorialization always in relation to one another. However, some of the more recent writings on affect have tended to over emphasize aspects of circulating affects in the deterritorialized “ether,” as a sort of corrective to critical theories that have overlooked these more contingent dimensions of social life.

Atmospheres: Collective – and often ordinary – affects

Anthropologist Kathleen Stewart pushes theorizations of affect towards saying more about collective, public life. In her book, *Ordinary Affects*, Stewart is masterful at evoking the *mood*, the feeling *in the air*, the way ordinary rhythms are suddenly disrupted and shaken by events and the subsequent elicited emotions, or the ways those rhythms

¹⁵¹ Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 44.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 46.

slowly accrete into collective expectations.¹⁵³ From the reading on affect and emotion, it is clear that there is an attempt to recognize and figure out how the circulation of affect and feeling may be important, both for the individual human experience, and for questions of politics and collective social life. This has been approached in a variety of ways, but common to all is the attention to the body and its attachments to surroundings, the often unpredictable and eruptive, forceful nature of these affects, and the way that people navigate, push back, respond to these forces in daily life. Stewart's book, *Ordinary Affects* (2007), approaches these issues from a narrative perspective. She highlights the social relationships through which affects circulate and exert their force, through writing in narrative vignettes based on her own life and her ethnographic anthropological work. This situational approach peels back some of the specificities of locations and histories, but seems to arrive at the heart of the matter in terms of the relationships between people. Stewart follows Deleuzian threads in her work on ordinary affects, and she experiments with how to communicate the irruptive moments in which affect surfaces. In so doing, Stewart tends to emphasize the *collective* aspect of affects in the way shared experiences are *felt*.¹⁵⁴ This resonates productively with Ahmed's approach to the politics that emerge from felt emotions.

In that sense, Kathleen Stewart's engagement with "ordinary affects" is an arresting approach, and one which demands the sense of affects as fully social, circulatory, and relational. In *Ordinary Affects*, Stewart writes about a range of

¹⁵³ Stewart, K. *Ordinary Affects*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007.

¹⁵⁴ Prose poet Lohren Green, whose work is very much in a similar voice has called this "atmospherics," and describes this as "the study of mooded happenings." Green, L. *Atmospherics*. Niantic, CT: Quale Press, 2014.

encounters, highlighting the rising and falling of force that affect entails. As Stewart describes:

This book tries to slow the quick jump to representational thinking and the evaluative critique long enough to find ways of approaching the complex and uncertain objects that fascinate because they literally hit us or exert a pull on us. My effort here is not to finally “know” them...but to fashion some form of address that is adequate to their form; to find something to say about ordinary affects by performing some of the intensity and texture that makes them habitable and animate.¹⁵⁵

Stewart has posed similar questions to affect as the writers above, but in a refreshing way.

In later work on affect, Stewart mobilizes the concept of “atmospheric attunements” to evoke the way forces come together and dissipate, especially around particular historical moments, shifts in social relations such as economics or governance, or in the ways people encounter difference.¹⁵⁶ This requires recognizing the labors and pleasures of becoming attuned to atmospheres. She writes,

An atmosphere is not an inert context but a force field in which people find themselves. It is not an effect of other forces but a lived affect – a capacity to affect and to be affected that pushes a present into a composition, an expressivity, the sense of potentiality and event. It is an attunement of the senses, of labors, and imaginaries to potential ways of living in or living through things.¹⁵⁷

Kathleen Stewart focus on how individuals live, how we act in the world, and how we experience the world. Stewart's approach, while told as a series of situations from a narrator's perspective, seems to do work towards an understanding of collective experience. Norms are disrupted and transformed. Norms are disrupted and reinforced. The reader can feel the tension and possibility at work beneath the familiar surfaces of

¹⁵⁵ Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*, 4.

¹⁵⁶ Stewart, K. "Atmospheric Attunements." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*. 29 (2011):445-453.

¹⁵⁷ Stewart, “Atmospheric Attunements”, 452.

Stewart's everyday terrains. Of course, perhaps Stewart is the only person to be able to do this, and to do it so well. This may be one danger of pushing and pulling at the norms of scholarship and ethnography. However, in the case of Stewart's work, experience is more vital, and both affection and perception are elicited from the reader. Stewart's narratives draw readers towards questioning the world apparent at the surface, through the situations and the way they are presented. She gets to the heart of the matter of affect in a way that scholars who write about it in more conventional forms may not be able to.

Conclusions

In conclusion, I offer one vignette from my preliminary fieldwork. John and his yard cannot be separated from their surroundings, from his life trajectory, and from his affective attachments to his yard. From down the block, John's yard is noticeably colorful and shaggy – especially the knee high plantings along the street boulevards that span two sides of the corner lot. Surrounding front and back yards are mostly grassy lawns, some with perennial plantings like shrubs and small trees. The riot of blooms in John's yard, even in late September when I visited, is one of his primary fixations and pleasures. Flowers of different varieties climb throughout a large vegetable garden, substantial grape vines snake along one side of the lot, and a range of flowers and vegetables in containers completely cover the driveway.

John, a white man in his 50s, began the yard-visit by telling me about each of the seven or eight cats that live in his yard, and then as we walked through the yard, he told me all about the plants – the origins of how they came to his garden, how he has cultivated them using various techniques, what they have needed, and how they have

fared in different places in his yard. John also told me about being a draft protester during Vietnam and riding the rails to and from California to pick fruit during most of the 70s and 80s. His main activity now is to dumpster dive at an organic produce source, and redistribute the salvageable food to those who need it on his bicycle. It is clear John's central ethics and politics that include dumpster diving (where he occasionally finds plants destined for the landfill that he transplants to his yard) are also significant in his configuration and cultivation of the yard's relationship to the people and neighboring yards which surround it.

I think it's just nice to have *one* island of comfort and nurturance, that's in the neighborhood, that you can walk through. Basically, if you're walking on the sidewalk, you're walking through our yard. So our yard is pretty *external* to the property, it's right out there, in your face.

It's clear that his yard is *for* a wide range of organisms and purposes. He talked about animals that move through and live in the space, he talked about how plants find their own places in the yard, and he talked about how spending time in the yard helps with his own worries and cynicism about politics and war. In the way that John practices his yard, the space affords a singularity in the context of neighboring yards that enables habitation of a range of organisms. The yard as cultivated by John makes possible an environment through which strangers can move, experience a host of sensations, and perhaps escape mundane aspects of their daily lives. With his emphasis on providing a range of colors blooming throughout the year, and his attachment to plants that might otherwise be discarded, John's yard can be understood in a variety of registers. His own personal attachments and appreciation of a much wider range of organisms than is the norm for yard spaces makes a space distinctive from its surroundings. He reinvents what a yard is, making an invitation to perception intended for passers by. He also sees himself as

practicing “sustainability” – not just in his yard, but also in the whole way he lives.

John’s yard makes a fairly wild exception to the norm, and it is this disruption that people notice and feel.

In the case of outdoor residential space, there is an excess or sum beyond the parts to the way the many individual attachments to houses and yards work over the space of a city block, a neighborhood, a “community,” and a city. This shapes the configurations of daily life physically, emotionally, and intellectually. Some parts are incredibly resilient and resistant to change and adaptation over time. Often these may be linked to circuits of capital, special interest and profit - as Virginia Jenkins, and later Paul Robbins, trace in the history of lawns. At the same time, there are aspects to these spaces which are much more malleable and open to transformative forces which might emerge quickly or unpredictably. The recent interest in sustainability is one area where yards are changing rapidly in very interesting ways. All of this entails relationships riddled with affective resonances, while *also* providing meanings, representations, and experiences. This requires interrogation not just of individual lived experience, but also a view of affects and emotions that includes the systems, institutions, and frameworks which give certain meanings to yards.

In this chapter, I have introduced some of the dominant scholarly views on yards, urban environments, and sustainability. I have argued that to understand everyday urban environments, it is necessary to better understand lived experiences with those environments. To do this, it is further necessary to parse material and embodied practices, affective attachments, and attunements to atmosphere – including individual and shared emotions and capacities. Yards serve as a useful analytic, at the intersection of everyday

practice, social relations, human-nonhuman encounters, and shaped by the processes of urbanization, and recently reimagined through concepts such as sustainability. This project examines yards in these terms, which will be further elaborated in Chapters Four, Five, and Six. However, first, it is necessary to understand the context in the dominant ways yards in Minneapolis are known and understood by official municipal perspectives, as well as environmental advocacy perspectives. This is the focus of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3 HABITATS

PLANNING MORE SUSTAINABLE HABITATS

We make you have a yard, whether you want one or not.

– Urban Planner, City of Minneapolis

We knew a lot about the watershed, but not as much about the *peopleshed*.

– Landscape Designer, MetroBlooms

The imagination is hampered in its flight.

– Henri Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*¹⁵⁸

Introduction

I stand on the front porch at the door, and John tells me to walk around the side of his house – he’d put on his shoes and meet me at the back door. He points around to the north side of the house and says, “Check it out – you’ll start to see the yard.” As I round the corner into a large and sunny side yard mostly obscured along the front sidewalk by large bushes as tall as me, I see a vast pile of plastic gallon jugs haphazardly clustered around an open plastic garbage can and a few buckets. Some were filled with water, some empty. Nearby roof gutters empty into a downspout, which in turn empty into a large dishpan. John tells me when he meets me outside, “This is my watering system. The garbage can is a rain barrel, of sorts. Then I fill the jugs when it rains. I use those to water everything. It’s my water conservation system, see.” Although he sees these practices as quite separate from the broader urban context in which his yard is situated, John’s experiences are directly informed by municipal governance in the form of historical decision-making about development and the building of infrastructure such as streets and sewers, and present day regulations to do with yard and home maintenance and land use.

¹⁵⁸ Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2003 [1970], 182.



Figure 8. Like other aspects of his relationship to his yard and home, John is driven by a desire to build and create on his own terms, with materials and expertise at hand. Photo by author.

These official practices supplement John's own everyday practice, by literally shaping the context of what is legally allowable. In this way, the forces which shape city policies also shape John's habitat.

John is by no means alone in placing importance on water use, water conservation, and stormwater capture. In the last three decades, in large and small cities across the United States, such concerns about physical and natural environments have been increasingly framed by municipal policymakers and planners through the concept of *urban sustainability*. Though details vary, urban sustainability is most often mobilized in formal governance through sustainability plans focusing on quantifiable metrics – sustainability indicators. Goals are set for these indicators, and best practices are identified and encouraged through a multitude of projects and programs. These plans and metrics frequently overlap and dovetail with ongoing citizen- and nonprofit-led environmental projects, as well as the creative making of everyday life. In short, these manifestations of contemporary sustainable urbanism have taken a firm – if not always effective or substantive even by their own measure – hold in the way planners, architects, and urbanists think and know the city.

This chapter tells a story about the central endeavor of any urbanism – to dream and plan the city yet to come, while at the same time managing the city now. The chapter asks how the dominant techno-practices which claim to know the city – whose most recent iteration come together as the sustainable city – take into account difference in the ways urban inhabitants actively make, do, and feel their urban environments and endeavor to make a meaningful common life. This is a different question than those often asked by voices within applied urban planning and urban ecology – such as how

sustainability might be more effectively measured, or how to encourage certain attitudes, behaviors, and choices. It is also a slightly different approach from major strands of critique and analysis by urban political ecologists and geographers, which focus on the ways sustainability becomes taken up by capital and thus further exacerbates uneven development. Certainly these dimensions reverberate throughout the discussion. But the story here echoes earlier and ongoing themes within the broad realm of urbanism, in examining the sometimes vast distance between, on the one hand, the ways urban environments are known and planned through expert knowledge, and on the other hand, the ways urban inhabitants experience and understand those environments to be meaningful in their daily lives. Where planners and designers so often offer *habitats* – even radically visionary habitats – people’s practices of *inhabitation* (or, *habiting*¹⁵⁹) often remain at the margins of an expert focus on quantifiable metrics, as well as the apparatus of city codes which regulate urban form.

The chapter argues sustainability perspectives on urban gardening reduce urban environments to their constituent physical parts; in so doing, meaningful engagements with everyday surroundings are also reduced. However, the chapter also shows the dynamic negotiations around this regulatory apparatus, and some of the range in projects and approaches on the part of nonprofit organizations and advocates. This does not mean an easy dismissal of the one dimensional and quantified sustainable city habitat. This is still very important, not least because this is the way city perspectives are committed to

¹⁵⁹ As translator Robert Bononno explains in a footnote in *The Urban Revolution*, Lefebvre uses an unusual form of *l’habiter* – an infinitive in the form of a noun – translated to English from the French as *habiting* (2003 [1970]), p189). As an English speaker, working within the constraints of translations, I understand and use several terms to resonate together in similar ways to connote : *inhabitation*, *inhabiting*, *habiting*. The point is that these terms which embody the practices and experiences of inhabiting a place, can be seen as different from, and at the same time integral to, *habitat*.

understanding environmentalism. However, this emphasis should not preclude *also* knowing about lived experiences in yards. In fact, as the chapter shows, these are the directions some advocacy groups are already heading. They have found benefits towards the goals of successful rain garden participation by emphasizing social connections, sharing skills, and self built gardens.

In particular, urban gardening has become a central character in sustainable urbanism, and in turn, forms the locus of this chapter. In the past decade there has been an explosion of interest in urban gardening. The role and potential of gardening within the city is presently seen as integral to making local and healthy foods more accessible, mitigating negative impacts of urbanization on habitats and water quality, lowering carbon emissions, as well as contributing to emerging forms of social justice, community and sociality in urban space. In Minneapolis, urban gardening has recently been the focus of major interest on the part of city government, as well as the subject of many nonprofit and activist groups stretching back at least six decades. In this chapter, I examine two recent cases: first, the adoption of an Urban Agriculture Policy by the City of Minneapolis, with associated amendments to city codes to do with allowable urban gardening; second, ongoing efforts on the part of a prominent nonprofit organization to promote the design and installation of residential rain gardens. Both of these efforts are quantified as part of formal sustainability indicators tracked by the City of Minneapolis, but the official vision of how urban gardening might fit into broader notions of a sustainable city remains limited. What becomes clear through the two cases discussed below is that urban gardening can be productively seen as a diverse field of motivations, practices, and understandings of city life. The shifting landscape of the perceived purpose

and practice of gardening raises questions about how urban inhabitants and urbanists might imagine and shape more sustainable urban environments differently.

Because front and back yards are key sites for gardening, the chapter concludes with a discussion of how residential yards are imagined and regulated in these two cases, and sustainable urbanism more broadly. What can this tell us about how *habitat* is understood and imagined from city governance, design and planning perspectives? As the techno-practices of city codes transpose inhabitants' practice-experience into its material effects, inhabitation itself is largely written out of official imaginaries of future sustainable urbanisms. At the same time, these official visions are only one part of a complex terrain of sustainable urbanism, involving much broader practices and projects than are usually considered in official plans or critiques which rely on those plans. As I show in detail in subsequent chapters (Chapters 4, 5, 6), the ways of knowing everyday urban environments through inhabitants' practices and experiences entail highly intimate, creative, complex, and often communal capacities which shape, and are shaped by, residential yards. Municipal environmentalisms, such as those organized around the concept of sustainability, supplement this everyday making and remaking by governing through existing codes and incentives (themselves originally shaped by a complex mix of best intentions and diverse interests). In the process, the dangers are that sustainability plans and projects render urban environments without a strong sense of the different modulations of inhabitation – the very ways of knowing the city most meaningful in everyday life.

City as Habitat

How do we know the city? More precisely, how do we know the city in relation to environment? Henri Lefebvre identifies a chasm between the expert knowledges and skills of what he calls “architects and urbanists” (planners, policymakers, designers) and the concrete practices of people’s inhabitation.¹⁶⁰ As I discuss also in Chapters 1 and 4, this is one of many contributions from Lefebvre, developed closely with his three volumes on the critique of everyday life. In this chapter, I draw on Lefebvre’s theorization of the distinction between *the city as habitat* known through expert knowledge, and the urban as produced through *everyday lived experience*, or inhabitation. In this chapter, I argue sustainability policies and projects once again present a conjuncture where a similar dissonance identified by Lefebvre’s insights into the urban more broadly, continues to obscure to planners how urban inhabitants live with their surroundings. By focusing primarily on measure and best practices, sustainability efforts on the part of the City of Minneapolis render urban environments such as front and back yards in terms that reinforce the city habitat as static and inert. This can be seen in the first case below, as the City has tried to overhaul building and zoning codes to allow more urban agriculture. However, official city programs are not the only means through which sustainable urbanism is deployed. Once the diversity of perspectives on sustainability is examined in their many concrete forms, it becomes impossible to wholly dismiss efforts underway, nor to see them only in terms of Lefebvre’s habitats void of meaningful inhabitation. In the second case below focused on rain garden advocacy and

¹⁶⁰ Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*, 2003 [1970].

urban gardening, I discuss the ways one nonprofit devoted to urban gardening in the form of rain gardens both reinforces and disrupts this city habitat perspective.

In the most general terms, *habitat* usually means an organism's or species' surroundings, implying the kinds of food, space, and resources it may require and prefer. It is this functional nature of habitat which Lefebvre finds distressing in the way it so easily makes possible simplification and reduction of the diversity of urban life, and from which he argues the concept has come to subsume the practices of inhabitation. The very notion of what it means to be human becomes reduced here – even beyond, or perhaps beneath, what it means to be animal – in what Lefebvre describes as:

a handful of basic acts: eating, sleeping, and reproducing. These elementary functional acts can't even be said to be animal. Animality is much more complex in its spontaneity.¹⁶¹

This overwrites the importance of concrete urban life by repressing the difference within modulations in how people live. Lefebvre writes, “Habitat was imposed from above as the application of a homogeneous global and quantitative space, a requirement that ‘lived experience’ allow itself to be enclosed in boxes, cages, or ‘dwelling machines.’”¹⁶² Akin to modern lineages stretching from Haussmann's to Corbusier's geometries of straight lines based on rationality, Lefebvre finds these reductive moves central to the devaluation of the creativity and potential of everyday life.

Heidegger's philosophy of dwelling plays a major role in the conception of habitat as deployed by Lefebvre. Dwelling encapsulates the animated practice of everyday life counterposed to space as inert container, or habitat. However, rather than

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 81.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 81.

the term *dwelling*, Lefebvre relies more heavily on the term translated as *habiting*,¹⁶³ to convey how he sees everyday life as full of dynamic practices. Stanek shows how Lefebvre's ideas about dwelling, practice, and inhabitation developed closely with his involvement in the large scale research project on dwelling and domestic life in suburban style individual houses versus high rise modernist housing.¹⁶⁴ Here, the idea of space and architecture affording particular sets of practices for inhabitants to make their worlds was in contrast to dominant architectural concepts of the time which were organized around "needs" and "wants" as functional human requirements, and which could be met with physical design solutions. The creative poiesis of everyday life unfolds with meaning and potential in surroundings which afford active and continual making – this is the notion of dwelling most resonant for Lefebvre. In contrast, habitats offer little potential for appropriation or "making it one's own", and so in comparison to dwelling, are seen by Lefebvre as an impoverished effect of a view of the city that obscures everyday life.

Specialized knowledge renders the city as a knowable "definitive object", and for urban planning and architecture, the city becomes a series of isolated functions and fixed boundaries – a habitat. This approach to the city enables the production of pseudoconcepts, some of which "appear to be precise (operational) and global" and "legitimate fragmentation and compartmentalization."¹⁶⁵ Lefebvre's example of the *environment* is worth quoting at length here, in order to see how he develops this sense of reduction, fragmentation, and partiality:

Take the pseudoconcept of the *environment*, for example. What exactly does it refer to? Nature? A milieu? This much is obvious but trivial. The surroundings? Yes, but

¹⁶³ See also footnote 2 above, about translating this term.

¹⁶⁴ Institut de sociologie urbaine, *L'habitat pavillonnaire*, 1966, discussed in Stanek 2011, p. 81-82.

¹⁶⁵ Lefebvre 2003 [1970], p.186.

which? No one seems to know. The city has an environment; it's called the countryside. Individuals have an environment: it's the succession of envelopes, skins, and shells that contain them, from their habits to their neighborhood. The apartment block and the neighborhood have their environments and serve as environments in turn. Is it the city's boundary or the city as boundary that we refer to as an environment? If not, why not? As soon as we try to be specific, we turn to a specialist, a technician. Thus, there is a geographic environment, a site, landscape, ecosystem. There is a historical environment, an economic and sociologic environment. The semiologist describes symbolic systems and the signs that environ individuals and groups. The psychologist describes the groups that serve as environments for individuals. And so on. In the end, we have access to a number of partial descriptions and analytic statements. We spread them all out on the table before us or dump them all into the same sack. That's our environment. In fact, the image is borrowed from ecological and morphological, which is to say limited, description, and this has been extended carelessly because it is simple and pliable. It has been used for the conventional and well-known (although officially unknown as such) operations of extrapolation and reduction.¹⁶⁶

The meaning of environment is elusive, but this elusiveness enables reduction and simplification in particular directions. This "everywhere and nowhere" is also a critique often leveled at the ways sustainability has been taken up and mobilized.¹⁶⁷

Circulating in and through this discussion of environment by Lefebvre are the concrete pressures of political life, in which the world is necessarily made knowable to the state with all its apparatuses, administration and bureaucracy. Lefebvre does not dismiss these as important, but his project is to show the importance and political potential of what has often been overlooked, obscured or misunderstood by emphasizing state apparatuses and institutions – the modest and private domains, practice, and everyday life in excess of simplistic and functionalist categories. Central to Lefebvre's project is an insistence on seeing *the possible* within the ways people live. This leads directly to a conception of politics as open-ended and expansive, and sees possibilities for sociospatial transformation within the concrete ways we already live collectively and

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p.186-7.

¹⁶⁷ Swyngedouw 2007

communally, even as dominant economic, juridical, and political systems impose and capitalize on our individuated nature.

Amongst the forest of urbanisms informing contemporary urban studies, *everyday urbanism* – one recent approach at the intersection of urban design, architecture, and landscape architecture – has drawn in particular on this potentiality within the concrete practices of everyday life.¹⁶⁸ Proponents argue it is through engaged and nimble design practices including attentive and respectful observation of what is already happening in a place, as well as involvement and design *with* the people who live in and through proposed designs, that meaningful urban places will emerge. The initial efforts in the mid-1990s towards defining everyday urbanism were met largely with silence and dismissal from increasingly popular, and now thoroughly mainstream, design thinkers like those of New Urbanism. This tends to favor form-based solutions that rely on particular productions of nature and nostalgia, as well as exclusionary senses of place in order to be legible.¹⁶⁹

More Sustainable Habitats? Urban Sustainability & Municipal Environmentalisms

At a symposium on urban ecologies designed for scholars and practitioners,¹⁷⁰ the City of Minneapolis Sustainability Coordinator Gayle Prest spoke to the audience about Minneapolis' recent sustainability efforts. She emphasized the role of metrics and indicators throughout her presentation, and passionately advised those involved with environmental efforts in other regional cities and towns:

¹⁶⁸ Chase et al. 2008. *Everyday Urbanism*, 2nd edition. New York: The Monacelli Press.

¹⁶⁹ Till, K. 2001. New Urbanism and Nature: Green Marketing and the Neotraditional Community. *Urban Geography*. pp 220-248.

¹⁷⁰ Urban Ecosystems Symposium, University of Minnesota. (January 25, 2010)

Just start measuring things! It doesn't really matter what they are – don't worry too much about which indicators to use. Just get a baseline measurement, and then don't be discouraged if things don't improve all that quickly.

This advice captures much of the urgency and immediate jump to measure which has reverberated throughout applied planning literature on sustainability and environmentalism for the past three decades. Planners have also tried to meld “green design” principles often developed in terms of single buildings and green architecture, with sociospatial scales such as neighborhood, city and region. This has taken a variety of forms. Throughout all of these moves, similar pressures to quantify, simplify, and reduce the world to knowable systems shape the possibilities planners and designers imagine for these cities and neighborhoods yet to come. For municipalities buffeted by pressures from economic crisis, environmental uncertainty and disaster, and persistent socioeconomic disparities, sustainable urbanism presents another layer of possibility, and also constraint, which takes shape in relation to existing institutional structures and pressures.

The Sustainable City

Urban sustainability as a planning and policy concept first emerged in the United States in the early 1990s in cities such as Seattle, Santa Monica, and San Francisco.¹⁷¹ Policymakers and citizens in these cities adapted internationally-focused discourses about sustainable development within their own context. These cities especially drew on the Three E's': Environment, Economy and Equity first laid out in the UN Brundtland Report

¹⁷¹ Portney, K. *Taking Sustainable Cities Seriously: Economic Development, the Environment, and Quality of Life in American Cities*. Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. Press, 2003.

as a means to capture the multi-faceted nature of sustainability as a guiding concept.¹⁷² Cities in the US and beyond continue to use this as a basis for sustainability efforts. The *sustainability plan* has become the most common tool for cities to articulate, adopt, and address sustainable city goals. These plans are generally built around a set of *sustainability indicators*, which are supposed to measure the outcomes of efforts to become a “more sustainable” city. Seattle was one of the first cities to initiate a major sustainability indicators project in 1996, also incorporating public participation in its development. Depending on the context in which these plans arise, they may also be tied to the city’s broader comprehensive plan.¹⁷³

The institutional arrangements for incorporating sustainability within existing urban governance vary across time and place. Separate city departments or offices were often introduced in some of the earliest cities to adopt sustainability. For example, the City and County of San Francisco set up an innovative Department of the Environment in 1996, charged with coordinating efforts towards sustainability goals throughout city government and over five year increments. This separate department grew directly out of citizen-led efforts to articulate a Sustainable City Plan for San Francisco in the early 1990s.¹⁷⁴ In cities that adopted sustainability policies a bit later, including the city of Minneapolis, a more integrated approach often dominates, whereby sustainability goals are integrated across city departments, often overseen by a coordinator and small staff, and associated with existing departments such as public works.

¹⁷² WCED 1987

¹⁷³ Portney 2003; Corson, W. *Measuring Urban Sustainability*. Washington, DC: Global Tomorrow Coalition, 1993; Kline, E. *Sustainable Community Indicators*. Medford, MA: Consortium for Regional Sustainability, Tufts University, 1995.

¹⁷⁴ Sustainable San Francisco, 1995; City and County of San Francisco, 2012

That the city has become the central scale around which sustainability policies are enacted has been discussed and debated by geographers and others in allied fields. This has been understood as another mode of the era of neoliberalizing local entrepreneurialism, where cities (and sometimes regions) compete for capital investment through the promotion of green projects of different types. This urban scale has also almost entirely obscured the potential, at least in the public imagination, of larger scale policies to address fundamental questions about resource use and management, environment and development. In the United States, urban scale sustainability with calls for acting locally has meshed seamlessly with much longer traditions of resistance against regional and centralized planning, such as those which emerged in many continental European countries.¹⁷⁵ Long a site for metabolic and organic metaphors, the city offers a salient canvas through which urbanisms reimagine more green modes of living. For example, the recent movement towards eco-cities throughout the global South, and especially Asia, has drawn on these kinds of metaphors by relying heavily on technical solutions for basic infrastructure needs such as solar panels and grey water systems, with implicit or explicit closed-loop designs and narratives.¹⁷⁶

Contemporary interest in codes remains largely in applied fields, with growing interest in developing mechanisms for policy transfer between places. This is especially the case with sustainability and a host of best practices seen as contributing to more sustainable urban futures. For example, urban agriculture has multiple web-based portals through which different actors such as government policymakers, politicians, and advocates are able to compare notes and share specific policy language about urban

¹⁷⁵ Hall 2002; Portney 2003

¹⁷⁶ Chang et al. *Regional Studies*, 2014.

livestock, community and rooftop gardens, and the marketing and selling of homegrown produce and farmers' markets.¹⁷⁷ In Minneapolis, the Sustainability Coordinator participates in a national network of sustainability coordinators by attending periodic conferences, as well as participating regularly in a closed web-based forum to compare notes about local policies and best practices. More expansive codes to allow landscaping such as native habitats like prairie grasses, rain gardens and bio swales, or xeriscaping, often have required relaxing height and species restrictions that would otherwise be limited.

A Sustainable Minneapolis

In Minneapolis, municipal sustainability efforts have echoed the above trends, as well as limitations, with efforts primarily focused on developing and tracking sustainability metrics. The City Council formally adopted sustainability as a key principle in 2003.¹⁷⁸ The primary goals of this initial resolution were to first, establish a process for articulating sustainability goals in the form of a 'Minneapolis Sustainability Plan', and subsequently, to integrate this plan as a chapter into the City's comprehensive plan. In this original resolution a selective list of projects and programs undertaken by the City of Minneapolis since the mid-1990s portrays the City as already working towards 'green' goals, including: citizen involvement in environmental task forces; brownfield

¹⁷⁷ For example, advocacy and activist groups regularly exchange specific language to expand allowable urban agriculture and other urban gardening practices (see Gardening Matters website: <http://www.gardeningmatters.org/community-garden-public-policies>, accessed June 20, 2013). In a similar way, the City of San Francisco Department of the Environment was involved with the establishment of a major policy exchange effort in the form of an internet-based clearinghouse organized around best practices, for California cities (<http://greencitiescalifornia.org/>, accessed July 28, 2013). Minnesota has a similar program, with a focus on metrics, Minnesota GreenStep (<http://greenstep.pca.state.mn.us/>, accessed July 28, 2013).

¹⁷⁸ City of Minneapolis

reclamation projects; adoption of Smart Growth principles to guide planning and land use decisions; water quality improvements and protection of watersheds through storm water management improvements; improving energy efficiency in City buildings and fleets; maintaining and improving parks and open spaces, as well as urban reforestation and community gardens. A series of actions were then identified to build on these past environmentally-oriented projects. These included developing a program to identify and track key sustainability indicators and ten-year targets for those indicators, as well as amending ordinances such as the City's zoning code to be consistent with the sustainability plan. In this 2003 resolution, sustainability is deployed as an umbrella concept intended to synthesize and guide environmental decision-making in a more coherent way, and eventually "integrate the Three E's, Environment, Economy and Equity (including social justice); coordinate efforts; garner buy-in; and increase the effectiveness of our ongoing programs and investments."¹⁷⁹ A small office was established that currently houses several staff, including a Sustainability Coordinator.

Sustainability indicators dominated these efforts in Minneapolis, and a separate sustainability plan was never produced. In 2005 the City held a series of public roundtable discussions to inform the selection of approximately 24 indicators, and a focus on sustainable growth was incorporated into the city's comprehensive plan in 2009. Minneapolis sustainability indicators have been modified periodically, and remain roughly grouped around the initial concepts of health, environment, and social equity. Since 2007, 26 indicators have been tracked annually in a series of publicly available reports: *A Healthy Life* (e.g. obesity rates, infant mortality, and teen pregnancy);

¹⁷⁹ City of Minneapolis 2003

GreenPrint (e.g. measures of alternative transportation trips, airport noise, and pollution in urban lakes, streams and rivers); and *A Vital Community* (e.g. socioeconomic statistics such as homelessness, violent crimes, graduation rates).¹⁸⁰

Case 1: Regulating sustainability in a city of codes

City of codes

City codes are at the heart of these recent changes in urban agriculture policies in Minneapolis. But how do such codes fit into the broader enactment of sustainable city policies, and what is the role of building and zoning codes in the ways policymakers, planners, and urbanists see more sustainable urban futures? In the past century in which urban planning came into its own as a profession and practice, city codes have changed dramatically. In the 1920s, generally the first regulations of private property to were relatively minimal restrictive documents to do with land use and what is now considered zoning. Regulations rapidly proliferated with the development and building boom in the postwar years. Now such municipal-scale regulations are being reimagined in terms which resonate with neoliberal aims at rolling back the state: flexibility, agility, and removing barriers to innovation and enterprise. In the case of Minneapolis, city codes serve as a key lens through which to see how municipal governance and planning in the era of sustainable urbanism shape how planners and policymakers see the possible. Codes work as a dynamic apparatus in contact with our most intimate lives, stretching into seemingly quite private spaces such as dwellings and yards, and evoking and shaping the best intentions of our collective lives. In this section, I draw out key links between the

¹⁸⁰ City of Minneapolis 2012

apparatus of city codes and the making of city habitats. Next I discuss these dynamics in the case of recent changes to Minneapolis city codes related to expanding allowable urban agriculture.

Municipal governance operates in two primary registers at once – restrictions enforced through regulations, and encouragement in the form of incentives. Codes play an important role within this duality by defining in highly detailed and spatial terms what is allowable or possible. As one experienced policy aide to a city council member who was very involved in the urban ag policy and amendments explained to me during an interview,

In Minneapolis, we aren't at the point of saying you *can't* have lawns, but we have decided it's *allowable* not to have a lawn. It's possible. At the top levels, there hasn't been a shift towards really saying, "This thing that you've been doing forever [cultivating a grassy lawn] is now no longer acceptable. You can't do this anymore" – even though that would actually make a significant difference towards stated sustainability goals for the City. We just haven't made that shift yet. It's a little bit schizophrenic in that way. We may get there. But not yet.

This description points to the conundrum between managing the present city, and planning for the city yet to come. As explored in the following empirical cases, urban gardening in Minneapolis captures attempts towards urban sustainability in these two domains of regulatory apparatus (codes) and encouraging alternative modes of gardening.

Official city codes have two primary functions within municipal governance, in the most basic sense. First, codes function as a means of regulatory power over private land and land uses in the city. These are generally understood as restrictive and limiting, and are organized around concepts of the common or public good such as health, fire, safety, nuisance, and maintenance. Second, codes shape future building projects and the general direction of development and redevelopment through land use zoning, by

outlining what is allowable where, and in what physical configuration. As will be seen in the two empirical cases to do with urban gardening in Minneapolis below, the dominant narratives about municipal regulation from city planning and health department perspectives, as well as urban ag activists, called for revamping existing codes in order to remove clunky and archaic government barriers to alternative (and by some accounts virtuous) gardening activities. How did these codes become so clunky?

Codes in the United States emerged in the first half of the twentieth century out of the perceived necessity to maintain property values by keeping those who were unwanted in an area out. Initially a response to the industrializing Victorian “city of dreadful night”, detailed planning and zoning regulations increased as cities became decentralized with the advent of suburbs.¹⁸¹ A combination of regulations focused on building heights and masses, along with land uses, was readily adopted in New York in the 1910s – the first American embrace of zoning restrictions modeled on German and British modes of planning.¹⁸² As this movement further developed, juridical claims for zoning rested on the right of the state “to regulate the private use of property so as to guarantee ‘the health, safety, morals, comfort, convenience, and welfare of the community.’”¹⁸³ Property values figured prominently in ensuing debates and refinements to the laws, and by the 1920s, zoning was considered the primary way to stabilize property values. However, as Hall points out, the relationships between *planning* and *zoning* were tenuous at this point in the 1920s – planning was often done through voluntary commissions and committees at the local level, while zoning was increasingly written into law through a series of federal

¹⁸¹ Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow*, 2002

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, p.58.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, p.59.

acts and US Supreme Court decisions.¹⁸⁴ Ultimately, these early zoning and building codes served to further segregate urban and increasingly suburban areas in the interest of preserving and raising property values – thereby concentrating poor, immigrant, and nonwhite populations in squalid living conditions and limiting access to new suburbs.

In the postwar period in the United States, an increasingly systematized and ‘scientific’ view of urban environments and large scale urban projects such as the interstate highway system rendered cities as comprised of discrete and knowable systems. In the 1950s and 1960s codes often proliferated and became significantly more elaborate based on these various systems. For example, in Minneapolis in 1963 the two page city code from the 1920s exploded into the large comprehensive code very similar to the city code document today. It was here, for instance, that allowable urban agriculture and animal husbandry was dramatically reduced.

Minneapolis urban agriculture

In 2008, then Mayor R.T. Rybak, in conjunction with the Minneapolis Department of Health and Family Support and the Minneapolis Sustainability Office, embarked on an effort to rethink the role of the City in supporting and shaping local food systems named *Homegrown Minneapolis*. Dovetailing with sustainability indicators, the initiative studied and compiled recommendations for policies to create a “healthy, local food system.”¹⁸⁵ The *Homegrown Minneapolis* report (2009) required the City to put together the first “Urban Agricultural Policy Plan”. Committees were assembled to translate the aims of the plan into zoning code amendments. Two years later, the City

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p.60.

¹⁸⁵ Minneapolis Urban Agriculture Policy Plan, 2011, p. 4.

Council adopted the Urban Ag Policy Plan (2011), and the associated text amendments defining, clarifying and regulating how food might be grown and sold within the City were adopted in 2012. Historically, growing food was largely written out of legal and regulatory understandings of urban land use when the first major comprehensive code was assembled in 1963. The key function of the current Urban Ag Plan was to expand allowable food production, processing, and commercial exchange in the city through amendments to Minneapolis city codes. This largely relaxed relevant regulations governing urban space, but also involved identifying and defining urban agriculture practices and associated material requirements in terms of land uses, gardening structures, and activities. For the current Urban Agriculture Plan, discussions around adding new definitions and amending existing code took the better part of one year, and preoccupied community gardening enthusiasts, food justice advocates, and organic and local food activists in the area.

The Urban Agriculture amendments to city codes reinforced some existing understandings of urban environments, and challenged others. Receiving much of the attention and press, these definitions now include several types of large-scale food production: *market gardens*: “an establishment where food or ornamental crops are grown on the ground, on a rooftop, or inside a building, to be sold or donated”; and *urban farms*: “an establishment where food or ornamental crops are grown or processed to be sold or donated that includes, but is not limited to, outdoor growing operations, indoor growing operations, vertical farms, aquaculture, aquaponics, hydroponics, and rooftop

farms”¹⁸⁶ For both *market gardens* and *urban farms*, the ability to sell fresh produce at the site where food is grown (on a limited number of days per year) was a major change. The definition of these new land uses was celebrated and widely promoted by the City and gardening advocates as allowing increased opportunities for economic development, and facilitating entrepreneurial drive across diverse populations in the form of for-profit food production in the city. Additionally, the definitions recognize for the first time that food production in the city may take a variety of physical forms – including commercial scale aquaponics, hydroponics, and living roof systems.

Although smaller in scale and less frequently touted in press releases, growing food in residential yards garnered much debate that points to the wide variety of urban gardening scales, practices, and understandings on the part of urban agriculture advocates and municipal planners. Discussion and debate about small-scale gardening structures such as *arbors*, *raised beds*, *cold frames*, and *hoop houses*¹⁸⁷ was framed around multiple understandings of the purpose and use of residential yards. Regulations of yard spaces generally are located within one of two main municipal purviews/departments: (1) planning (land use and zoning); (2) housing maintenance (outdoor upkeep such as

¹⁸⁶ Definitions according to the 2012 City of Minneapolis zoning text amendments: *Aquaculture*: the cultivation, maintenance, and harvesting of aquatic species; *Hydroponics*: the growing of food or ornamental crops, in a water and fertilizer solution containing the necessary nutrients for plant growth; *Aquaponics*: the combination of aquaculture and hydroponics to grow food or ornamental crops and aquatic species together in a recirculating system without any discharge or exchange of water (City of Minneapolis, 2012b).

¹⁸⁷ According to the 2012 Minneapolis zoning text amendments: An *arbor* is considered ‘a landscape structure consisting of an open frame with horizontal and/or vertical latticework often used as a support for climbing food or ornamental crops... may be freestanding or attached to another structure’; a *cold frame* is ‘an unheated outdoor structure built close to the ground, typically consisting of, but not limited to, a wooden or concrete frame and a top of glass or clear plastic, used for protecting seedlings and plants from cold weather’; *composting* is officially understood to be ‘the natural degradation of organic material, such as yard and food waste, into soil’; and a *hoop house* is ‘a temporary or permanent structure typically made of, but not limited to, piping or other material covered with translucent material for the purposes of growing food or ornamental crops...considered more temporary than a greenhouse’ (City of Minneapolis, 2012b).

overgrown lawns and broken windows). In both cases, outdoor space is defined as front, side, and back yards – with different allowable uses and maintenance guidelines for each. Front yards are significantly more limited in the range of allowable uses, and back yards much less regulated. The planning department’s purview over yards is complaint-driven, and the enforcement of maintenance regulations are a combination of complaint-driven enforcement, as well as annual visual surveys done by the city.

Given this background about how yards are defined and regulated from the point of view of municipal departments, debates underway about the proposed urban agriculture policy changes were constituted largely from two main perspectives. First, urban agriculture proponents tended to focus narrowly on the capacity of a single yard to produce food based on the best growing conditions (usually full sun) – regardless of regulatory distinctions based on front, side, and back. In contrast, city planners had broader conceptions of yard uses, especially in front yards – evoking the preservation of view corridors and neighborhood character as potentially threatened by increased productive food gardening. These arguments against expanded allowable gardening structures such as arbors or raised beds included concerns and protests about ‘unsightly’ disruption of the collective environment along the front of city blocks. Urban agriculture advocates countered this resistance to expanding allowable structures and uses of front yards with very different visions of urban neighborhoods. In advocates’ views, agriculturally productive land could exist in every yard, with a range of structural supports to maximize food production. In the end, the revised yard regulations do expand allowable urban agriculture possibilities, especially in front yards, with some compromise. Because the municipal planning and maintenance departments are involved

primarily when neighbors complain, it remains to be seen how the revised urban agriculture policy may shift yard practices and norms, and how this may be variegated across the city.



Figure 9. An inhabitant in Northeast Minneapolis attempts to remind passers by about city regulations to do with the appropriate spaces for dog feces on this self made sign, “All dog feces must be picked up by dog owner. City ordinance.” Photo by author.

Official codes and ordinances telescope from the most broad category of land use, down to the minute degrees of, for example, how and where dog feces may legally exist in the city. Codes also serve as a point of negotiation around which different perspectives pivot, due to the fact that they literally define urban life (or at least purport to) in spatial and material terms. Through this negotiated terrain of the urban agricultural code amendments in particular, it is clear urban gardening is not a series of black and white decisions as often characterized through best practices around gardening promoted by environmental activists. Here, the process of revamping codes in place since 1963 raises questions about how urban agriculture and urban gardening are defined in very fine scales. This reveals what is made legible in the policy context – how these definitions emerge from, and also produce, a narrow rendering of urban gardening. Urban agriculture activists saw little value in modes of gardening beyond production, belying the fact that gardening embodies different meanings, life experiences, and collective capacities depending on where, how, and by whom it’s practiced. A tension between *gardening as food production* and *gardening as beautification* emerges in these debates around city codes in Minneapolis. Planners working for the city felt the need to push back against urban agriculture activists who primarily understood yards in terms of their biophysical and productive capacities. The planners with whom I spoke considered this aspect of their role as taking the collective long view. They understood their role as looking out for unforeseen negative consequences of a total shift (however unlikely) towards urban food production in residential yards. They also considered their role as keeping a more diverse range of uses and meanings in play for residential yards, even as this meant limiting some of the allowable urban agriculture uses.

Case 2: Aspirational sustainability in rain gardens

In addition to food-producing gardens, the City of Minneapolis tallies the number of rain gardens each year as one sustainability indicator. Rain gardens usually take the form of a shallow depression planted with a variety of water-loving plants, and are designed to capture rain water from downspouts or impervious surfaces such as driveways and sidewalks. Ideally, these plants slow and divert storm water runoff, keeping the flows of water from polluting storm sewer systems. Because the typical residential roof in Minneapolis uses asphalt tiles, it is advised that rain gardens generally not be food-producing, due to the potential for chemical residues in the water to be taken up by edible plants. Usually native plants are recommended, as they often tolerate local climates better without as much need for water or added chemicals. A particular urban environment is imagined through rain gardens – one that involves a reclamation of territory from ‘exotic’ species such as turfgrasses, and one that redirects the movement of water and pollutants vertically at the source, rather than horizontally across city landscapes.

In Minneapolis, one nonprofit organization, MetroBlooms, has been central to efforts to improve water quality through rain gardens. The organization grew with initial support from the City and local activists in the 1960s, and the focus has shifted from an emphasis on beautification towards a direct engagement with water quality issues and stronger environmental advocacy in the past decade. MetroBlooms developed a series of workshops in 2005 to educate and promote rain gardens in particular, as one type of urban gardening that can contribute to better water quality. MetroBlooms now partners

with a variety of government agencies and neighborhood groups. Their workshops are now promoted throughout the Minneapolis metro area, including website links and promotion by the City of Minneapolis Sustainability Office and Public Works Department. Because these gardens are often misunderstood as “messy”, “shaggy”, or unattractive by neighbors or passers by, an educational mission is often built into rain garden design. For instance, Metro Blooms gardens often include signage reading: “I am a Rain Garden. I capture rainwater to protect our water resources.”



Figure 10. Metro Blooms’ and other literature on rain gardens, assures homeowners that these gardens can be beautiful, can trap mosquitoes rather than encourage them, and that the gardens require little maintenance after plants become established. This points to the work necessary to address many residents’ anxieties and their reluctance to adopt this different form of gardening. Photo by author.

One of Metro Blooms' ongoing initiatives, *Neighborhoods of Rain Gardens*, scales up from a focus on individual residential properties to conceiving and encouraging rain gardens at the scale of neighborhood. This has taken different forms in different neighborhoods, often determined by the partnerships between MetroBlooms, funding agencies, and neighborhood organizations. Two of these recent *Neighborhood* projects of differing scales show an evolving approach on the part of MetroBlooms regarding how neighborhood rain garden initiatives are communicated to residents, how individual rain gardens are designed and installed, and the role of measurable outcomes. The first was a large-scale project of more than 120 rain gardens, designed and installed in 2010. While the number of gardens and associated storm water metrics reached the targets, the designers found resident involvement varied widely at all stages of the project – initial interest, design and installation, and ability and willingness to maintain gardens over time. Property ownership status may have affected participation in the program, with approximately 53% of households renter occupied in this neighborhood.¹⁸⁸ MetroBlooms designers felt renters may not have had as much involvement in outdoor spaces in general to feel empowered or capable of maintaining the gardens. As one landscape designer elaborated, “We knew a lot about the watershed, but not as much about the people-shed.” Still, the project has made considerable difference in the appearance of the neighborhood's yard spaces and the way neighborhood residents are experiencing them.

¹⁸⁸ City of Minneapolis 2010



Figure 11. View down a block with majority rain gardens in front yards, early spring. One resident described it this way, “Even without everyone taking care of their gardens, you see a different way of having a garden.” Photo by author.

Metro Blooms now focuses volunteer days around seasonal maintenance, such as clearing mulch and debris from rain gardens and street drains in the spring.

In a different part of the city, a smaller “Neighborhood of Rain Gardens” project was undertaken, with a decidedly different approach to involvement on the part of residents. Unlike earlier projects where volunteers dug up and installed gardens, residents were engaged early on to work with designers and collaborate to help one another prepare and plant gardens. This focus on residents’ direct involvement in planting gardens and neighborly help was intended to foster feelings of ownership over their gardens and to “build community.” The goal is that over time others in the neighborhood will see how their neighbors were able to do their own rain gardens, and be inspired to consider the idea themselves. Measurable impacts such as quantity of runoff captured by gardens of this neighborhood project were more modest than in the larger-scale project described above, due to a smaller number of rain gardens. However, MetroBlooms designers felt the different approach led participants to master the techniques firsthand, perhaps feel more confident about their own rain gardens, and establish an informal support network amongst neighbors.

From an environmental advocacy perspective, the recognition of relationships between neighbors is increasingly important. “Community” is imagined as being “strengthened” and “built” through the encounters between people and gardens, and this has become a central part of Metro Blooms’ discourses around their programs.

Participants in the small rain garden project described above self consciously joked at the first installation demo as they chatted and drank coffee on a chilly, early weekend

morning: “Well, we’re getting off to a late start – but we’re building community. That’s what it’s about, right?”

One year later in this smaller project, some of the rain gardens have languished and not received care that would help them flourish. By the City’s sustainability metrics, they count as rain gardens, but they might not be reaching the goals laid out by MetroBlooms and the neighborhood organization. The city’s number of rain gardens sustainability metric doesn’t quite capture the social connections surrounding rain gardens, nor advocacy groups’ work to influence changing urban gardening practices.

The difference in these cases between official city codes and expert advocacy may not matter much if both deploy reliance on narrow slices of specialized knowledge about urban environments. However, there are several key differences to emerge in the latest iterations of the Neighborhood of Rain Gardens program in Northeast Minneapolis, from the City’s official plans and metrics. The rain garden program, while still limited in scale and relevance for many people’s yards, endeavors to offer the kinds of socialities through which meaningful environmental practices such as rainwater capture in individual yards could take hold and become part of broader everyday life for urban inhabitants. Through the mobilization and fostering of affective encounters in workshops and informal gatherings, as well as thinking in terms of multiple temporalities in conjunction with plants, people, and neighborhoods, MetroBlooms provides additional dimensions to urban environmentalism beyond city habitat perspectives focused solely on measure. Still, the rain garden rhetoric revolves around best practices such as how to install the gardens through very prescriptive steps, as well as the kinds of plants suitable for them.



Figure 12. Images taken at the rain garden installation workshop on a Saturday morning in fall of 2012, in Northeast Minneapolis, organized by MetroBlooms and the neighborhood organization. Photos by author.

This rain garden advocacy also operates on fairly narrow views of an archetypal homeowner who lives in a single family (often very suburban) house.¹⁸⁹ So while taking this kind of project into account expands the usual critiques and analyses of sustainability policies beyond planning and measure, significant limitations remain to moving towards a more robust and perhaps meaningful urban environmentalism.

Rain gardens 2.0: Adapting to rain garden affects and rhythms

MetroBlooms tried out a new tactic for inviting a broader range of people, as the Neighborhood of Rain Gardens program developed into its second year in Northeast Minneapolis, with the continued involvement of individuals in the area and from the neighborhood group. This was an informal information session held in the backyard of a particularly keen couple who installed several rain gardens with the help of the program in its first year, and then a short walking tour of rain gardens in early summer. Some participants from the first round of rain gardens came to tell people about their experiences, and funding from MetroBlooms and the neighborhood organization helped provide snacks and a bit of beer and wine. People who heard about the program came to find out more. Some people brought their neighbors along. After a loose presentation by one of the MetroBlooms designers about rain garden basics, projected onto a portable screen as chickens clucked underfoot, the group meandered towards several rain gardens built and installed the previous year. Residents who had rain gardens told the group about their experiences, and pairs and trios of people chatted and compared gardening notes as we walked from garden to garden. A small group split off to see a neighbor's side and

¹⁸⁹ See, for example, MetroBlooms prescriptive literatures and websites: <http://www.metroblooms.org>, last accessed July 16, 2013.

back yard without a rain garden, but that is just a beautiful space that many people admired – usually inaccessible and private.

The lived experience of the evening, with all of the mingling – people making time to meet one another on a busy weekday evening, ask others how they'd heard about the event and what they hoped to do in their garden this season – as well as relaxed approach to conveying the technical information about rain gardens, highlighted the sense of social connection through rain gardens which organizers had hoped for. It also served to make rain gardens seem manageable, desirable, and important, through the narratives of residents and neighbors. The structure of the event also allowed for individual stories and perspectives to come through, even when not totally in line with the prescriptions for rain garden design and installation. For example, one participant in the evening talked at length to individuals and the whole group about his preferences for building the edges of rain gardens up above the ground level in berms, rather than digging down into the earth to create a depression. He was still championing the program in general, although he hadn't participated. He told me he hoped the neighbor he brought along, who is a new homeowner and a bit overwhelmed at what to do in his yard, would seriously consider the rain garden program as a way to become more engaged with his yard – to, in essence, take some “baby steps” toward more involved gardening. The approach of MetroBlooms and the neighborhood group points towards more relevant and meaningful registers through which urban environmentalisms might take hold – still reinforcing dominant conditions and status quo understandings, but opening up spaces through which to be affected – by neighbors, plants, earth, and water.



Figure 13. The second year – a kickoff evening information session. Focus centered around socializing, followed by this short presentation about rain gardens. Plates of crackers and cheese, cans of Grain Belt Nordeast beer on ice in coolers that also served as seats, and cut up vegetables were situated in the patio area of the host’s spacious yard. Photos by author.

Conclusions: Sustainability beyond habitat?

In 1986, an innovative book was published about housing and everyday life. The provocative title, adapted many times over since then in planning literature, conveys the central argument and approach: *Housing as if People Mattered*.¹⁹⁰ Marcus and Sarkissian identify a major dissonance in the ways planning and design projects are conceived, designed, developed and managed: the lack of a meaningful presence of inhabitants and their experiences in design and subsequent management processes. Marcus and Sarkissian drew attention to the fine-grained ways people lived *in* and *with* space – for example, the ways people made entries their own with decorations under varying spatial conditions, or especially the many ways children actually played (or not) in common outdoor spaces designed specifically for them (or not). The distance between inhabitant and designer so beautifully and respectfully rendered by Marcus and Sarkissian is important far beyond the specific cases of public or government-designed medium-density family housing in 1970s and 1980s Anglophone contexts. It speaks to this same general dissonance that reverberates throughout modern urban planning and broader urbanisms in the past 150 years.

Nearly twenty years before Marcus and Sarkissian, Lefebvre theorized this same kind of distinction as the ongoing dialectic of modern cities known and planned as *habitats*, and the urban as *lived* by inhabitants in daily life. In this chapter, I have argued sustainability policies and projects present a recent iteration of this same distinction,

¹⁹⁰ Marcus, C. and W. Sarkissian. *Housing As If People Mattered: Site Design Guidelines for Medium-Density Family Housing*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986. The book offers more than 250 concrete guidelines elaborating a broad range of design and management concerns about a variety of types of multifamily housing. The guidelines included photographs, diagrams, and abundant built examples. Marcus and Sarkissian drew from existing but often overlooked post-occupancy evaluations (POEs), emerging social science research, as well as the joint authors' own experiences and site visits to different housing communities all over the Anglophone world.

where specialized sustainability perspectives render urban environments as primarily physical habitats. This takes shape through city codes, regulating allowable uses. I also show some of the ways nonprofit advocacy projects have attempted to reach beyond this narrow focus, in an effort to incorporate concerns about community, participation, and changing norms about urban gardening. This more expansive view starts to include how people interact not just with physical space, but with one another. It has also been understood by these advocates and designers as necessary in furthering the success of rain gardens. In turn, it is understood these rain gardens have implications for water quality across watersheds, ultimately contributing to official stated sustainability goals.

Both the urban agriculture and rain garden efforts discussed above disturb dominant understandings about what constitutes an urban garden, and by extension, practices of urban gardening – especially a garden in a residential front or back yard. Embodied in the discourses that make up the efforts discussed above to promote urban agriculture and rain gardens are different imaginaries about how sustainability is understood, and how changing practices may reshape and contribute to a more sustainable urban life. In the case of developing urban agriculture policies, the process of working out the definitions and details of city code amendments reveals sometimes conflicting understandings about how and where urban agriculture should take place. These negotiations take physical shape in the city code apparatus, defining the allowable materials and contents of spaces for food production in the city. In the case of rain gardens in Minneapolis, the chapter shows the shift toward recognizing the importance of social relations in the long term success and failure of sustainability goals on the part of rain garden advocates and experts. Furthermore, the spatial scale of the environmental

interventions of rain gardens intersects with new and existing socialities at fine-grained scales of city block and neighborhood. Such efforts still surely can suffer from narrow ideas about home ownership, individual acts incommensurate with the scale of environmental challenges, and neoliberalizing tendencies to shift responsibility for common goods into increasingly private domains.¹⁹¹

Still, it is important not to dismiss as a whole the specialized knowledge of urban environmentalisms currently underway. Just as the sociopolitical richness of everyday life may be obscured from a planner's gaze, the layers of development history, apparatus of codes, and infrastructure beneath yards may be largely obscured from inhabitants' daily perspectives. It is not an either/or question. These debates and projects point to the importance of better understanding dynamics around sustainability efforts beyond a narrow focus on measure and indicators. Variation in efforts often considered part and parcel of urban sustainability become flattened by policies and critiques alike focused solely on sustainability metrics – the variation in understandings and practices may not be sufficiently captured with this kind of habitat-thinking. Indicators and associated measurements can define targets, but may not provide adequate insights about how those targets might be reached in a particular place and depending on social differences. Thus identifying indicators and measurement is not enough. What we need is not simply sustainability plans that lay out indicators and measurements, but studies that examine the processes and practices that recognize larger visions and possibilities of more sustainable

¹⁹¹ As participant Sarah in NE told me, “The rain garden project the neighborhood is trying to do. What is that? I mean, it's the big polluters who have screwed up our water quality, not an individual's garden. I know the intentions are good, but it's mismatched effort. We should be regulating big ag!”

urban life, and which implicate a complex and broader terrain of people dreaming and making the city yet to come.

Yards in particular offer a means to frame environmental issues in terms beyond habitat, even as most official and advocacy literature focuses instead on systems approaches (such as stormwater management). As will unfold in the following chapters (4, 5, 6), yard practices and experiences far exceed the bounds of the usual code and environmentalist perspectives on the contents and meanings of yards. Each chapter takes up a different dimension of these yard experiences, in an effort to better understand the possibilities and relations obscured by more dominant perspectives such as those explored in this chapter. The next chapter examines how people inhabit yards through a range of embodied engagements – from intensive cultivation to the barest maintenance.

CHAPTER 4 INHABITATION LIVING WITH YARDS

Introduction

“A mess,” Michael describes his yard, laughing. “Ahh, what can I say? It’s relative.” He gestures to the north, towards his neighbor’s yard. “I look at it from the point of a formal garden on this end, and my yard is down here,” dropping his hand a few inches from the front steps where we sit in the shade on a hot Tuesday afternoon in July. “No, it’s not the worst it could possibly be – I do *mow* it. But that’s about all I do!” Michael is sixty two, has been unemployed for more than ten years, and now works and volunteers as a freelance stage director in the theater. He has a sharp wit. As I try to describe my project through the front screen door while handing out fliers, he has a wisecrack for everything I say. But I stick with it, and he says he might as well answer my questions, he has nothing better to do. We both think it will be a swift conversation as we sit down on his front steps. Even I am surprised as our conversation unfolds over more than two hours. He tells me, “Now that you got me going on this whole thing, there’s a lot more about plants and yards than at first blush I would have said. Ah, you’re getting these odd stories out of me!” It’s clear through the telling of these “odd stories”, and the way he shows me around the space, that Michael’s engagement with his and nearby yards – while not immediately apparent or embodied through practices such as a lot of maintenance or active gardening – runs deep within his perspectives on attachment to the past, other organisms, and neighborhood life.

These dimensions of his engagement are perhaps surprising because Michael’s yard could not be more nondescript, especially in relation to his immediately adjacent

neighbors' yard. One of the most distinct physical boundaries between yards in all the forty five or so yards of this project delineates Michael's yard from Adrienne and Dave's. No fence, but a dramatic difference in degree of cultivation and contents. To the south, Michael's front yard: a relatively empty lawn pocked with dirt patches, three foundation plantings around the front stoop which are now full blown trees. The space is fully shaded in the afternoon by a large ash tree on the boulevard, along with the umbrella-shaped canopy of one of the last old time majestic elms growing on the boulevard across the street. The backyard is not very different – irregular grass, more sun, a chain link fence. Adrienne and Dave's yard to the north in front: dense, lush. Sculpted and cascading fountains and waterways are punctuated with carefully placed specialty ornamental trees, shrubs, and boulders. Paths of flat stepping stones wind past small fairy figurines, tiny buildings, and other odds and ends which make tiny landscapes within a landscape. For the past decade or so, when they installed their first water feature in the backyard, Dave and Adrienne and their two teenage children have become more and more engaged with shaping and reshaping these yard spaces. Even before this, the yard, and house, have been continually made and remade over time. But in the past three years, the front yard has become more and more elaborate.

This fairy garden yard has become a beloved neighborhood highlight and quasi-public space. People from blocks around know the yard, tell me about it, and regularly make forays past it on foot in order to experience the cool microclimate from the water features, sit on the benches placed along the sidewalk, and walk up into the front yard and even around the side and back yards. Michael chuckles in response to my question about what it's like to live next to their yard with a twinkle in his eye. "There are a few of us

who laugh and giggle and think maybe it's gone a bit too far. But everyone in the neighborhood just loves Dave and Adrienne so much, they're just such kind and wonderful people. *Bemused* would be the right word. And I think I also say, 'Everyone should have a hobby!'" He laughs and continues, "Who am I to judge? And yet, I do feel some guilt that they put all of that time and effort in, and [pause] I just don't care – I'm sorry!"

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Even the most minimal yard invites and demands some degree of maintenance and care – if nothing else, there is grass to be mown. And, as seen in the previous chapter, if for no other reason than the City may demand a fine. How can we understand this spectrum between Michael's minimalist yard adjacent to Adrienne's highly elaborated landscape — two of the extremes in engagement with yards in the project? And what do these spaces, and engagements, mean to the people who live with them over time? The central argument of this chapter is that lived experience with environments must be understood through the material engagements of inhabitation. Further, these engagements unfold as a continual process of producing space and time, and become meaningful when situated in rhythms of social life, with implications for how both environment and city can be conceived.

Yards, like home interiors and houses, can be seen as one of the places the people who inhabit them can directly shape, design, and make them their own – often without undue financial strain. In my study areas, this is largely done without expert help or hired labor. So these mundane, familiar spaces can be important lenses into worlds of everyday

life, and as such, they are bound up with – but never completely constrained, or explained, by – the parameters set out by expert designers, real estate developers, formal policies, extent of private property bounds, or social norms. What emerges from the yard visits of this project is a rich array of yard experiences and spaces. In this chapter, I present and make sense out of these diverse yard experiences from the vantage of the human inhabitants who live with these spaces.

I organize these experiences along a spectrum of yard engagements, ranging from the most intentional and skilled practices of cultivation as gardening, to the broadest practices of sitting, reflecting, and being attuned to senses out of doors. I argue that to go beyond the city as habitat, spaces such as yards need to be understood in the ways they are inhabited and meaningful to inhabitants. This requires some understanding of how bodies engage with surroundings through everyday practice, how this engagement unfolds over time, and what kinds of transformative possibilities might be latent within these everyday landscapes. This entails understanding encounters with surroundings as ongoing formation, shaped by socionatural rhythms. The possibilities of these encounters – both materially and socially – circulate through these embodied engagements. To conclude this chapter, I reflect on inhabiting yards, and discuss the significance of this approach for understanding urban environments more broadly.

Inhabitation Beyond Habitat

If habitat is only partially adequate to understanding urban life, what else must we know? If we follow Henri Lefebvre’s distinction, as discussed in earlier chapters, *habitat* as a largely reduced and quantified physical environment can be understood in dialectical

relation to *inhabitation* – all the lived experiences and practices of daily life which together shape inhabited environments.¹⁹² The two are always in constant formation together, affecting capacities of the other. However, as we have known the city in scientific modes informing planning and collective decision-making, urban environments have been understood, regulated, and imagined largely as quite static and quantifiable habitats. As shown in Chapter Three, outdoor domestic space in the context of contemporary urban environmentalisms has been seen through this lens of habitat, reducing it to something to be measured, regulated, and maintained within a framework of private property and manageable nature. As this chapter, and the subsequent two chapters, will show, lived experiences with these spaces – the diverse ways yards are *inhabited* – involve an excess beyond this measured habitat. Inhabitation as mobilized in this chapter fleshes out the key aspects of everyday life discussed in Chapter One: embodied practice, repetition and rhythm, and the ongoing formation of built environments as always shaped, and shaping, social relations.

Including those left out of formal habitat visions is the first thing necessary to better understand urban environments as inhabited – to see inhabitants and their activities as active participants in making place. Lefebvre describes *practical activity* as “a process and a praxis,” not an object which can be defined.¹⁹³ Here, practical activity is in constant relation to *urban society* – a possibility towards which collective life in cities is moving. Rather than the reduction of the everyday as abstract space by architects and urbanists, these are the dimensions of inhabiting concrete space, or the space of habiting: “gestures

¹⁹² Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*, 2003 [1970]

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 3.

and paths, bodies and memory, symbols and meanings, desires and needs.”¹⁹⁴ This is an ongoing becoming, towards no set or definitive destination, but towards a horizon on the process of urbanization. Building on the inclusion of people and their practices, we must also consider the role of more than human organisms and forces in the shaping of urban environments. This has become well traveled terrain in human geography, as discussed in more depth in Chapter Two. It should not be surprising at this point that a focus on human practice and meaning must take into account these entities in environments. Domestic home grounds are often considered by people to be the front lines of their encounters with the more than human urban world.

By starting with a situated sense of human experience through embodied practice and rhythms, rather than existing categories and concepts, the approach here grounds conceptions of urban environments in realms of meaning and practice. Ultimately, the recuperated phenomenological approach which informs my broader project becomes a way to understand *how people live*, and how in that inhabitation, difference is encountered and handled in the everyday spaces of our collective lives. Attunement to outdoor surroundings and the relations of response which arise over time between people with these surroundings constitute a major component of this. As will be shown in the case of yards, these are the places where the material practices of inhabitation makes habitats meaningful, socially and politically and emotionally. This chapter takes seriously these concrete material engagements through which bodies and surroundings shape one another.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 182.

The yard narratives which follow are organized in roughly two ways in order to explicate these conceptual points. First, across the whole chapter, the yard stories form a spectrum of engagement, beginning with the most intentional cultivation as gardening, and ending with broader experiences of the outdoors. Across this spectrum are diverse ways inhabitants understand their yard practices – from careful planning and design towards an ideal vision, to the most basic and minimal maintenance; from virtuosic gardening based on decades of experience, to failure, frustration and desires for yards which thrive. Second, along this spectrum, the yard stories are grouped in two main sections. The first, “Cultivating Engagement with Surroundings”, shows the ways people’s bodies interact with surroundings, drawing on notions of skilled practice and embodied experience as key ways environments are perceived and made meaningful, both individually and collectively. Coursing throughout these stories are the multiple rhythms and temporalities essential to yard experiences. This emphasis forms the second main section of the chapter, “Yard Rhythms,” where in these accounts, temporalities and rhythms play central roles in the ways people experience the more than human, and human, encounters in yards over time. Finally, in the Conclusion, I discuss the transformative possibilities within these yard stories, and also reflect on the importance of affective attachments and care circulating within the stories.

Cultivating Engagement with Surroundings

The active and embodied material engagements of cultivation in yards involve a range of practices on the part of participants: digging, lugging, sweating, watering, planting, tending, weeding, raking, sweeping, bagging up, hauling. Although rarely a

focus of much attention by gardeners themselves, integrated into all these gardening activities is the necessity for pausing to notice and to become attuned. To the feeling of resistance between root and earth. To the sound and smell of water seeping into soil. To the air moving across skin. To the presence of birdsong, and where? Cultivating yards entails not just gardening, but is also caught up with cultivating attunements, skills, and relations with nonhuman organisms. Furthermore, the embodied practices of cultivation involve not just the moment of touch between person and plant (a very important dimension), but also temporal registers which span seasons and years, and which suggest that people and their yards respond to, and develop, their respective capacities over long timeframes.

Across the study areas, and as seen above in the cases of Michael and Adrienne's divergent cultivation practices, yards ranged from highly sculptural and formal garden landscapes to neatly maintained "empty" kinds of spaces with minimal plantings beyond lawns. And in between, some scruffy overgrown yards and productive food spaces. Participants in the project ranged in the degree to which they saw themselves as gardeners¹⁹⁵, and talked about gardening as a practice of experimentation, iteration, frustration, and skills into which gardeners grow.

One of the key aspects of cultivation in yards is an embodied, and often fairly skilled, practice that is in constant conversation with the material and biological entities of yards. These are the very characteristics about engagements with surroundings which anthropologist Timothy Ingold pushes in his examinations of perception, environment,

¹⁹⁵ Not surprisingly, people interested in participating in the project were also interested in their yards for the most part. I strove to find a range of experiences, though, and so not everyone was an avid, skilled, or even interested gardener.

and skilled practice.¹⁹⁶ Ingold draws on Merleau-Ponty and others, and begins with the limitations he finds in Western ways of knowing based on a separation between the person as a social subject and the biological organism in its environment. Ingold tries to make sense out of understandings of human beings “constituted both as organisms within systems of ecological relations, and as persons within systems of social relations” (2000, 4). Ingold links these two understandings through an ecological approach to perception, recognizing the emergent properties of relationships between people’s activities within a particular environment, in terms of material engagement such as performing tasks in relation to other organisms and learning skills.

Ingold is preoccupied with a sense of restoring the whole-organism-in-its-environment to ways of knowing in the context of social anthropology. Anthropology, archaeology, biology, ecology – these fields which have skirted around the subjects on which Ingold focuses are equally implicated in leaving out integral relationships of people / organisms / individuals / subjects. He argues that only through inhabiting a world, can that world be considered an environment for those inhabiting it. Similarly, Ingold points out there is no objective material outside environment, which different cultures then construct differently. Instead, perception of environment depends on active involvement between an organism and their surroundings, and so there is no blank outside to the mind and ways of knowing (and perceiving) environment. He finds that what especially anthropologists have considered differences in culture (often imagined as a kind of interpretation of an objective external environment) actually emerge out of variations in skill which arise through bodily practice situated within their surroundings.

¹⁹⁶ Ingold, T. *The Perception of the Environment: Essays in Livelihood, Dwelling, and Skill*. New York: Routledge, 2000; *Being Alive*. New York: Routledge, 2011.

It is not only or primarily through cultural construction, but *engagement*, that people exist in their environments.

One of the primary domains in which Ingold explores these ideas is that of skilled practice, rethinking anthropological discourses on the culturally symbolic import of such practices as basket weaving, in order to show how people learn and practice such activities through their bodies. First, he argues for a distinction between growing versus making. Here, making can be understood as the Western, modern mode of designing and envisioning an end result on paper or in the imagination before then going through the rote motions to construct the end product. In contrast, Ingold argues, most modes of being engaged in daily life, can be better conceived as a kind of growing with physical surroundings. People grow with their surroundings such that in learning skills and in producing things, the body becomes attuned to the materials and forces which come together through practice. Things, Ingold says, are *grown*, not made. Second, in the course of engaging in particular practices, people become attuned to difference through the body and through repetition, and this attunement to handle difference from one moment to the next and to respond to those differences becomes skill (2011).

Preoccupied as Ingold often is with material tasks, he describes sawing a piece of lumber for a bookshelf and the way that this attunement is actually *felt* through the rhythms of interaction between wood, saw, hand, arm, body. He writes,

Feeling lies in the coupling of movement and perception that is the key to skilled practice. By way of perception, the practitioner's rhythmic gestures are attuned to the multiple rhythms of the environment. Rhythm, then, is not a movement but a dynamic coupling of movements. Every such coupling is a specific resonance, and the synergy of practitioner, tool and raw material establishes an entire field of such resonances. But this field is not monotonous. For every cycle is set not within fixed

parameters but within a framework that is itself suspended in movement, in an environment where nothing is quite the same from moment to moment.¹⁹⁷

Ingold ties ideas about environment, perception and rhythm together: “In short, to perceive the environment is not to look back on things to be found in it, or to discern their congealed shapes and layouts, but to join with them in the material flows and movements contributing to their – and our – ongoing formation”.¹⁹⁸ The ways people are engaged with cultivating yards brings out this sense of ongoing formation and rhythmic encounter.

Being a gardener: Knowing enough to experiment, being willing to fail

The most accomplished gardeners in the project, even with the relative complexity and intensity of engagement with their yard spaces, were often reluctant to declare themselves gardeners, and each pinpointed different material engagements which are the important to gardening. But in all cases, a willingness to try and possibly fail was considered key. Within this sensibility is the knowledge that there will be the chance to try again, that with the rhythms of season to season, and year to year, there are opportunities to experiment, fail, and succeed. “Well, I don’t know that much, but I know just enough to experiment, just enough to get into trouble!” Jim Kelley chuckled, with his characteristically modest and understated manner. It turns out, as visits unfolded and I found out more about his childhood, Jim’s parents ran a greenhouse business in a small town now at the edge of the Metro area. So he grew up surrounded by the cultivation of plants. Cultivation here becomes an attunement between human bodies, plant bodies, surroundings, and rhythm.

¹⁹⁷ Ingold, *Being Alive*, 59.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 88.

Barb, a former Hennepin County Master Gardener,¹⁹⁹ is helping her sister in law reimagine her yard across town in Saint Paul. Barb and I talked about the process of helping a beginning gardener to get comfortable and make decisions about her yard. “She comes here to my yard, and loves this garden, so that’s what I think she’s thinking. But of course, she’s got really different challenges, and really different relationships with her neighbors, and skills or interests – so all of that, is – we’re kind of feeling that out with each other. And I’ve been puttering with this yard for almost twenty five years! And I’ve said to her, ‘It just will take a long time.’” Barb asks my advice about how to help her sister-in-law see the possibilities of the backyard, and we discuss pros and cons for drawing directly on printed photos of the yard. “I think she just really can’t *see* it yet. So we’re working on that.” Barb also wants to work with the established plants in the yard, such as an old lilac in one corner which has not been trimmed at all recently. “She is very concerned about that, but it doesn’t look all so happy now, but I think it’s gonna give it a new lease on life.” Barb is helping her sister in law to work with what is there.

This attitude to try and possibly fail pervaded conversations about gardening practices. And points to the ways the most avid gardeners often were the least attached to particular visions of what their yards and plants might be like. Less important seemed to be a specific creative vision in most cases. Rather, participants who consider themselves gardeners understand iterations, attunements, and response at the fore of the ways they experience their yards.

¹⁹⁹ An extension program run by the University of Minnesota in conjunction with Hennepin County. Master Gardeners take classes and participate in ongoing educational activities, while providing a certain number of volunteer hours each season. It is a popular program with retirees and older residents. Master Gardeners live disproportionately in suburban areas, and several participants reported Master Gardener activities happening more frequently in far flung suburbs. This was one of the reasons Bev, who lives on the North Side, decided to leave the program.

This response relies on being attuned to the pace of plants. Barb tells me about a phrase she learned in the Master Gardener training program that has stuck with her, about the pace of plants: “sleep, creep, and leap”. She explains, “You think about the first year that you put a plant in, and it’s gonna just sleep. You’re not gonna see much, it’s gonna try to figure out if it wants to be there. Then the creep year – it comes back, it survives the winter, and it’s gonna maybe send out a couple of new leaves, or it’s gonna look like it might really grow. And then the leap year – after three years – you see it’s really taken. And it lives there. And it’s looking healthy and it’s really gonna make it.” Barb tells me about waiting to see whether an area she’s planted with her sister-in-law with groundcover from a neighbor will really take off. “That’s my dream, to have it be so lush and then you’ll have to use the patio bricks as places to step between the plants. And if it doesn’t work, it doesn’t work!” Barb laughs.

In addition to the pace of plants, Barb tries to help her sister-in-law see the possibilities by looking at nearby yards. “I always say, if it works in their yard, and it’s two blocks away, it’s gonna work in your yard! So you don’t have to make a big investment. We can trade with people, we can work with what works in their yards.” In this case, as soon as Barb and her sister in law were walking around the yard, a neighbor from across the street with an impressive garden came over to talk with them and offered all kinds of things she could divide from her own yard. In addition to this kind of awareness of what is thriving in nearby yards, Barb tries to help Jeanette see that things will evolve, change, and that moving plants will be just fine. “She asks me, ‘Why would we move it after all the trouble of putting it in?’ I try to explain that you kind of get a feel for it, and then things change – like the trees mature and you have more shade – but you

can't know that ahead of time, what will be too shady, or where the plant feels like being." This is an example of how avid gardeners are attuned to the subtle and shifting needs of plants as they mature and develop across seasons and years, and also to the fluctuating resources available to them.

Becoming attuned to happy plants

Whether or not plants are "happy" was a constant thread, used as a way of describing how plants might thrive (or not) in particular locations in yards. The sensitivity required to track these plant micro-geographies, and anticipate how individual plants might respond to a change of location (and subsequent change in water, drainage, nutrients, sun or shade) constitutes a hum drum skill of little note for most participants I talked with. Marie, another experienced gardener in South Minneapolis, captured what other gardeners left largely implicit when she told me, "I've been surprised by how much time I spend just looking out, editing. Asking myself, *what do the plants need?* And I contemplate this and consider different things to do," (see also Chapter Five).

For Wanda in North Minneapolis, gardening in her yard is all about the ways her plants thrive at the intersection of touch and care over long time periods. She explained how gardening demands a certain degree of responsiveness to plants over time. And as she continued, the rhythms of this care come through as a rewarding, and deeply embodied, engagement. She tells me about her adjacent neighbors who invested quite a bit of time and effort into planting gardens in front and back about ten years ago, but have never been able or interested to keep up with them. "You know," she told me quietly as we stood along her front sidewalk glancing towards their yard, "I don't understand people

who just *install*, and don't want to nurture these little things, and make sure that they're okay." Wanda brightens, "That's the part about gardening that is so rewarding, is that it's a living thing and it gives back to you. I don't care if it's vegetables or plants, but you gonna love it, and it's gonna love you back by *producing*, and I think that's what it is about," (see also Chapter Five). For Wanda, plants are affected by the care people provide, and people are affected by the very growth and production of plant bodies themselves. All of this happens at the pace of the plants themselves, and their ongoing, and sometimes changing, needs for water, nutrients, and weeding.

Differences from year to year, as well as from season to season within one year, inform how people make decisions and make these kinds of responses to plants over time. Often participants recounted to me long and detailed narratives about particular plants – their origin stories, when they planted them, if they had moved them around the yard or divided them, whether or not they liked them, where such plants had been "happiest," or thrived the most clearly. For Kenneth, this takes shape in a relationship with one particular plant, a lady's slipper. Kenneth is an accomplished gardener and also a former nurseryman who is now a stay at home dad in South Minneapolis. He told me about his experiences with one plant in particular over the course of about the past decade (see also Chapter Five). He described this as an ongoing responsive encounter between himself and the plant. The plant responds to its surroundings and care; in turn, Kenneth responds to the plant. He told me, "I do have a couple of favorite plants, so I always give them extra water. I protect them. One is my yellow lady's slipper. I planted it, and I didn't understand much about how it flowered. The first year, it flowered. The next year, it flowered. The third year, no flower. Well, then I read that it normally takes five to seven

years before it will flower, if it's transplanted. And it went for four years without a flower. Now, it's been flowering the past few years, so I guess it's doing alright. But it comes out for a week, and then it's gone. And then it just looks like a weed. But I am pretty excited about this particular plant." Kenneth continued,

A lot of it is waiting. You experiment, and every year it's like, well, that didn't quite work, so I gotta wait until next year. I'll try something else and try something different. A garden, like a painting, is never really finished. A lot of it is just experience, people planting year after year.

Implicit in Kenneth's description is the attunement that develops between people and plants over these years.

Mobile plant geographies

One important dimension of this kind of experimentation emerged again and again: surprisingly mobile plant geographies within and across yards. Especially seasoned gardeners constantly "edit", as several participants told me. This editing entails moving plants, dividing perennials and replanting them elsewhere. Participants often had their own philosophies about the best time to divide or move plants in response to changing seasons. In the fall, some gardeners like to make these kinds of changes as a means to tidy things up and be ready for the following growing season. Others preferred to do this in the spring, feeling it made the most of the new growing season and kept plants under control. Either way, gardeners relied on their memory of what had happened in earlier years, success and failure, and could recount detailed micro-geographies for individual plants.

For those newer to gardening, trying to settle on how they want their yards to be, moving plants can become an obsession, even as it hinders the ability for smaller plants

to become established. Jack recognizes this when he says, “I keep moving things around! Nothing can get bigger, because I keep moving it every year or two! But that’s one of the things I like the best about my yard. Is making those changes. And splitting things up to share with other people.” Jack shows me the “infirmarium” in a corner of his yard, a small bed of plants which need some extra care, and will eventually be planted in more high profile parts of his front and back yards.

People also moved plants important to them from yard to yard, ranging from sentimental attachments to more pragmatic concerns about money invested in buying them. Lorraine told me she moved plants in early spring, when she moved from a street undergoing major construction a few blocks from her current home in South Minneapolis. For instance, she tells me about a ground cover. “I had this in my boulevard at my other house, and it has beautiful little magenta flowers that bloom all summer. I gave some to my friend, and then she gave me some back when I moved. There’s just a little spot of dirt out there, along where the trash and the neighbor’s fence is. I thought if that grows back there, it’ll look really pretty.” In addition to plants and outdoor furniture, Lorraine brought a variety of objects with her, including a trellis, bricks, sculptures and mobiles. She groaned at herself when she told me, “Ursula, I think I had more garden crap than regular stuff when I moved!”

Past and future gardens

Beyond their material presence, these past gardens and experiences with gardening are often right at the surface in affecting how people engage with their yard in the present. This comes through in the way people understand what is ideal, normal and

valued; bodily capacity in the skills and experiences close at hand from which to draw; as well as familiarity with biophysical climate and various plants. While taking a garden tour in a neighborhood not far from North Minneapolis study area (though distinctly different in terms of racial and economic makeup), I came across a poignant example of this kind of gardening in the image of past gardens. The resident shapes her backyard in the image of her grandmothers' gardens – one, a country farm garden, and the other a Latvian American garden in the city. These remembered gardens give a rich sense of place and meaning beyond the present temporality for this gardener. They also guide decisions about which flowers, assembling garden beds, and in this sense the past gardens become static in their image, but also in flux through the ever present processes of growth, change, and cultivation.

Usually these past yards resonated in the study areas in much more subtle ways, often not surfacing until conversation deep into a yard visit, a follow up, or a story not immediately relevant, but related. Two dominant narratives came up in my study areas, fairly particular to the geographies of Minneapolis: first, many participants had rural childhoods filled with large gardens – vegetable and flower. Very often people with these experiences took for granted their skills and capacities to garden, or purposefully counterposed their current city yards with the utilitarian gardens of the farm.

Ann and her partner, Bonnie, have settled over the years on distinctions between front and back as territories in which each takes a primary interest. Ann considers the front her domain, and it is the place where she has slowly and methodically replaced lawn and existing hedges with a range of plants such as hostas and some annuals she enjoys and finds at nurseries. Ann navigates between space the dog needs and how to carve out

areas for her plantings. Ann's partner, Bonnie, maintains a gorgeous assemblage of blooms in the backyard. She grew up on a farm in rural Minnesota, and credits this experience to her abilities, but also her desires for a garden that is purely about flowers, colors, and textures – decidedly not food production. They spoke back and forth, finishing one another's thoughts, as we talked about these past experiences.

Bonnie chuckled often, skeptical of my project as she answered most questions, a reluctant participant (Ann was much more interested to talk with me). But especially when the question of past gardening experience came up. Bonnie rose to the question, despite herself, "I grew up on a farm. We gardened all the time. The grown ups used tractors and plows to go between the rows of the vegetables. Because we canned for *weeks*. Dairy farm." Ann then chimed in with her dry and deadpan humor, "And as a result, we don't plant vegetables." Bonnie added, by means of explanation, "Once I discovered a farmers' market – which of course we didn't have growing up – I was like, 'Oh! You can just buy these?!' So." She paused in her deadpan manner. "That's what we do now."

As the conversation continues, it's clear that Ann had very limited experiences gardening before Bonnie. She has had to, in her words, "learn to enjoy the outdoors." They both relish telling me a story about a trip to an aunt's house, where a big garden included potatoes. "The kids now haven't a clue. We took her nephews to the lake once, and told em to go pick some potatoes or something. They came back and said they couldn't find anything!" Ann exclaimed, "That was ME!" Bonnie continued, "Well, see I just grew up with all those things. I mean, I can spot wild asparagus in the ditches." By contrast, Ann's experiences growing up "in a quonset hut in university housing" had

limited opportunities or obligations to cultivate plants. “Well, we had a little green patch. And there was somebody kitty corner from us who paid us a penny a dandelion, and his daughter and I would dig them up. But, mow? plant? what? So, yeah. I never, never, *never* picked a vegetable of any kind. It’s an acquired taste.”

Over the years, Ann has adapted to living with a gardener, and has taken this on herself by slowly taking charge of the front yard territory. “Gradually, I started sneaking hosta in. We fenced the front yard because of our dog, and grass hardly grew there under the big tree. I pruned back the honeysuckle bushes, and then I spent a year sifting the dirt, getting the roots out. And then I thought if I put a few hosta in, she wouldn’t notice. I’d dig up another row of grass and put some plants in. And Bonnie’s very observant, but not necessarily apt to comment.” There seemed an implicit agreement between the two that this front area was Ann’s place to mess around, and that Bonnie’s gardens in the back were a more serious and skilled endeavor. In describing it, Bonnie tells me her motivation is recreation, but she also says she might have been a farmer if her grandparents hadn’t sold the farm. She continues, “It’s something real to do, It is unlike office work.” And Ann adds, “And you like having the cut flowers. You’re more wanting the English cutting garden. I like that, but I don’t have any of that planted in my brain. I’m the shade gardener, so I buy hosta based on a good name, and a good price. And then, I just put em in the ground and see what happens.”

In addition to this kind of childhood experience with large farm gardens, the second dominant narrative of this kind of lifelong rhythm has to do with The Great Migration to northern industrial cities such as Chicago by African Americans from the US South in the early 20c. This shared geographic trajectory from the American south, to

Chicago, to Minneapolis is a common thread across African American participants in North Minneapolis. Many of these residents grew up in Past experiences with Chicago government subsidized housing projects took on a variety of experiences with architecture – townhomes or multi-family buildings, with a range of immediate access to yards and gardens. Often these families would visit agricultural settings in the South and be exposed to large gardens and farming there. As kids they learned about how to work in gardens, how to pick beans, and were exposed to canning on a large scale. Now those with whom these labors resonated then find it easy and just a natural thing to do.

Impossibly hard: elusive gardening skills

But what to do when all of these yard and gardening activities seem impossibly hard? You didn't grow up helping with any gardening, or take much interest in plants. You are not set up with the right tools, you don't know what to plant, or where. Plants wither, leaves curl up, eventually die. Although people across the study areas were likely more adept at gardening than a cross section of all of Minneapolis due to self selection to participate in the study, I tried hard to find participants whose yards were not necessarily spectacularly cultivated or whose own skill and sense of gardening identity fell more into the novice or disinterested end of the spectrum. Among these participants, several felt they were failed gardeners despite interest and effort. One of these is Sheri, who from our first conversations told me she felt she has slowly killed the nicest plants they inherited from the previous owners. She and her husband's yard is largely lawn, with some foundation plantings, and a small vegetable garden in the back. Her gentle and somewhat tentative nature became even more hesitant once we were out, walking around the yard.

Sheri describes herself as a hopeless gardener, and pointed out many areas around the yard where she had tried, and failed, at planting various things, or that she was unsure about what to plant. Yet she still talked about finding respite in the vegetable garden, especially the way going outside to pick fresh mint leaves for tea punctuates her day. Beyond this small vegetable garden and a few annuals in the front yard, their teenage sons mow the grass, and that's about it. Sheri points out marigolds to me, but calls them by the wrong name, which she has planted below the front picture window. "See," she says, "this is where I've tried. But I don't know..." her voice trails off as she leans down, touching the little plants and pointing them out to me. Throughout all of these struggles with her yard, somehow Sheri seems determined to keep trying.

These kinds of "awkward encounters" open up thinking about how people feel a deficiency or lack in their relationships with surroundings,²⁰⁰ and how someone like Sheri understands and feels this lack. Her experience is full of uncertainty, a kind of fatalism which she jokes about, and pride at attempting to grow perennials. She relies on her neighbor's wisdom and knowledge about plants,²⁰¹ as well as sharing plants themselves. Again and again she credited this neighbor, Fanny, with guiding her towards the success Sheri has had.

This kind of learning from neighbor to neighbor happened throughout study sites, and often participants credited adjacent or nearby neighbors for getting them started and seeing them through difficulties or projects with particular plants or yards in general.

²⁰⁰ Hitchings "How Awkward Encounters Could Influence the Future Form of Many Gardens. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 32, no. 3 (2007b): 363-376.

²⁰¹ These are neighbors who are also self-described hoboes, regularly riding the nearby rails, and hosting many visitors in their yard and home who come from the tracks. Although I was unable to conduct a formal yard visit with them, I talked and visited with Fanny, the matriarch of the household, and Hobo Queen multiple years running – crowned at the annual Hobo Convention in Iowa. Fanny is an accomplished gardener, with a special interest in cultivating native plants for butterflies and other insects.

Two of the most accomplished gardeners in all the study areas were not always so. Barb and Marta have been neighbors for more than forty years. They know one another's yards, and they know one another's ways of being in their yards. Marta's yard is filled to the brim with blooms – especially her south facing side yard, which is adjacent to Barb's study windows. Barb told me this close proximity and experience of Marta's engagement with her yard has been central to her understanding of what it means to cultivate her own kind of growing with her yard.

I think her garden is an extension of her love and her personality, so the garden becomes – what you walk up to is what she wants you to *feel*. It's really beautiful, it's really neat. I have a different aesthetic for gardens, but it was good to have that influence, where you – where you tended it, and you enjoyed it, and she was out in her garden. We would talk and we would visit, so I got to see up close more like the management of the garden, the enjoyment of it. That you don't just plop in the plants. It's like children – you live with it and you work on it.

This account of Barb's points toward learning from Marta the ongoing formation of garden through constant engagement.

In this first main section of the chapter, I have shown an array of embodied engagements with yards, and the ways cultivation takes on multiple social meanings and a variety of material forms over time.

Yard rhythms

The sense of ongoing formation and openness permeates Lefebvre's critiques of modern capitalist social relations, and as discussed previously, he argues everyday lived experience is the key to how he sees possibilities for sociopolitical transformations in conjunction with built environments. These resonate with the ongoing practices of formation in the making and growing of yards throughout this project. In particular,

towards the end of Lefebvre's long trajectory of works, an interest in *rhythm* as it relates to experience and spaces unfolds into his project of *rhythmanalysis* – attending to the multiple temporal registers at play in the production of any given spacetime.²⁰² In the examples throughout this chapter and especially those to follow, the pace of plants, routine habits, and rhythms of people's lifetimes course through the diverse engagements with yards.

Keeping up with the pace of weeds

Weeds provide a focus around which some of the above cultivating practices and experiences orbit. The pace of weeds means that particular temporality of those plant bodies whom gardeners (and others) attempt to eradicate from their lawns, gardens, and yards. Throughout the project, weeds and the weeding activities which usually accompany them – or experience of obligations to weed which accompany the plants – was a constant source of reflection and conversation before and during yard visits. Some participants loved weeding most of all, and reported feelings of peace, calm, and meditation in the practice of weeding and reflecting on weeding labors after the fact. Others despised weeding more than anything else, sensing a crushing obligation and feelings of failure when they weren't able “to keep up with the weeds.” This language of “keeping up with” in both cases reveals different ways of experiencing time, plants, and being in yards.

Lorraine took me through the side gate, overgrown with a lilac that she loves to smell through the kitchen window during peak blooming time, to her backyard. Lorraine

²⁰² Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life*. Please see also discussion of rhythm, difference, and the production of space and time in Lefebvre's formulation in Chapters One and Two.

is a white woman in her early 70s, retired, a mother and a grandmother, now living alone after losing her husband to illness several years ago. She is also an experienced and skilled gardener. She has been adjusting to increasingly limited physical abilities to bend, stoop, dig, carry, and other kinds of labors in the cultivation of her yard.

I asked her how she would describe her yard and what she does there. Without pause, Lorraine focused on the back and told me, “The back feels to me like a certain place of retreat.” Then she paused. “Working with plants for me has always been therapeutic,” she said. “When I was working [as a minister], I would come home and be exhausted, but I’d go out and garden and it’d be just like taking a nap. Sometimes it’s challenging because I now have two hip replacements, and I can’t squat down – there are certain things I can’t do. So I’ve had to adapt, and I’m going to be making more adaptations.” Lorraine paused, then continued in a strained voice, “Which is really very frustrating for me.” She brightened a bit with some effort, “But mostly, my backyard is my refuge and my sanctuary.”

Lorraine did not dwell only in the positives about her yard experiences. She explained during the course of our first yard visit that her own physical capacity to do the things she wanted to around her yard have been significantly limited by recent challenges with arthritis. She was frank and open about the challenge of accepting these changing physical limitations, and I could hear the frustration in her voice at several points – for example, as she flatly described her desires to accomplish more in a given day, but needing to stop because of sensitivity to heat or pain. This took shape in the ways she relies on her son and daughter-in-law, who live several houses down the block, as well as her neighbor immediately to the north, Kenneth. These names came up again and again as

Lorraine told me about changes she made to the yard over the past three summers she has lived in this house.

At the same time, the practices Lorraine called “tending the yard” – weeding, mulching, deadheading, watering, seasonal tasks like tidying up raspberry bushes or dividing and transplanting perennial plants – the many different labors of yard work, also give her a rich source of pleasure. “What do I enjoy the most about my yard? Hmm, probably sitting and enjoying the beauty that I’ve created, and then next would be just *actually doing* the yard work and making it look really pretty.” Her yard is a place to be tended and enjoyed, a place where her own embodied relations with her material surroundings impinge and shape how she finds meaning there, and the combination of her visions of gardening as she wants it to be with the limits of her changing bodily capacities invite and demand particular social relationships with her immediately adjacent neighbors, and those along her block.

Changing bodily capacities

This need to keep up with gardens, plants, yard maintenance, in conjunction with changing bodily capacities, is captured well by Jack. In his experience, the size of the yard and expectations for what is gardened makes all the difference. “I think a lot of people don’t have a lot of time, to maintain, and a lot of times, I think they maybe have too much garden and it gets overwhelming, and you gotta be really careful about that. Cause your garden can kind of overwhelm you, and kind of own you and run you. And, like, who wants that?” The past few years he has been helping his mother, in her late 60s, more and more with her large suburban yard. “I look at my mom’s yard and at her age,

it's kind of overwhelming. And she's decreased it considerably over the last twenty years, which is a great idea. And I think people just take on too much, or get kind of nervous, and then it's like making your first vegetable garden – you plant too much and then it's like, 'Oh gosh, now I don't want to weed it, water it, and this and that.' You have to watch that or it'll run your life and you don't want that." In contrast, Jack has been happy with the small size of his yard, and tells me he can keep up with all the necessary tasks in one long day. Or he simply spends a little time each day, in the morning. His situation is a bit different from most, in that his work is quite independent and the summer season is slow. "Usually I wake up and I go outside and I water. And that's kind of what I do. I do that, and I do a little weeding, and that's pretty much all – you know, that's about forty minutes a day, is all I put in. Sometimes I put in more."

Perspectives on weeding often fell into one of two camps: either weeding is understood as a kind of meditative practice, which people seemed to enjoy and appreciate, or weeding was a loathed, but necessary, obligation or duty. The very visibility of weeds, especially in front yards, instigates people to undertake this kind of maintenance – pulling, digging out with tools, and a presence always there, only sometimes more or less at bay.

Ann in North Minneapolis spoke about weeding as a kind of time outside of time. "I lose myself." Likewise, Barb said now that she is retired, hours can go by without even looking up. Her husband, John, said he's taken to carrying her purse inside for her, because even the short walk from car to the backdoor can take several hours if she bends down even once to pull out a weed. People also had favorite tools and tricks. John in Northeast Minneapolis uses a Chicago Cutlery knife with an aging wooden handle. He

demonstrated how he pries up the long white thick roots of dandelions. When he was done, he nonchalantly threw the knife into the ground, where it stood up the rest of our yard visit.

Participants often talked about such yard tasks, and in particular gardening – though not always only the most experienced or elaborate gardeners – in terms of ‘the doing’ and ‘the having done’ – both involve activities, skills, socialities, challenges and engagements with more than human surroundings. In many cases, the labors and pleasures of gardening establish a setting in which yards are enjoyed and experienced by simple activities such as sitting with a hot or cool drink, looking and watching, listening, being in and of the landscape for a period of time, simply being out of doors. Sometimes these are regular times, constituting rhythms and patterns meaningful in daily life. Other times these make up unusual moments, exceptions, or temporalities outside the confines of linear time. These always entail some degree of being social. And the doing of yard tasks, and then appreciating (or being frustrated) once they are done, are important in the ways people understand their own cultivation practices and others. All of these particular weedy rhythms, and the diversity of experiences with them, point toward the importance of embodied engagements with yards and yard socialities.

Seeing the pace of trees

An urban tornado and the loss of mature trees

Sometimes a sudden event or disruption reveals a relation otherwise obscured by everyday life. Such is the case of a massive tornado that traveled through parts of the North Minneapolis study area the year before fieldwork was undertaken. Betty and I sat

at her dining room table, inside on a bright sunny weekday morning. It's not long into the first yard visit, and after some of the particulars of the structured questions, she has started telling me about the storm. In the late afternoon of Saturday, May 21, 2011, a tornado traveled right along her street, just one stretch of the path the tornado made through urban and suburban neighborhoods. For Betty, the storm has been transformative. She and her husband of more than forty years, Sid, were preparing for a trip when the storm arrived. Both are retired educators – Sid a longtime principal, and Betty a high school art teacher. The past five or so years for them have been full of transitions – Betty was in an accident and suffered a brain injury, which put her, as she described it, “out of commission” for two years. Sid has had his own medical issues, and the short trip they took the day after the tornado was to the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, MN for his heart surgery, for which he'd been waiting a long time. Before they knew it, a tree had been blown right through the roof and a bedroom of their house. The damage to their home was extensive, and they were relocated to an apartment building in downtown Minneapolis for nine months while the house was repaired and insurance claims sorted. She has since had time to reflect on the experience, and talked to me about how one grows out of such an experience in unexpected ways.

This growth has crystallized for Betty in her feelings about the drastic loss of mature trees along her street and in her neighborhood. She tells me, “But when I got back, and the more I had time to sit down, outside – outside, too, I had to be outside – I realized that sometime things look pretty bad but they can be good.” Her voice is full and wavers a little with emotion. “And the storm was really bad, but I felt like I grew. In places I never would have – so I'm appreciative of that. Cause I never even gave it a

thought about the trees on the block!” Betty began to laugh as she mimicked her earlier self, “‘Who cares!,’ I’d say. ‘Maybe we should cut that one *down*, so I can *see* better!’ Then I realized what trees are for.”

Trees become revealed as a measure of time through their sudden destruction and absence. In addition to mentions of cooling shade in a hot summer, trees become a measure against which Betty understands her own lifetime. “My biggest sadness that brings tears, is when I think about all the trees that are gone, that were big and mature, on our block. And I will never be around to see that again. Cause thirty or forty years” – she smiles a soft smile at me and her voice quiets – “that would be nice, but I won’t be here.” This awareness of her own lifetime becomes an impatience with the replacement trees the City has planted along the boulevard. Betty has a new and fervent interest in these trees. “It’s so weird how much I cared about the trees [after they were first planted].” Despite careful watering and attention, the first replacement tree didn’t make it and had itself to be replaced. “Of all people! *My* tree would be the one to die!” She got to know City employees who answered her questions and checked up on the tree, and even sent her a note of thanks. “I check that tree and water it, and I know how important that tree is gonna be to me.” And she has tried to convince neighbors who complained to her about paying for the water, that they will benefit from the trees in the long run.

Walking through her yard with Betty revealed additional dimensions of her experiences there. She brightened and in her voice there was a shift in feeling from reporting, to inhabiting memories of past times. The yard for Betty clearly holds a lot of experiences which have passed. The recent physical limitations of she and her husband have meant her attitude towards the yard is one of utilitarian maintenance with which

they can barely keep up. There is a tentative nature of her engagements while I am there, a distance and hesitation as she talked about the plantings and spaces. Still, the storm seems to have shifted this sense of obligation towards one of care directed at the new plants she has planted, as well as the boulevard tree which is set to be replaced by the City. The sudden loss of the trees reveals through Betty's experiences a sudden sense of their long lifetimes, and highlights transitions already underway for Betty and Sid about their shifting engagements with their yard.

"You could say, these trees are my children, in a way"

Across the river to the east, Tim is telling me about the trees in his yard during our first yard visit. There are about five maturing oaks which he planted about twenty years earlier, and are now a respectable size. "I guess you could say I almost feel like these trees are my children, in a way. I just like watching them grow and get bigger." Tim has a quiet and calm demeanor. He is patient with me and interested in participating in the project, but not overly talkative. He is in his sixties, the first summer I meet him, married with no children, and has lived in his house in Northeast Minneapolis for about twenty years. Tim uses a motorized wheelchair, with limited mobility in his legs. Tim's yard is neatly maintained, with a spacious side yard comprised mainly of lush lawn, some small planted beds around the margins like the front sidewalk, and dotted with trees. He and I have a particular connection, and I feel my questions stir something up inside of him. My quiet seems to match his quiet, and I sense this right away. When I see him for the second yard visit the following late spring, he tells me he remembers our conversation "like a therapy session", as he remembered telling me all kinds of things he hadn't said to

anyone before then. On the spectrum of yard visits, his was not remarkably personal or open, but it was clear the encounter felt that way to him.

The question of trees has struck a particular chord with Tim, and in his voice I catch more emotion. Over the course of two summers, as I visit Tim's yard periodically, he discusses the trees and how they are doing, any changes. He primarily trims the trees himself, and has only hired a tree trimming business once or twice as the limbs have grown up beyond his reach. From the deck at the side of the house, Tim likes to just look out at the trees, he watches them grow.

Tree proportions, scale, and measures of risk

Trees also serve as measures of scale and proportion in yards. For John, a painter and artist, former cab driver, raconteur, neighborhood organization member, and resident in Northeast Minneapolis for twenty two years, the importance of yards is constituted primarily by physical elements in proportion to one another. He seems to have in his mind's eye a sense of the appropriate physical elements and their relationships that should constitute yards, and how they are arranged and delineated in the neighborhood. In addition to fences, which were a major preoccupation of his, John talked at length about trees in his own yard, and in general. John's experiences with trees in are inflected with a deep reverence, but focused on the management of risk and potential destruction to houses from falling limbs. Interestingly, he himself was responsible for the most dramatic moment of destruction in his yard, when the six foot tall scale replica of the Chartres Cathedral he had built for 19 years was accidentally smashed in a matter of seconds as he cut down a large box elder tree.

When John moved into his house twenty two years ago, one of the first projects in the yard he undertook was to make a rectangular brick surface in his side yard about ten by six feet, and to begin building a scale replica of the Chartres Cathedral. He made the cathedral out of scraps of plywood, two by fours, and other lumber odds and ends, and ended up painting it blue to protect the wood from weather. As he tinkered away at its construction, people would stop and peer at the cathedral through the hedge and fence along the front sidewalk of the yard. Living between two popular neighborhood bars, John told me it was always interesting to listen to what was said when groups of inebriated people would pass by on weekend evenings. The nonchalance with which he told me the story of the cathedral's demise belied the attachment he still clearly feels towards the structure, expressed in his affection for the remains of it, and also the detail with which he recounted building it and accidentally destroying it. He took me into the garage to show me a practice spire he had built as he was still getting the proportions just right. "This one's *nearly* perfect," he told me, as he touched the very top of it. John built all of this by eye, experimenting with size and shape, angle and construction. He says, "It's easy, all of this is from free wood, free lumber. You just try it out and eventually it works." John tries to insist to me that nothing about the cathedral project is unusual or required special skill.

Pieces of the cathedral hang along the back fence behind the garage, not a visible feature of the yard from most vantage points, but still present in the background. Traces of the tree remain, too: one large chunk of branch or upper trunk lies in the side yard, while the wide trunk rises up out of the back yard about twelve feet. New shoots grow from it, which John trims back periodically. "It's neat to watch it change over time," he

told me as we looked at areas of the trunk which were disintegrating. “The thing about trees is that they are going to fall down. The branches are going to fall down, and you don’t know when. But your house is going to be in the way, and then you will have problems. Like my neighbor, I keep telling my neighbor, those branches are right up close to your house!” John’s insistence about the dangers of falling tree branches has meant over time has methodically trimmed back most of the trees in his yard. He scoffed when I asked if he hired anyone for these jobs. While John considers trees important elements to yards, his own relationship to the particular trees in his own yard takes shape through the structure of his house, and the possibilities – in his mind, inevitability – of damage. For John, the trees embody unpredictable forces which can only be constrained by proper and vigilant management.

Reflecting on yards and being outside

Inhabitation entails not just active cultivation, with all of its embodied practices like planting, designing garden beds, digging, and weeding. Inhabitation also involves reflection, and this takes shape through practices of sitting, looking, and thinking. In this section, I examine some of the primary ways people discussed with me the ways they inhabit yards beyond gardening. These stories highlight the necessity for pause points and rest, which together allow for a sensory attunements to “just being outside”, as many people told me. Here, yard rhythms are about slowing down, pausing, resting, and noticing surroundings.

In many cases, the labors and pleasures of gardening establish a setting in which yards are enjoyed and experienced by simple activities such as sitting with a hot or cool

drink, looking and watching, listening, being in and of the landscape for a period of time. Sometimes these occur at regular times, constituting rhythms and patterns in daily life. Other times these are exceptions, or are experienced as temporality outside the confines of linear time. And participants talked about these in terms of the importance of “just being outside.” Cultivating plants certainly contributes to these experiences through the shaping and reshaping of these spaces. Avid gardeners, in particular, talked about sitting in their yards and admiring their labors, as well as appreciating the growth of the plants themselves and other organisms in yards. But gardening is certainly not necessary for such sensory engagements. As can be seen in the vignette at the opening of this chapter with Michael, even the barest and most “empty” of yards can hold value and meaning as a place to experience. For Michael, sitting on the front steps is a means to inhabit social worlds of his neighborhood – people passing by with dogs, neighbors coming and going. In a broader way, yards become places, or settings, for people to pause in order to reflect and be. In this way, they are settings which afford the capacity to dwell.

“And some place to sit. You know, you need that in a yard”²⁰³

This kind of inhabitation often included *sitting*. Many people told me they spend time contemplating their yards from favorite vantage points – often they talked about having morning coffee in some proximity to their yard and using this time to figure out their day. For Barb, an accomplished gardener, the cultivation of her yard provides immediate pleasures in just sitting and being in the space (see also Chapter Five). Furthermore, she relates this to care over successive lifetimes of residents of a single

²⁰³ See also Chapter Five, part two: *Outside In* photo essay.

house. In this way, the cultivation of her own yard provides a way to provision future inhabitants with what she considers a meaningful setting – cultivating this yard as a future timespace. And resonates with the ways she understands provisioning newcomers to the neighborhood with plants and knowledge. She tells me she thinks about all of these things as she sits in her favorite spot in the yard.

Where people sit has a lot to do with the basic elements of light and shade. Not surprisingly, when people spend time in their yards, they tend to seek shade in summer and full sun in spring and fall. The properties in all the study areas of this project are laid out on street grids which match the cardinal directions. This becomes important at times of day, and times of the year, when sun or shade is particularly desirable. Distinctions between front, side, and back depend on the rising and setting sun, but also the built structures and features of each yard. During the field seasons of this project, the desire for shade was particularly acute as the summers were full of hot and humid days. This determines where furniture is positioned, how projects such as patios and porches are designed and used.

In all the study areas, then, being on the east or west side of the street makes possible different socialities to emerge as people sit, garden, and spend time in their yards according to daily and seasonal rhythms of the sun. For instance, Tina’s front patio project, although challenging in regards to obtaining permits, provides what she calls as “usable” space for summer breakfasts and time to be outside in the summer. “In the summer, we’re out front in the mornings for breakfast and coffee. Then it’s opposite, in fall and spring, when we sit out back on the deck for dinners, where it’s shady.” A few blocks down, and on the opposite side of the street, Leslie told me about realizing they

could put chairs in their front yard. “I don’t know why,” she said, “but when we lost the shade in back, we put two chairs in the front yard for the first time, and it was so nice to be out there in the evenings! We found we talk to neighbors more, or people walking past. Just little hellos, but it’s been really nice.” These examples are just a few representative ones from the South Minneapolis study area, but so many more illustrations could be drawn out from each study area to underline this same point.

Yard soundscapes

Experiencing the ambient soundscape of yards sometimes involves noise from nearby large infrastructure. We pause and wait for the plane to fly past, and conversation picks up again. Margaret tells me about looking for houses to buy in the 1990s. “We never heard the planes overhead. You know how when you are looking for a new place, you check it out at different times of day, different days, to see about traffic. Well, we never really stopped to hear the planes. And it’s definitely increased since we’ve been here, but you just get used to it.” Although a fairly significant political and environmental issue in the Twin Cities region, remarkably few participants in the South Minneapolis study area discussed the incessant noise from airplanes much at all unless I expressly asked. This study area is just beyond the official boundaries of remediation for noise control, which participants often ruefully told me.

When listening to audio recordings of interviews months later, such sounds of these nearby industries significantly affected two study areas. Foremost was in South Minneapolis, where planes taking off and landing overhead peppers the conversations. Some participants continued speaking and hardly raised their voices during these twenty

or so seconds of elevated noise levels. Others simply paused during the most intense sound, picking up where they left off without skipping a beat. None seemed phased at all by the noise. Those who had lived there for decades told me about the increase in frequency and hours each day that the noise was noticeable, with a keen sense of whether planes were landing or taking off, and which runways they were using based on the sounds and visible flight trajectories. But for the most part, many did not identify this as affecting the time they spent in their yards, or their activities. As an outsider to the neighborhood, I felt less adept at navigating the disruption to the flow of conversation. However, as the project continued, I found myself become much less sensitive to the sounds of airplanes coming and going as disruptive noise. The aesthetic of train noise was different in Northeast Minneapolis, where participants told me with some affection about the heavy sounds of clanking cars, sliding steel doors, metal wheels on metal tracks. Nils, who lives right at the margins of the railyards, talked about becoming used to the noises at night, feeling them reverberate through the house itself, and missing them when he travels away from home.

Porches, stoops, steps, patios

Places adjacent to houses especially suited for these kinds of reflections on yards include porches, especially back porches. When Marie talked about looking out at the gardens and thinking about what they need, she often does this from their screened back porch. With kids, porches extend not just the amount of home space, but also the ways parents and children are able to interact. Margaret, mother of two daughters now in college, told me the porch they added to the back of their house enabled she and her husband to be nearby, but not necessarily involved directly with their kids. This was

important as the children got older and were less interested in “hanging out” with their parents (see also Chapter Five). Porches also inhibit social encounters by providing visual and physical boundaries between This can sometimes be desirable – as for Wanda. She told me her three season porch in front of her house is a place she likes to be at night, without passers by and neighbors approaching her for conversation. Like all of her perspectives on yards from the interior of her house (see also Ch4), Wanda still makes a strong connection between inside and outside spaces. But physical separation isn’t always ideal, as in the case of a small house in Northeast Minneapolis, where Lisa wants more connection to the back yard (see Ch5). However, there are porches in the project which are not actively used. Salma’s back porch in North Minneapolis was empty of furniture, reflecting both the extreme heat of the summer of 2012, but also the changing capacities of keeping up with house and yard which Salma mentioned. Some porches never get cleared of storage items.

Still, many if not most participants talked about enjoying eating in their porches, and eating was one of the main activities that happens there. Some participants told me about consciously committing to eating most meals outdoors or nearby during spring, summer and fall months – whether on porches, decks, or patios. For Sarah, porches are places to be and experience the sights and smells of the yard (see also Ch4). “Smell them,” she tells me. “These are Casablanca lilies. At night you can really just smell them, they blow into the porch.” Another swath of blooms nearby catches her attention, and her dry humor and insight into her experiences comes through. “This is flax, they bloom only in the morning. The little blue flowers open when the sun is still dull. It’s breathtaking! I’m being sarcastic and real at the same time.” Both the front and back porches are also

places to eat for Sarah and her partner. We have paused in the shade of the back porch, standing near a round table set with placemats and a candle.

All of these sensorial dimensions of yard reflections, and the ways they take shape in the spaces and furnishing of yards, point toward the need and desire for pause points in daily life – time to be able to notice things, to be in and of the landscape, to think about plant bodies, to watch and wait and be attuned to surroundings, time to simply be outside. This raises questions about whom has access to these kinds of temporalities, spaces, and practices. In addition, as pressures mount to alter everyday yard practices towards certain environmental goals and outcomes, incorporating these dimensions of yards beyond quantifiable metrics or the terms of capitalist value, may be essential towards making material our collective environmental futures.

Conclusions: Possibilities for Transformation?

What can we make from all of these yard experiences? It's not hard to see that the making and maintenance of yards can be very personal endeavors, shaped by individual experiences, idiosyncratic tastes, and particularities exceeding easy generalizations. If history and knowledge might be considered the layering up of these kinds of stories, then there is certainly much in these domestic grounds to give those layers shape. But I also think it is possible to see broader themes and encounters reverberating – though in slightly different forms – throughout these yard experiences. Yards are spaces with which people are engaged often for decades. As such, they embody broader natural and social rhythms of seasons, years, climate changes, policy changes, changing and uneven urban geographies, in addition to changes within individual lives, employment and financial standing, and family life. This long duration of engagement makes possible the

cultivation of meaningful life. In Chapter Six, this will take shape as a kind of urban commons through shared territories and shared practices. But this chapter has emphasized the ways people become attuned to more than human surroundings, and the ways they make sense and meaning out of responding to those encounters.

The skillful cultivation in yards – gardening – is a major locus for these encounters. However, a dimension perhaps missing in Ingold’s formulations of *growing with* our environments through rhythmic and skilled embodied engagement is the key realm of emotion in the context of social relations, so clear in the accounts of this chapter. Indeed, caring for others – other people, other organisms – resonates throughout the yard experiences. Though the accounts above center around individuals, it is clear the labors and pleasures of yards come in the form of their social meaning and value. In this way, it is possible to see how the kinds of material engagements through which people live with yards in everyday life can be understood as much more than the private domain where care has often been relegated.²⁰⁴ Concerns with these kinds of affective attachments in yards forms the basis for the following chapter.

It is this affective and caring domain, which always must be situated in its social context, in which I see the most transformative potential in yards. If the everyday is, indeed, the area most in need of change, as Lefebvre writes, then yards are well positioned to make some contributions toward urban environments in which people might find more meaningful life. And perhaps, in turn, make these spaces with environmental concerns in mind. As it’s clear from the above stories, people are already engaged in the

²⁰⁴ Lawson, V. "Geographies of Care and Responsibility." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 97, no. 1 (2007):1-11.

making of meaning and place in and through their yards. But several points can be drawn out, which might be useful for those involved with policies and projects related to yards.

First, yards are places where the exchange of skills and expertise can be a significant aspect of neighborhood life, especially from one generation to the next. This has profound implications for community well being and a sense of belonging, as well as shaping everyday biophysical environments. Second, these kinds of exchanges are always riddled with social relations, and social aspects of yards are the fore for inhabitants. People framed their experiences with yards around their experiences with other people – whether from their own childhoods, their immediately adjacent neighbors, or the people who might live in their homes once they are gone. Third, the importance of yards as spaces of reflection, pause, and attunement cannot be underestimated. Here again, social differences and their ongoing legacies contribute to uneven access to these kinds of spaces and this kind of pause. But for those with access, across study areas and some of the most obvious social differences, this reflective engagement with yards was significant. The following chapter, constituted in part by three photo essays, makes visible many of the relations circulating throughout these yard stories.

CHAPTER 5 AFFECTS CAPTURING YARD AFFECTS

I *Slowing the quick jump*: Methodological notes on studying affect

Introduction

Marta holds the door open, inviting me into her shady backyard. Light filters through thick layers of oak leaves, makes shapes on the glass of the stormdoor, on the paving. I pause just long enough to make a photograph with my small red point and shoot digital camera. The image is a bit blurry at the edges. Marta is caught with an expression of some doubt, anticipation, waiting for me to cross over the threshold into the outdoors. We have been talking easily for an hour or so on her front porch. She has told me long stories about growing up in Germany during World War Two, arriving in Chicago to work as a nanny, making her way to Minneapolis, raising her family and the children of many people on her block, her passion for chamber music. Now it is time to go outside. She, just like me, is wondering what it will feel like to be in the yard together.

How are yards felt? Yards invite, demand, and overwhelm certain modes and relations of response between the capacities of bodies and surroundings. It is clear from fieldwork with inhabitants that their own yards, and yards in their neighborhood, are felt through bodies, and those bodies are always caught up in the practices of inhabitation – from simply sitting in a chair or looking out a window, to basic maintenance, walking through on the way to someplace else, to skilled and virtuosic cultivation. In this chapter, I offer an exploration of how yards become realms of affective force for the people who live with them. The central argument of this chapter is that yards become meaningful to people as felt, affective realms through the pleasures and labors of inhabitation.



Figure 14. Marta leads me into her backyard in North Minneapolis. Photo by author.

In particular, the chapter explores how yards are felt through a range of embodied practices; how yards become *things* which gather and grow in meaning; and how yards become caught up in architectures of indoors and outdoors. In this chapter I experiment with forms of address in text and image adequate to yard affects.

The affective register in which this chapter is situated exceeds the bounds of technocratic and environmentalist renderings of yards as territories within urban environments, as discussed in Chapter Three. If included at all in such policies and projects related to yards as part of city habitats, dimensions of this register may be only narrowly imagined. For example, city codes envision yards as a static and physical domain within the broader urban landscape, whose bounds and contents can and should be neatly contained in stable categories (lawn; hardscape; fence; front/back/side). Furthermore, the yard is imagined as a kind of empty spatial remainder – the rest of the lot beyond the house structure – whose sociospatial meanings are quite narrowly limited to the logic of property value and the related perpetual anxieties about disorder and decay. As I also discuss in Chapter Three, recent urban environmentalisms attempt to expand these notions in terms of more inclusive habitats for a wider array of plants and animals (such as rain gardens), and see private yards as having the capacity to increase distinct ecosystem functions for the city overall, such as quantifiable contributions to improving water quality and reducing storm water runoff. In so doing, such projects bundle together yards, private property, ownership, and environmental stewardship. But as I show in Chapter Four, yards are also places people inhabit, or *live with*, their surroundings – animate and inanimate, human and nonhuman, material worlds and dream worlds. This lens of inhabitation makes possible a view of any given yard not only as a

discrete and bounded territory, but as a set of meaningful practices and experiences. The images and text which follow this introduction take up the analytical and methodological challenges of how to study, write, and convey these affective capacities within the everyday life of yards.

As one response to these provocations, in Part 2 of this chapter, I assemble images and text to invite relations of response with the reader. The image and text together embody the proposition that affective dimensions of yard experiences constitute the heart of what people do in their yards, and how they understand these spaces. For the most part, this is in registers beyond more easily legible concerns such as property value or environmental commitments. It is a photographic and textual experiment in evoking some of the range, virtuosity, intimacy, feeling, and encounters in yards in the study. Yards make possible the circulation of particular affects, and yards are at the same time made possible by those circulations. Most of all, in this chapter I invite the reader to be affected.

Studying affects: text and image

As discussed also in Chapter One, affect has become a domain of lived experience of interest to scholars in a wide array of fields. Circulating in and through bodies, rhythms and places, affects have been considered an excess, spilling over the concepts and categories through which representational language and thought know the world. And so, how to study affects? Geographers have been motivated in the past decade to take up affects as a concept to not only expand understandings of political subjectivities,

but also break down some of the distinctions between human and nonhuman.²⁰⁵ Even as affects are understood to be more and more central to global political economy, as well as the formation of subjectivities in advanced capitalism, the challenge of the very ineffability of affect has elicited a range of approaches from geography and related fields. It is one thing to write, as Deleuze does (and others do, see also Chapter Two), about the flows and forces of bodies affecting one another – but altogether another matter to study these affects in their concrete, material forms.

Ethnography can be particularly well suited to studying affective dimensions of people's relationships with their surroundings, because it is an approach that is all about being immersed in others' time and space. The practice of studying affects requires an attunement to relations of response. The most powerful ethnography demands a researcher cultivates an openness to being affected (in itself a philosophical orientation), and a willingness to see and reflect on the affective power of one's own presence on the people and surroundings in which one is immersed. Furthermore, sharing time and space with participants and places means embodied engagements with surroundings necessarily become part of the world of study. Ethnography is about what people say and also what they do.

Ethnographic research practice classically includes a significant emphasis on reflexive writing through habitual note taking, thick description, reflective memos, and a variety of narrative styles to capture the qualitative richness of 'the field,' all of which has been negotiated and richly debated in fields such as cultural anthropology.

²⁰⁵ Braun considers this part of a larger move towards a neovitalism, where life itself becomes the key emergent force through which disruption, change, and politics is made possible. Braun, B. "Environmental Issues: Inventive Life." *Progress in Human Geography*. 32, no. 5 (2008):667-679.

Ethnographies have traditionally taken the form of scholarly academic writing in monographs or journal articles, with all of the creative possibilities and constraints embodied therein. In geography, journal articles often follow the familiar formula: make a theoretical claim, articulate supporting points through interview excerpts, and conclude by drawing out from these specific quotes the larger argument. But does this form of writing ethnography really capture the relations of response which constitute ‘the field’. Thus, writing ethnography has long been a rich vein of creativity, reflection and debate – spanning fields such as anthropology, sociology, and cultural geography.

Geographers and others working with affect have been particularly experimental in trying to capture affective dimensions through writing. The giant in this area of geography is Nigel Thrift, who as also discussed in Chapter Two, has formulated non-representational theory as one means of better understanding affect and its political force.²⁰⁶ Here, of interest are the ways affects circulate, become captured, as well as disrupt forces of the market, governance, as well as difference – in short, the ways affects are caught up in politics and vice versa. Drawing heavily on the broader ideas of relational theory, Anderson and Harrison introduce NRT as:

Insisting on the non-representational basis of thought is to insist that the root of action is to be conceived less in terms of willpower or cognitive deliberation and more via embodied and environmental affordances, dispositions and habits. This means that humans are envisioned in constant relations of modification and reciprocity with their environs, action being understood not as a one way street to matter, but as a relational phenomena incessantly looping back and regulating itself through feedback phenomena such as proprioception, resistance, balance, rhythm and tone; put simply, all action is interaction.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁶ Thrift, N. *Non-Representational Theory: Space, Politics, Affect*. New York: Routledge, 2007.

²⁰⁷ Anderson, B. and P. Harrison, eds.. *Taking-Place: Non-Representational Theories and Geography*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate: 2010.

Other geographers have followed suit, but the challenges of studying and writing about these elusive affects have presented limitations. Often in the spirit of more narrative writing evoking affective response from the reader, focus can be limited to the affects of surroundings on researchers themselves, as a kind of direct relation of response. For example, John Wylie writes about going for a walk across the countryside.²⁰⁸ Here, nonhuman and material surroundings exert affective force on the researcher, but it can be limited to an individual response, and often from quite privileged positions.

Kathleen Stewart, also discussed in Chapters One and Two, provides a counter point to such an approach and has had a significant impact on affect scholarship, by emphasizing the production and circulation of *collective* or public affects of a particular moment in time. Drawing on very similar Deleuzian notions of the emergent force of affects and the singular ways they come together and pull apart, Stewart works toward a destination with more relevance for shared political life, and endeavors for other voices to come into her writing through their affective attachments. For example, her evocative writing captures the daily, ordinary realities of the neoliberalizing world economy and retracting state support under President Reagan, in the ways people begin to feel at grocery stores and as more and more people begin to live in their cars in the hollers of West Virginia in the 1980s.²⁰⁹ Though she sometimes uses herself as an entry point in her writing, Stewart is able to expand beyond her own affective experience, and begin to address the broader and shared affects circulating throughout public life.

²⁰⁸ Wylie, J. "A single day's walking: narrating self and landscape on the SouthWest Coast Path." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 30, no. 2 (2002):234-247.

²⁰⁹ Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*

In this project, I experiment with the challenges and possibilities of studying affect in a twofold way: through writing and photography. First, I draw on classic approaches to ethnographic writing in form and practice, in order to describe and interpret yard affects on the part of study participants, and also myself. Second, I experiment with the making photographs as part of my research practice. I explore the potential of images to convey and invite affects – both in their making, as well as their afterlives in analysis and writing. Throughout the arc of the lives of images in my research, analysis and writing, I find images permeated with affective force. I assemble image and text together in essay form, in order to investigate the work they do on one another, and to ask how to create new affective experiences with yards through this work. In this age of digital ethnography that routinely includes interactive video, websites, and participatory research, these more traditional modes of communication may seem already outdated. However, their potential remains to capture reader, and to invite new attunements.

Chasing yard affects

An image can itself be a kind of *thing* in the sense of Heidegger's famous bridge – gathering together forces, worlding a world, and in turn, affecting that world. The making of images is also always the making of meanings. And neither images nor meanings are fixed, both involve the participation of viewer, and change over time. The temporal arc of a photograph runs from the context of the instigation to make the image, the material technologies and embodied practices developed which shape how that image is captured, stored, viewed and reproduced, and the potential persistence of images to

continue this, and perhaps new, world-making long past the present in which they are made. Each of these twists and turns in the life of an image become integral to the ways meanings are made from them.

Throughout all stages of this project, images have paused, sped up, framed, constrained, instigated, generated, contradicted, and validated yard affects. In none of these functions are photographs neutral, straightforward, nor do they record an objective truth. I approached making photographs as a significant component of my research practice. In addition to constellations of words chasing the ineffability of affect and emotion, I pursued knowing yards through visual means. Photographs provide distinct perspectives, information, feelings, and encounters from other research modes. While the practice of making images in the project resonated with the kinds of reflexive and iterative aspects of my ethnographic writing and reading activities, photographs have a range of different materialities, as well as social and cultural meanings. These emerged in the making of photographs during yard visits, and also as a part of participatory activities.

In this chapter, I discuss three phases of image-making as they relate to studying yard affects, and the broader aims of the project. In the first section, *Approaching Images*, I discuss how distinct photographic gazes emerged in the project, in conjunction with developing research questions and before extensive time with people in yards. In the second section, *Working with Images*, I reflect on how photographs fit within the broader research practice during yard visits and other activities; how the more than five thousand images of the project were handled through editing; and finally how the three photo essays which conclude this chapter were assembled with images and text. In the third section, *Writing with Images*, I discuss the ways these edited images and assemblages of

text and image worked during the writing process. I relied on these essays to jar memories, crystallize encounters, and transport yard affects from one moment to another. These afterlives of images have since functioned as *cairns*, marking places of meaning and wayfinding in the now distant terrain of fieldwork spacetimes. As such, images have participated centrally in the ways words weave into arguments, feelings, and relations throughout the project as a whole. These experiments are not without some risk. But also, possibility.

Approaching Images

It is long before Marta will invite me to walk with her through her yard, and before I will make images of her at the backdoor. I work to parse out distinct photographic perspectives within the project, and to articulate how these illuminate research questions. In the abstract, images document enormous numbers of details, provoke, structure parts of yard visits, and set up the conditions for how knowledge about yards is produced later, “after the fact,” when I am no longer right there in the place or time. Photographs in the project functioned in multiple registers, some more directly attuned to the affective dimensions of yards than others. Each kind of photograph in the project is multivalent.

Based on preliminary yard visits, in conjunction with research questions, early thinking about photographs in the project included four main objectives, which became embodied by particular photographic perspectives on yards. First, photographs were intended to serve the need for documentation of yard spaces and their physical contents – for instance, furniture, lawns, trees, hardscaping. I imagined this would include

photographs of yard features, as well as edges, structures, and adjacencies and proximities (for instance, neighboring yards, views in and out of the yard). Photographs for this purpose would likely take an architectural gaze preoccupied with perspectives, as well as recording material facts. For example, I developed a series of perspectives related to the meeting of interior and exterior through thresholds to the yard in the house, as well as thresholds to the yard such as gates in fences. Because the lot lines of most yards in the project aligned with cardinal directions, I also developed a checklist for views in and out of the yard along these lines. Second, photographs would document – and in the best cases embody – the experience of a yard tour. Because the camera would be an obvious part of my research apparatus as participants showed me around their yards, this mode of photographs not only recorded where in the yard we went, and in what sequence, but also revealed a bit about what residents *thought* I wanted to photograph. Participants would also be included in these photographs – bodies, expressions, gestures, activities. Third, by asking participants to pose for a portrait in their yard, in a site of their choosing, it seemed it would be possible to identify sites in yards important to participants. Finally, participants' yard activities might be recorded by asking people to photograph their own activities.

From these initial main objectives, questions and concerns soon emerged about the nature of knowing the world through photographs, practices of making and using images in the course of social science research, and my own photographic experience and skills. As the project gained steam and yard visits became second nature for myself, not all photographic gazes continued to be meaningful and feasible to the project. Some photographic gazes emerged with more force, and some fell away.

Working with images: making, sifting, assembling

Making photographs

“Show me your yard,” I ask. Marta asks, “Where shall we start?” I try to hold back from any prescriptions, and let her take the lead. Stories will unfold and plants will be pointed out. Blooms held in hands which have held a thousand blooms before. This I now know. I am about halfway through the yard visits which make up my fieldwork with inhabitants. I carry my audio recorder as we talk. By now, into the second season of fieldwork with residents, I know recording this way will work for transcription later, but I check and double check the settings, the battery icon, and lock it into the record position. Despite these now familiar routines, each yard visit is different. And always the possibility of failure, erasure, calamity. I follow Marta out through the backdoor and we begin.

This photographic gaze is tuned to feeling, gesture, and moment: part trace, documenting movements through yards; part perspective on affective registers circulating within our conversation; part encounters between bodies in the space of the framed image. These are images made in the heat of the moment of yard visits and interviews, juggling notebook, voice recorder, and being in the present moment and conversation with participants. Most of these photographs get the details down, record our movements in the yard, capture what the participant shows me and in what order, and shows me how people move through and inhabit the space. Something pointed out to me, worthy of saving. A closeup of hand and plant touching. A scene caught in mid-range. Camera held with one hand, fleeting image captured. Sometimes furtively framed to include

inhabitants who might be trying to move out of frame. Avoiding the inevitable photos of people's backsides as they bend over plants close to earth – something about which people often joked. All the while, amidst opening to these relations of response, I search for these images as they flash past.

Some people in the project were reluctant to be photographed, darting out of frame as soon as I raised the camera. Some proceeded with their activities, seemingly unbothered by the presence of the camera. Sometimes together we ignored the photographs I made; other times slight pauses while I photograph something about which we were talking, with participants moving aside foliage to show me and the camera something important. For the ones who seem fairly comfortable with being framed by my camera, I ask to make a photo of them posing in their yard. Sometimes these end up as portraits which feel like real portraits. Flattering enough to want to give to those photographed. Mostly they are not as attractive or telling as I hope they will be, the intimacies of the previous conversation welling up and inhabiting the image along with the performed smiles and position in a favorite place. Somehow the act of pausing for an intentional portrait made each of us suddenly aware of our distinct roles. I quickly realize in the project how portraits in yards would be an entire project in and of itself, benefitting immensely from – if not requiring – the talents and experience of a trained photographer. Perhaps a later, collaborative project.

Now I make images spanning property boundaries, revealing spaces in between, adjacencies to back alley, neighbor's yard, sidewalk. These are systematic vantages, designed ahead of time to record information about the shape and contents of yard spaces, as well as to serve as frameworks for comparisons across yards. The checklist is

in my hands, but I don't need to look at it. I move from point to point, following predetermined transects across the yard. Corner to corner, and from these, I gather views inside, views outside. Usually I make these images on my own, toward the end of interviews and yard tours. Through this gaze, I focus on the ways scale and material come together, and shift the frame towards yards as interstitial spaces and boundaries. I move fast, aware I am in a yard space that is not mine. People are curious. Neighbors sometimes watch me. Participants might be inside now, I feel them watch me from windows. Or they hover and talk with me as I try to focus on the small viewfinder screen at the same time that I try to make conversation. This is a cooler, architectural gaze on yard landscapes. More territory is included in each frame, but possibly less immediate meaning. Marta's house, now centered in frame from across the street. Now the side yard is centered, bounded by houses to left and right, north and south.

Marta sits in the front porch, surrounded by the original 1920s louvered glass planes on the exterior of screens. Her chair faces the front yard. Outrageously vibrant gold finches flit between bird feeder hanging from the small ornamental tree in her front yard, and the bigger trees of the side and back yards. A less familiar bird comes to the feeder, conversation stops. Still sitting, Marta reaches for her bird book, on a side table, and quickly flips to the right page. And how do people look at their own yards? I ask participants to point out favorite views, favorite places to sit, to be, if they mention this. I study where furniture is placed, how chairs are oriented. I learn quickly that more detailed interviews emerge if participants can see some part of their yard. I learn to pause ever so slightly, in order to see where they choose to sit, where they suggest a visitor should sit. Later, the yard visit comes to a close and I ask to make some last photos as I

circumnavigate the house. I move through yards on my own and I enter into one of the most intimate of yard spaces – the place where someone regularly sits. I make photographs there, trying to see what they see with my camera.



Figure 15. Marta shows me images in one of her photo albums. Many images are of individual blooms, garden beds, and her children and grandchildren in the yard. She has labeled most photos with the names of plant varieties, often with the date. She told me they were photos of the best years, and considers this a kind of record of her successes. Photo by author.

Some participants make their own photographs of yards – before the project, after the project, during the project. Marta has made photographs of her yard for the past twenty years, off and on, and assembles them in a photo album. She documents particular plants, especially the blooms. She keeps the images which best capture the brilliance of color, extent of blooms, rare varieties. Her album is one of highlights, moments and seasons of success in her eyes. Each photo is labeled with plant common names, no dates. Grandchildren now teenagers stand amongst the bold front yard annuals as vibrating five year olds, eight year olds, a pause in their motion. Other participants have captured notable moments. John points out his crushed Chartres Cathedral in photographs which he has pinned to the brilliant blue walls of his back entry. At the time he was enamored with disposable cameras which made panoramic views. He uses these images to talk through the crushing of the cathedral, and to weave the past and present together in the things which are the same, and which are different.

For those who completed this additional participatory component of the research, photographs usually meant a follow up visit to download photographs, or pick up printed images. In a few cases, participants sent images via email with short explanations, and that was that.²¹⁰ But usually this meant a follow up visit, and I was surprised at the depth with which participants really wanted to talk through the images – to show me each one, explain what they tried to capture, provide background details for the plant, object, place, or scene shown there.

²¹⁰ Incidentally, through this exercise, I was able to get some sense of participants' facility with their familiarity with downloading images from their cameras, email, digital files.



Figure 16. John points to the branches he was removing when they fell and crushed his scale model of the cathedral at Chartres, France. These images are pinned just inside his backdoor. Photo by author.



Figure 17. Lorraine and I download the images she took of her yard, in response to the participatory instructions in the project (see Appendix II). We sat at the table on her front porch. Photo by author.

For the several participants who express to me real gratitude for the chance to photograph their yard, I feel a surprising amount of relief. After working so hard and taking what to me seems so much, to have people find something of value for them in their lives makes me enormously relieved. Into all the encounters of the project I carry with me the power of the history of ethnographic research – my own history from previous projects and all the regrets and insights I gleaned from them, as well as the long history of exploitation and deception, and rarer moments of collaboration and exchange, through which knowledge emerges and circulates. This awareness makes me more attuned to the feelings of ethnographic researcher as intruder, guest, taker. It is easy to fall into this feeling. But being attuned to what unfolds in the space between myself and participant invites also the realization this is a relation of response in all directions in the best of cases. In this moment, discussing the photographs participants have made for me, and for them, I am reminded again about what I offer others, however slight this may be in the larger context of our lives. An opportunity to reflect on their own singular everyday.

Sifting images to find emerging meanings

Memory cards, batteries, cables circulate from field to camera to computer to hard drive to cloud. Once downloaded, the images line up one after another by the thousands until it is their time, deep in winter. Then the screen overwhelms with the colors of summer, over and over. In contrast, cold January light bends through windows. Winnowing begins for the five thousand, four hundred and seventy four images. Learning new software, keyboard shortcuts help me flit through images, ranking from one to five stars, adding

keywords, highlighting with colors the true selects from each grouping²¹¹. Words begin to stand in for whole constellations of meanings. I am coding my images, and relying on them for meanings, just as I do for interview and fieldnote texts. For example, touch. The software effortlessly shows all images with keywords, and as I work with them, I winnow them down to see how they might be prioritized. In the *touch* images, people's interactions with plants, and some animals, is a relationship between bodies. *Sitting* images, when seen all together, show a range of furniture, places to perch, views from favorite spots.

Once the most useful and evocative images are identified, I start to print little thumbnail versions and cut them out. Now the table is filled with little squares. Color thumbnails cut into rough squares bordered in white make almost old fashioned slides, but without their satisfying planar heft. These neoslides spread across a table without the need for light. I experiment organizing in rows and columns – chronological, study area, perspectives. Themes emerge, jotted in iterations on paper, postits. Body, touch, architecture, front, back, side. Stacks of these thin paper slides pile up. Selects bubble up to the surface, those which I return to again and again. Images which are not great sink towards bottom of the recycling bin.

Assembling image and text

These three hundred or so images have now been sorted and sifted. I tape them to white paper, experiment with relationships between them. Early iterations feel clunky. Grids of twelve images, grouped by themes. But the small size obscures details. Relations

²¹¹ For this project, I used the program, Adobe LightRoom, for all sorting, editing, and finalizing all images.

seem forced. Themes are not clear. The images need text in this context, so that they make some kind of sense to someone unfamiliar with each moment. So I break apart the grids, and focus on a stronger relationship between text and image. More details fill each image than I can possibly analyze, but it is important to try to let them speak with the viewer. So I decide to enlarge images one to a page. But where do the voices fit? And how do I mark the distinct voices? Voices in words on facing pages, running from page to page. Voice also in the framing, making, sifting, editing text. Images on left, voices coming in and out to the right. The two hundred selects now becomes ninety or so. Decision-making by iteration, again and again, pares them down. The images and I settle into three themes: *Touch, Thing-ness, Outside In*.

Landscapes of everyday life

From a range of examples far too vast to capture here, I consider photographic projects specifically about the landscapes of everyday life which have been formative for my outlook for this project. I study how image, text, margins, format, captions and notes are handled in each. Bill Owens' now classic gaze on suburbia in the 1970s feels so firmly planted within it.²¹² I take from his work a respect for the lives within the forms of suburbia, and also an appreciation for the domestic intimacies he was able to capture – knowing now how challenging this is. Quiet garden scenes from Chicago front and back yards are without people, but somehow Brad Temkins is able to saturate the images with some sense of them nonetheless.²¹³ Yet these images are framed so tightly, the worlds

²¹² Owens, B. *Suburbia*. Fotofolio, 1999 [1973].

²¹³ Temkins, B. *Private Places: Photographs of Chicago Gardens*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, Center for American Places, 2005.

beyond the particular gardens seem not to exist. Temkins' images echo with tendencies in formal garden photography, which constrain the limits of images centered on particular arrangements of plants. In the desire to represent these yards as the private oases they might be, the images leave out some of the broader context.

Afterlives: writing with images

It is afternoon and I sit at the computer. Through the window, it is all snow and brown and cold winter light. I float away between words. My mouse finds its way to the folder where I have stored the three photo essays in small file size – easy to download and open on the campus computer. Suddenly impossibly green scenes fill the screen. These select ninety or so images have come to stand in for whole constellations of meanings, places, and experiences. Together, the three essays in progress have begun to stand in for the terrain of the whole project. Immediately this raises the question about whether, and how, diversity in yard experiences is represented adequately, ethically, sensitively enough, across these essays. But beyond raising questions about representation, my own photographic gaze, and the many decisions and actions shaping these, the images and text I have assembled now serve as my own affective entry points into experiencing yards throughout the writing phase of this project. Just as hearing the ambient summer sounds of interviews and yard visits with participants transports my writing body to a different season and spacetime, these images become a way to enter and inhabit yard worlds different from the ones I spin with words. I knew when conceptualizing and assembling this chapter through its many iterations that I wanted to

communicate with readers through these images. I did not appreciate the extent to which my own writing self would return to these essays again and again while struggling through other chapters. Searching for details, chasing the right words, remembering how a participant moved in their yard.

Similar to the intensively experienced aural atmosphere of transcribing yard visits, especially out of season, the visuals interrupt, draw out and contradict details from my own memories, transport sensory experiences through time and space. The summer air on summer skin past becomes also anticipation for summer ahead. The first image takes me to Wanda's yard. Now I am there, helping load up a wagon with weathered frog figurines, wheeling it out to the front yard. Or sitting in her favorite spot under the pergola, looking at and appreciating her carefully cultivated yard. Summer air on skin, summer sounds in air. Small details such as the condition of paving, irrigation systems slightly obscured from view, or the contents (or lack thereof) of neighboring yards reveal habits of upkeep and the resources available for such.

The pairing of image and text enables further depth and some explanation. In the most successful instances, the pairing invites the viewer and reader into layers of participants' words, analysis, and literary experiences resonant with engagements shown in images. In some instances, text does not match up easily with what is portrayed in the image. For example, Jim sits in his wheelchair on his deck, photographed by myself. But the days represented by the text of his yard diary reveal a much longer span of time than the several hours of that particular yard visit with Jim.

In Part 1 of this chapter, I have discussed some of the challenges of studying affect, and reflected on the ways images have captured yard affects in this project

throughout research and writing phases. In the following Part 2, I invite you to be affected.

II Photo essays (image with text)

I. TOUCH

II. THING-NESS

III. OUTSIDE IN

I TOUCH



This is where I live.

I'm out here because I love to be out here. I wake up in the morning thinking to myself, "Ooh! I'm off [work] today – I can come out and touch my yard." Everybody doesn't feel that way. Others look at it as a chore.

I enjoy seeing the newness of the plants. See my smokebush back there? I thought it was dead. I thought it was dead. And I started giving her Miracle Gro and fertilizer and talking to her – all my plants are girls – and since then she's just been sprouting! It's just like she knows that mama's there! And she's just – I touch her every time.

I don't know if I can pinpoint one item I enjoy the most. It's just so *refreshing*. I give a lot of thanks to my mom, because she was a gardener, and I just want her – out of all my siblings, I'm the only one who took this from her. I just hope that – and I talk to her about it. She's gone, she passed, she died in 1999. But this is her influence.

Wanda works on her front boulevard garden, mulching and putting out decorative frogs at the start of the summer. Much more than other participants, Wanda articulates very directly the importance of touch in her relationship to her yard.

What people don't realize is that they think they can put something in and that's it. It still has to be touched. It's just like a child, you can't just bring them here and say, "Okay, you're on your own!" They want to feel like they're loved, and they want food and nourishment. I think that you have to really want to do it. The passion has to be within you, to put your hand in the soil. And I love touching the dirt. I like the feel of it. I just can't stand it when I have on gloves. That's why my nails are forever dirty. Because I like the soil itself.

The thing about gardens to me is that they're living, so you want to touch them. So I don't understand people who just *install*, and don't want to nurture these little things, and make sure that they're okay. That's the part about gardening that is so rewarding, is that it's a living thing and it gives back to you. I don't care if it's vegetables or plants, but you gonna love it, and it's gonna love you back by producing, and I think that's what it is about.



But the importance of touching yards comes through other yard visits as well – every time people leaned toward plants, brushed their hands over them as they talked, ran leaves between their fingers, pointed and pulled foliage aside. They cradled blooms in their hands, and pulled weeds from their footings.

Absent-minded or purposeful, while they talked, some hung on to fistfuls of leaves. Plants brushed our shins, we ducked under branches, we looked up with mouths open, admiring the shade from a last big elm canopy. Hands searched to locate and point out a particular plant amongst others.

Touch is part of a multisensory and embodied inhabitation of yards, including smell, taste, sound, sight. Touch was particularly important throughout yard visits as residents showed me plants, and is implicit in many tasks and activities around yards.

All the time you're working with your hands, you are desisting from going crazy. – Roger Deakin



This is supposed to be more woodlands stuff, more shade. And so there are probably at least nine different types of ferns buried in here. Actually, I have a couple of favorite plants, and that's one of them [*pointing to maidenhair fern*]. So I always give that one extra water (*smiling*).

And the other favorite is my yellow ladyslipper, you know. I protect them.

I put in the yellow ladyslipper, and I didn't understand much about how it flowered. The first year, it flowered. The next year, it flowered. The third year, no flower. Well, then I read that it normally takes five to seven years before it will flower, if it's transplanted. And it went for four years without a flower. Now, it's been flowering the past few years, so I guess it's doing alright. But it comes out for a week, and then it's gone. And then it just looks like a weed. But I am pretty excited about this particular plant.

A lot of it is waiting. You experiment, and every year it's like, well, that didn't quite work, so I gotta wait until next year. I'll try something else and try something different.

A garden, like a painting, is never really finished. A lot of it is just experience, people planting year after year.



Many times when I asked people “Show me your yard,” a kind of inventory unfolded as we walked. This was important – in letting me know what they thought I wanted to know, but also what they wanted to tell. Some of these accounts were clearly familiar and even well rehearsed. Others emerged in the telling. The plants especially were a way to focus our eyes, our conversation, our gestures.

I just take changes as they go, start with one little area, and do some changes there. This summer, I moved some bushes around – a spiraea, given to me by my girlfriend, moved from her yard. So I planted one on each corner of the house. To do that I had to move other things around. So I also put in this shrub.

Touch was significant in the telling of these plant origin stories. Where, when, under which circumstances human lives and plant lives came to be entwined. Distinctions were made between plants, differences noted, touched, pointed out. People and temporalities were also given woven into the descriptions.

Required of me: most of all admiration, nodding along, agreeing (sometimes too much), questioning, documenting.



I'm so excited because this is my first year with tomatillos and they're in there. I just can't wait till they explode. One of my friends, she said that tomatillos are like the Incredible Hulk of the plant world – cause they just bust out of their husk.



It's fun to have this! I like it. This is the first year. I just haven't done as much for it as I should have. But I've eaten from it. Collards, and broccoli. And here are carrots. And I don't remember what this is, I don't know if it's okra – I think so, yippee! I'll cook that. And I had an eggplant. It was a tiny little thing. But I ate it.

These greens look good. I think it needs more water, though. I haven't been doing it diligently, but I come out – I should water it today.

Salma shows me her vegetable garden in a waist high raised bed. The relatively new lumber is light colored and fresh from this season. Tags are lined up with each row, the words mostly worn off from sun and weather. The raised bed came from a local organization focused on economic rejuvenation for the North Side through a reworked relationship between people, earth, and food.



Isn't it beautiful here! I need this emotionally somehow. It does something to me. It cheers me up. It makes me feel happy.

Marta's side yard is a neatly maintained and joyful place, full of colorful blooms. She grew up during hard times in World War II in Germany. She was the fourth of eight children. Her grandparents' farm was a respite from her mother's poor treatment during these years. Marta told me she took a lot of pleasure in the physical work, and said she would sing and sing in the fields while working – that others would notice this about her.

MARTA / YARD DIARY / JULY 10, 2012

How do you feel about your yard today? OR Write down any additional comments or thoughts below.
It's blooming to my satisfaction.

MARTA / YARD DIARY / JULY 18, 2012

How do you feel about your yard today? OR Write down any additional comments or thoughts below.
Just glad the ground got a good rain.

Marta loves to work in the midst of the flowers on the south side of her house. She told me it gives her a similar feeling of freedom and openness she remembers from working on her grandparents' farm. Sometimes she brings out a chair to this part of her yard. Sometimes just walking through it is enough.



And this is a pretty grass, called prairie cord grass. I've cut it way back. I think it's a native. It was on the prairies. It gets full and lush and beautiful. I love it in the autumn, you know, when they're all yellow.

Patty shows me a type of grass in one of her boulevard gardens. She's lived in her corner house in North Minneapolis for 39 years, and is now a newly retired public school teacher.

I've had the boulevard gardens for at least twenty years. All because I wanted those ornamental grasses, and I didn't want to mow the grass! I put the ornamental grasses in on purpose, but the others – just transplants or extras. Like here, I took everyday hostas, you know, just everyday cheap ones, and I transplanted them. That's why those are here. You can just divide things! And here then I just planted Joe Pieweed, that a friend gave me.

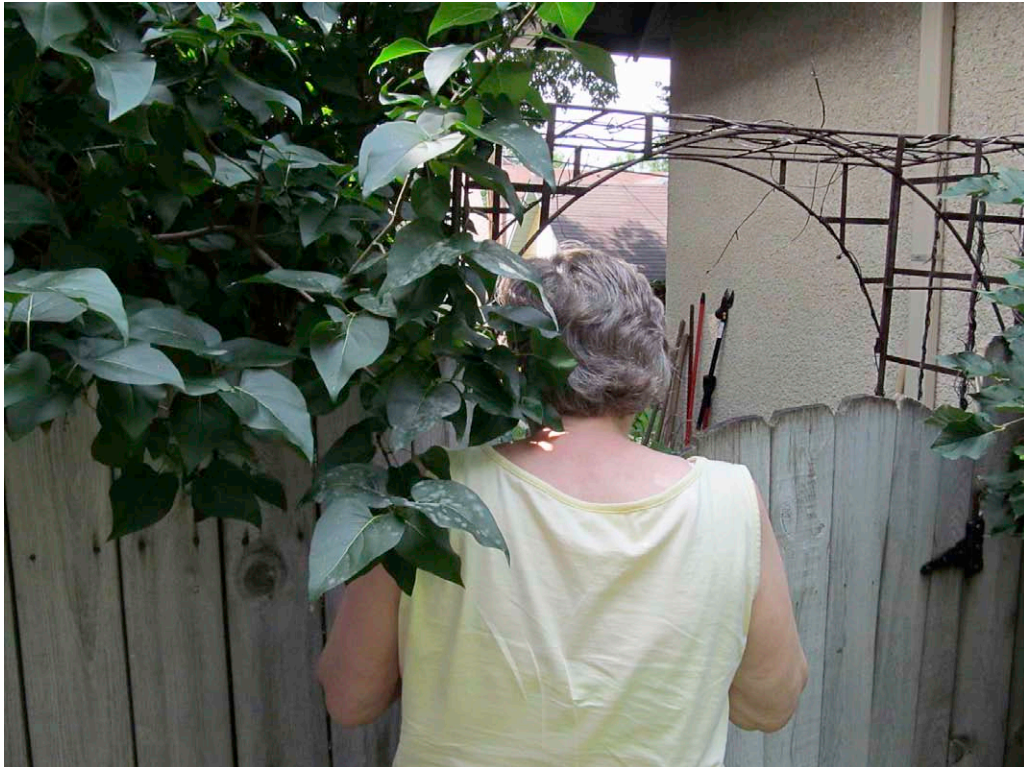
And I have all kinds of herbs out here that people can help themselves to, if they want. You'd think people would come along and say, "Oh! Let's have some oregano!" but they don't really. But that would be nice.

Being out here is magic. People I don't even know stop and we talk.

It's just been spectacular for a kind of smiling neighborly thing. The boulevards especially. You're out there, and people are walking by. It's just been wonderful!

Patty was so thrilled to be asked to participate, she felt honored and proud to show me all the things she has done with a range of yard spaces – an intimate fenced backyard filled with found and salvaged metal objects put to new uses, along with an elaborate collection of labeled hosta plants of all kinds, and vegetables interspersed within ornamental plantings.

Birds share her yard – she offers feeders, bird baths, bird houses. Birdsong and cicadas permeate my recorded conversation with Patty, on a hot midday in August.



This is a Korean lilac that was here [when I moved in], and oh my gosh, it smells so good! Right by the kitchen window – it's just wonderful! And it's late blooming.

I just love this funky old gate. I just like it cause it looks old and you know, I didn't have it replaced when my son bought the new fence for me. And just beyond it is a trellis my kids gave me for a gift. I moved it from my old house. I just bought a clematis for it.

I love just this whole gestalt of this part of the yard. I mean, I just kind of like little rooms in the yard, and this is like the entry and the outlet part on this side of the house. The way into my backyard oasis.

Lorraine makes her way through the gate and past the lilac.



Sitting. I most enjoy sitting. I sit right here. This is my place.

I love sitting in my yard. Especially early in the morning. I have my coffee out here. I read the paper. And I just look around. It gives me a lot of pleasure, because I feel like older gardens and older homes deserve a kind of love and attention. So I feel like, *this is good*. Whoever comes behind me will get this really nice garden and they'll have a nice place to sit.

View of Barb's back porch in North Minneapolis, built by her husband, John. I made this image sitting in her favorite chair at a table under an umbrella on a small deck she and her husband built. Barb and John have lived in their home in North Minneapolis for 42 years.



Sheri: It's really very unusual that we would do something like this [build the patio].

Well, I have these ideas that I want to do. I have a bunch of those big rocks, so I thought the rocks could be just underneath the deck and then maybe some of the leftover gravel up under there. And then I'd love to get a little fountain that makes noise.

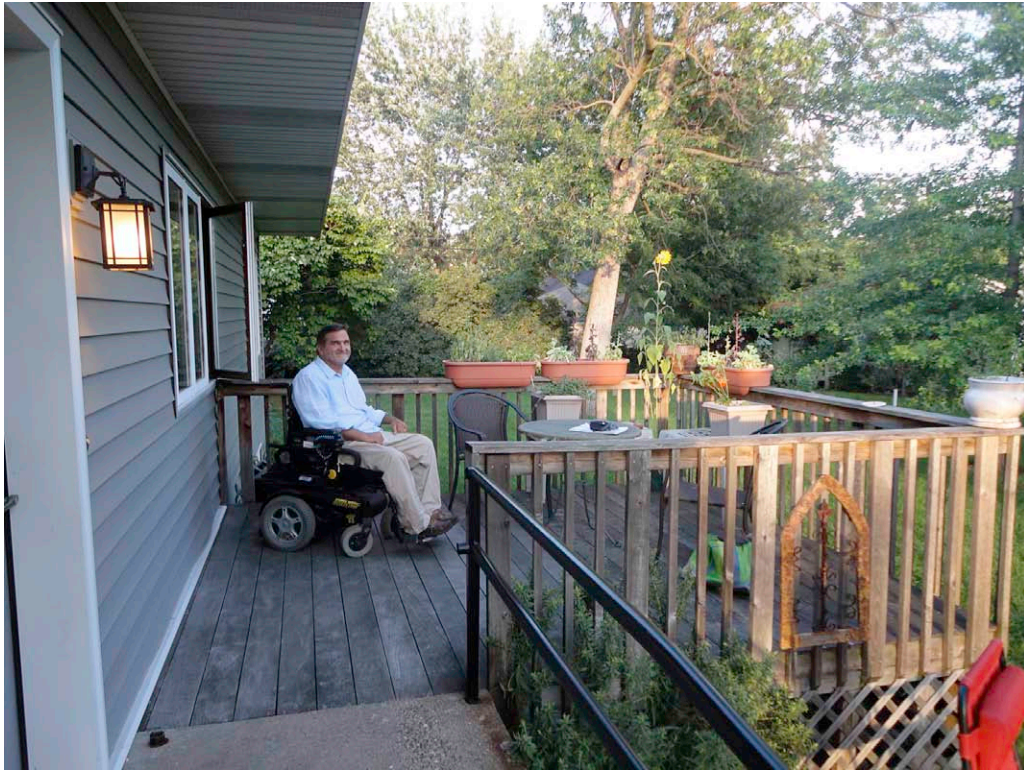
We looked up online how to do it, and we called up my step dad and asked him for ideas, and so it really isn't a hard, hard thing to do. So that's good.

Jim: It feels good to be doing this. It feels good.

Husband and wife, Jim and Sheri, talk over the side fence with a hobo visitor to their neighbors' yard. Jim fills in gaps between patio bricks. Making a place to sit.

When I met with them the following year, Sheri told me they used it a few times.

Sheri: We had some people over once, and made a fire. In the fall, when it was cooler. It was nice.



TIM / YARD DIARY / JUNE 2, 2012 SATURDAY

Did you spend any time outdoors around your home? **Yes**

If yes, about roughly how long, in total? **7 hrs**

If yes, what did you do?

returned garbage container, napped on deck, filled bird feeder, weeded garden, napped against a tree, stacked rocks in rock garden

How do you feel about your yard today? OR Write down any additional comments or thoughts below.

Satisfied at day's end with what I accomplished. Have rock garden 97% weed free, hope to finish tomorrow.

TIM / YARD DIARY / JUNE 3, 2012 / SUNDAY

Did you spend any time outdoors around your home? **Yes**

If yes, about roughly how long, in total? **4 hrs**

If yes, what did you do?

weeded rock garden, did some rock placement, weeded around back of house, rested in shade of ash tree, watched birds at bird feeder, herded rabbit into neighbor's yard, planted tomato in backyard, watered tomato plants and rose bush, smoking cigar and sipping scotch in garage while recording this, listening to baseball game

TIM / YARD DIARY / JUNE 4, 2012 / MONDAY

Did you see anybody while outdoors around your home today? **Yes**

Who were they and what did you talk about?

Mary, neighbor to north, she looked out window and we exchanged greeting.

How do you feel about your yard today? OR Write down any additional comments or thoughts below.

Tired. Not satisfied. I tried to arrange the marigolds into a peace symbol but don't think people will recognize it as such. Developed a blister on my hand that opened.

TIM / YARD DIARY / JUNE 6, 2012 / WEDNESDAY

What is the weather like today?

sunny 80s, then rain around 6:30

How do you feel about your yard today? OR Write down any additional comments or thoughts below.

Our lawn service mowed the grass and yard always looks sharp afterward

Relaxing. enjoy placing and positioning rocks – therapeutic, Zen?

TIM / YARD DIARY / JUNE 9, 2012 / SATURDAY

Did you spend any time outdoors around your home today? **Yes**

If yes, about roughly how long, in total? **2 hrs**

If yes, what did you do?

In the morning did a little weeding, but it was too hot to continue.

In the evening my wife and I enjoyed a beverage on our deck.

Did you see anybody while outdoors around your home today? **No**

How do you feel about your yard today? OR Write down any additional comments or thoughts below.

In the evening once it cooled down, we were chatting on the deck and my wife commented that she would miss our yard if/when we move away. We have been talking about someday moving once we are no longer able to maintain the yard/house ourselves.

TIM / YARD DIARY / JUNE 11, 2012 / MONDAY

Did you spend any time outdoors around your home? **Yes**

If yes, about roughly how long, in total? **2 1/2 hrs**

If yes, what did you do?

read a John Grisham novel in the garage



This is what I do when I'm talking to anybody, on the phone, you, whatever – I pick up, I can't help it.

It's the garden that brings me out to the front. Just to keep it nice looking because it's the front, and I want people to enjoy its weirdness. This was one of the first things we did that first year we moved in. When you first cut a garden [into the sod], you have to keep cutting it, pulling the grass that tries to grow, I have kept up with that.

I imagine this will keep someone from buying my house someday [because of the gardens and necessary caretaking]. You know? Like they'll go, no way! But I'm not going anywhere right now, thought I don't plan on staying here forever, this is not my home, this is where I live right now. I'll go back to the east coast. Patrick wants to go back, but this is a good place to be for arts, so it's a hard decision.

Like everyone says, 'Your house isn't worth anything anymore!' And I'm like yeah, but it's worth something to me. It's my shelter, it's my place where I work, it's the place where I eat, it's where my dogs live, it's where my partner lives. I don't want to think about its value all the time in some arbitrary market. I mean it truly is just arbitrary and it depends on somebody else, you know? You decide to choose which systems are meaningful.

Sarah weeds an area of her front yard in Northeast

Minneapolis as we talk during our first yard visit.

Don't take a picture of my butt, whatever you do!



And some place to sit. You know, you need that in a yard.



Son: Have you seen anybody?!

Adam's thirteen year old son pauses on the back deck where we are sitting, as he runs through the back gate, headed along the side of the house, through the front yard, and back around to the alley. He and several neighbor boys are running wild. A Tuesday evening, late August. The school year is almost underway again.

Adam: Yeah – I've seen me.

Son: No, anyone with a nerf gun?

Adam: No. And if I did, I wouldn't tell you.

He shouts over his shoulder as he runs to the front yard.

Son: Well, anyway, that's good for us – good that you haven't seen anyone!



Helen: I love it most in the spring, when everything looks so fresh and green. And it's that really beautiful light green. Now everything just looks a little tired. But it's a good time of year for planning. That's – I think – one of the things about gardening that has surprised me. I was sort of surprised about how much thinking I do. About it. I'll sit out here and I'll think, "It *needs* something. What does it need?" I'll just look at these spaces and try to visualize things, I'll maybe read things, and then all of a sudden, I'll say, "*This* is what it needs." And I'll try that, and it may work, or it may not. And if it works, it might only work for a couple of years.

The whole process is so – um - amazing. Like in February, you look out at the landscape and you think there is no way those tulips are gonna come back up this year. And then they do. So it's this whole birth/death cycle, it's really kind of surprising, and wonderful, every year.

Ursula: Are there particular aspects that have surprised you?

Helen: I was surprised at how inaccurate the word "perennial" is, and how much – when people say, you can just plant a perennial and forget it – how wrong that is! Because right now, I have divided a lot [of plants] this year, but I have a list of all the things that need dividing next year. That really changes the look of a garden, because it goes from being overgrown to looking like you just planted it all over again. The whole process is never ending.

It's been fun to do it this summer as a partially retired person. Because I always thought, if I could just spend an hour or so a day, I could really keep this under control, especially weeds. And that does make a huge difference. And it's very enjoyable to go out there in the morning, and work.

And Jim and I see it very differently. We'll be out here [on the back porch], and Joe will say, "The garden looks beautiful." And I'll say, "You know, it's got a lot of weeds, I really don't like the way the iris are looking." So we enjoy it in our own ways. He thinks mine is too negative.

Joe: I like the process. I like the cyclical process. I do appreciate the changes Helen makes after they are made. But digging all the holes and planting stuff isn't – well, sometimes it is fun. Sometimes I enjoy it. But a lot of times, it's just nasty. Most of what I'm doing is working out there. But that's still enjoyable.



JOE / YARD DIARY / AUGUST 13, 2012

How do you feel about your yard today? OR Write down any additional comments or thoughts below.

Cleaning the fountain is a fairly quick matter of using a jet of water to flush out the greenish water and algae on rim, and then use a slow flow to refill the basins. I replenish the algaecide to finish (shake a few drops from the bottle).

JOE / YARD DIARY / AUGUST 15, 2012

Did you spend any time outdoors around your home today? Yes

If yes, about roughly how long, in total? 1 ½ hrs

If yes, what did you do?

1 hr – reading on the porch

30 min – having dinner on porch

Did you see anybody while outdoors around your home today? Yes

What was your interaction like? Dinner with my wife

How do you feel about your yard today? OR Write down any additional comments or thoughts below.

Regret that we haven't had many dinners on the porch this year because of too hot weather and TV habits (we've started to watch the evening news and eat while watching).

JOE / YARD DIARY / AUGUST 19, 2012

Did you spend any time outdoors around your home today? No

How do you feel about your yard today? OR Write down any additional comments or thoughts below.

We had two political signs in the front yard, and when we got back from a play (afternoon) and dinner at 8:00pm, we saw that they had been taken – we felt angry (me) and discouraged (Helen) that such a thing could happen in our neighborhood. Now, we have doubts about replacing the signs.



To perceive the environment is not to look back on the things to be found in it, or to discern their congealed shapes and layouts, but to join with them in the material flows and movements contributing to their – and our – ongoing formation. – Timothy Ingold

Sometimes perceiving environment does include looking back on things. Sometimes that is the thing.

The thing that's so interesting about this perspective, is that you really get an appreciation for all of these textures. And when the sun changes, the colors change, and it's always changing. So, from *this* perspective, *that's* the thing.

That over there is more sculptural, and you see the different designs of the trees. That is a whole different experience - laying on that hammock. Oh my gosh! And then this is not a bad place to sit back here, to sketch, because you can see – well, I don't know, it's about similar.



SARAH / YARD DIARY / AUGUST 15TH, 2012

Did you spend any time outdoors around your home today? **Yes**

If yes, about roughly how long, in total? **1 ½ hrs**

If yes, what did you do?

I trimmed up the overgrowth in my yard and played with my Dogs in the yard. I'm slowly preparing for guests on Sunday. Also took my Dogs out.

The yard is starting to look better. I cleared a lot of overgrowth and weeds.

How do you feel about your yard today? OR Write down any additional comments or thoughts below.

I'm worried about my sedum that seems to be falling apart in the middle. My cucumber is dying and I don't know why. I picked 3 flowers (zinnias) and put them in a small vase of my mother's shaped like a chicken (hen).

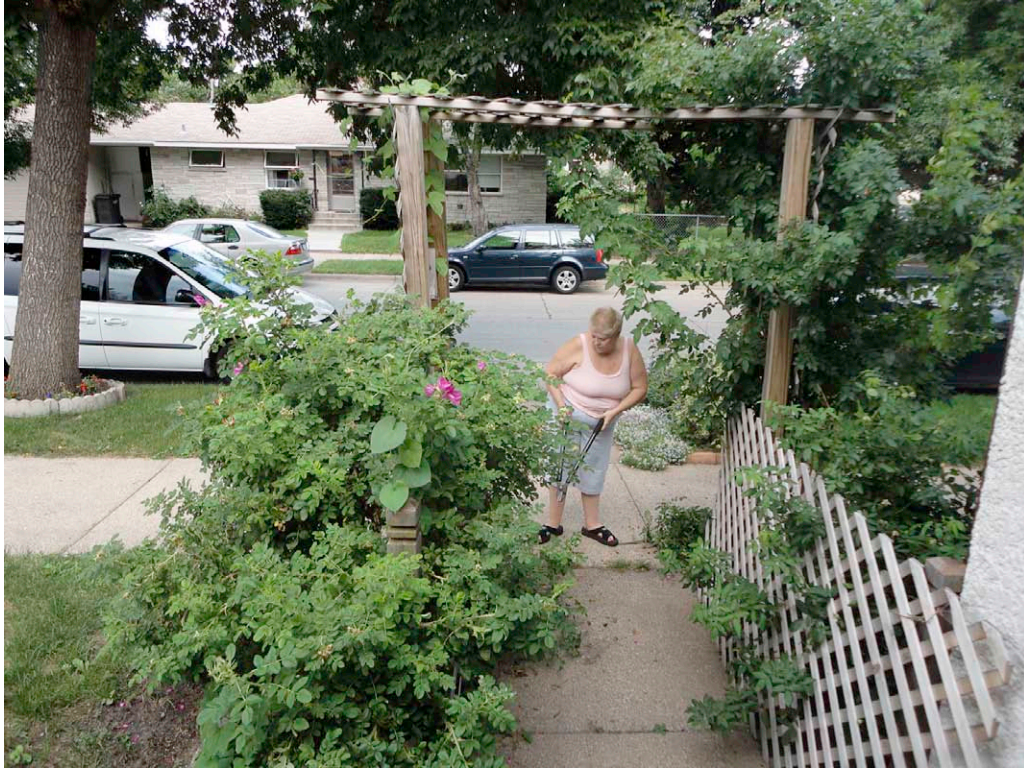
SARAH / YARD DIARY / AUGUST 25TH, 2012

Did you spend any time outdoors around your home today? **Yes**

We tend to just hang outside on the weekend – we chat on the patio/driveway. Let the Dogs out. Open the garage to fetch certain items. We planned to go to the fair. Outside – we loaded things out of the car to the patio/driveway to prepare to go to the fair. Later in the evening after the fair we got in the hot tub for about 30 minutes.

How do you feel about your yard today? OR Write down any additional comments or thoughts below.

I love my yard on the weekends – it's there to add a backdrop to the events (however normal) of my summer.



Sawing is one of a suite of commonplace tool-assisted activities, including also hammering, pounding, and scraping, that all involve the repetition of manual gesture. Indeed this kind of back-and-forth or ‘reciprocating’ movement comes naturally to the living body. In a fluent performance, it has a rhythmic quality.

This quality does not, however, lie in the repetitiveness of the movement itself. For there to be rhythm, movement must be *felt*. And feeling lies in the coupling of movement and perception that is the key to skilled practice.

By way of perception, the practitioner’s rhythmic gestures are attuned to the multiple rhythms of the environment.

Rhythm, then, is not a movement but a dynamic coupling of movements. Every such coupling is a specific resonance, and the synergy of practitioner, tool and raw material establishes an entire field of such resonances. But this field is not monotonous. For every cycle is set not within fixed parameters but within a framework that is itself suspended in movement, in an environment where nothing is quite the same from moment to moment. – Timothy Ingold

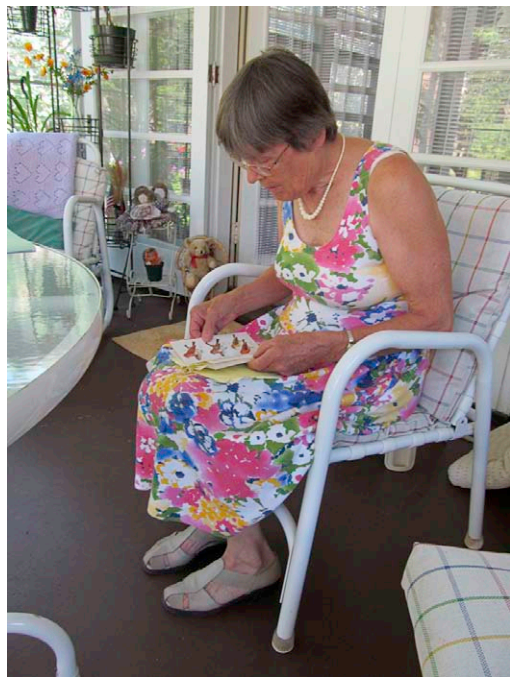
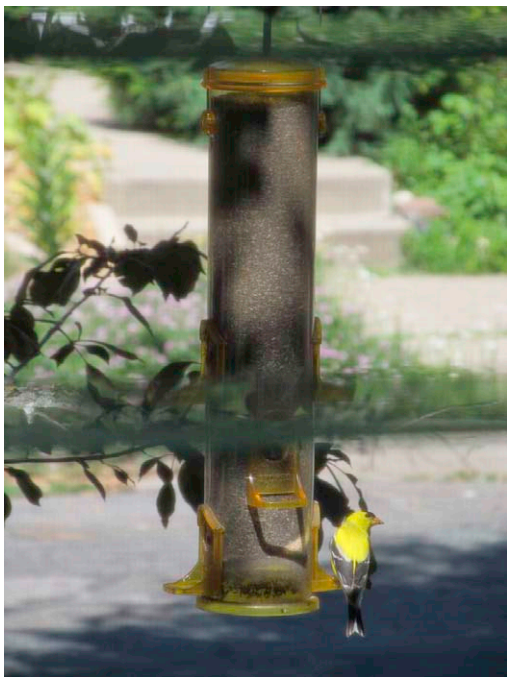
The capacities of bodies are constantly changing. As bodies grow with landscapes each makes new capacities. Tasks that once were easy become hard. And challenging skills become habits, like second nature, over time.

All of this cultivation is like an offering people make to one another, to plants, to animals, and to themselves. An offering of wild blooms, colors, and textures which are alive.

II THING-NESS



Things matter not because of how they are represented but
because they have qualities, rhythms, forces and movements.
– Kathleen Stewart



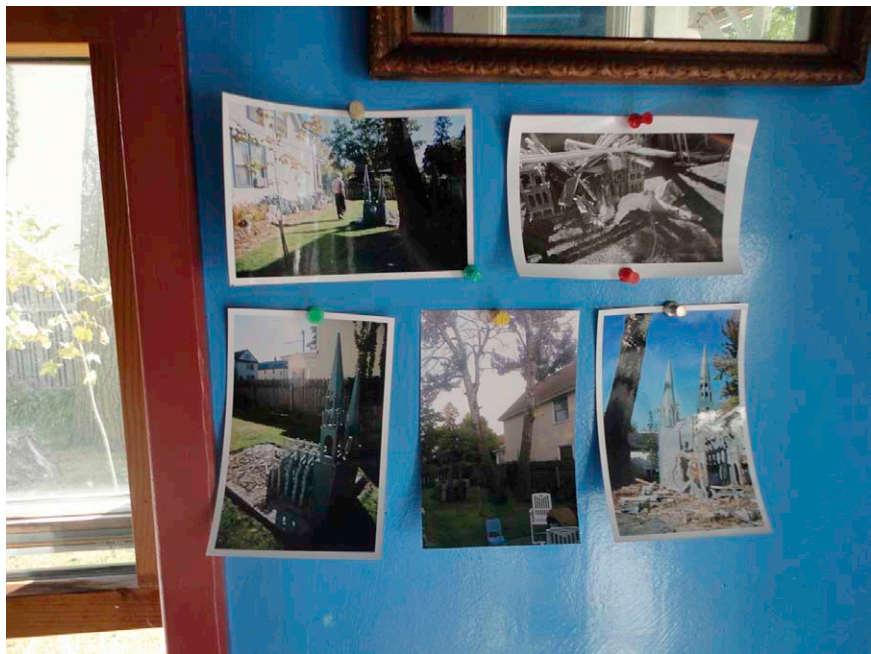
Marta led me into the front porch, through her dining room and side room with baby grand piano and an area with music stands for her recorder playing. Her house is full of statues, figurines, especially angels. We got situated in chairs on the front porch. She faced out into the front yard and this sparked things for her as we talked.

I love the life of the birds, and looking out at the flowers.

All my little birds – every other day I refill the birdbaths. I just love nature.

Goldfinch at Marta's bird feeder. During our conversation, a different and more unusual bird flew to the feeder. Marta immediately got out her bird book and thumbed through the pages, totally absorbed, as we compared notes about the features of the bird we each noticed.

Bird sings outrageously in tree in the front yard.



John, a painter, former cab driver, raconteur, neighborhood organization member, and resident in Northeast Minneapolis for twenty two years. In 2010, a tree John was cutting down fell on a six foot high scale replica of the Chartres Cathedral John built from scrap lumber in his side yard.

Here, he shows me photographs he made after the disaster. They hang just inside the backdoor, in a brightly painted blue entryway.



SARAH / YARD DIARY / AUGUST 23, 2012

How do you feel about your yard today? OR Write down any additional comments or thoughts below.

My tomatoes are splitting on the vine – my sister says it's from inconsistent watering – which I believe because water from rain has been in short supply this summer and water from a hose is never as good as rain.

LORRAINE / YARD DIARY / JULY 31, 2012

What is the weather like today?

Hot and humid – very uncomfortable for me

How do you feel about your yard today? OR Write down any additional comments or thoughts below.

happy to see boulevard weeded

glad to have a shady place to sit on a hot day

still hoping for rain! watering is NOT the same

LORRAINE / YARD DIARY / AUGUST 4, 2012

Did you spend any time outdoors around your home today? Yes

If yes, about roughly how long, in total? 40 min

If yes, what did you do?

got paper

went out through front yard to go to theater – came home through yard late

sat out and read paper while kitty explored

went through front yard again to go to son's house up the street from my home

What is the weather like today?

Cool! sunny – rained 1.75" last night

How do you feel about your yard today? OR Write down any additional comments or thoughts below.

Glad it is watered so I don't have to do it today!

SARAH / YARD DIARY / AUGUST 22, 2012

What is the weather like today?

It threatened rain all day and then around 3pm it rained lightly. I opened the porch doors so I could see the yard wet and glistening – the color becomes so much richer in the rain.



I'm taking care of my neighbor's monarchs while they're out of town for a few days. I give them a new leaf each day, and look – he has kept track of every one in a notebook the past few years he's been raising them. How many eggs, whether male or female, when he releases them.

Lorraine cares for Kenneth's developing monarchs. He has been raising and releasing monarch butterflies for the past five years or so. It started out as something to do with his two children, but he said now he's the main person keeping up with it.

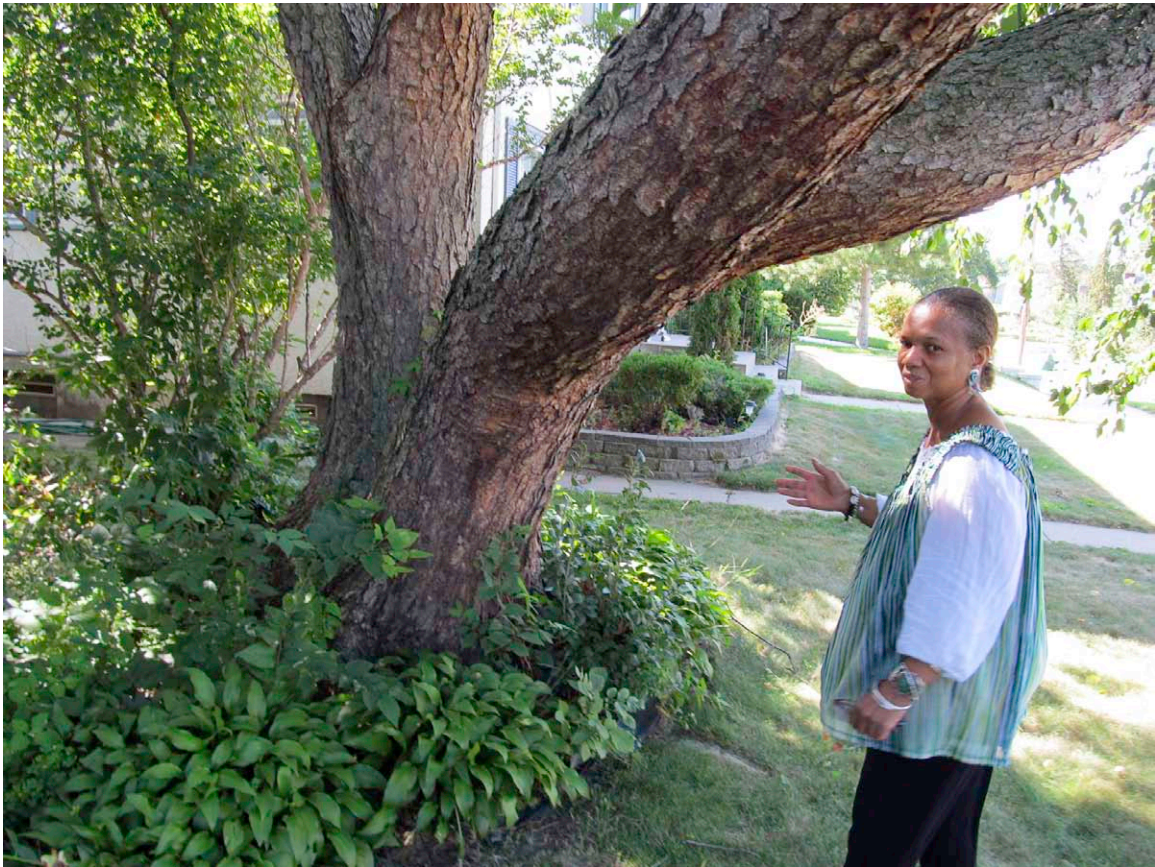


The milkweed just kind of took over the front garden – it kind of changed purposes. I let the milkweed come because I was collecting the eggs, and last year, it was more than a hundred. Well, the past two or three years has been more like 200, and this year it'll be a little less, a little over a hundred. I was leaving the plants so I could collect the eggs off them, and a couple years ago, I was taking all the leaves off to feed them. And then I ran out of food! So I went all around the neighborhood and found all the milkweed patches, and actually got to meet a neighbor, and her whole yard is just milkweed.

I was feeding 25 at a time, it took – you know, when they're big, they go through about a leaf a day, when it's not on a full plant. So I'd go in the morning and afternoon. But I haven't been there this year, cause I haven't had as many to feed, for whatever reason. I mean – most people, they wouldn't allow that. So it kind of took over this area, but then I use it for a different purpose. It changed a little bit. And then, some people like the more manicured look and those are the people that kind of grumble about people who let their gardens go.



Well, it's all one. It's all kind of *my*. What to call it? My whole. Yeah, my comfort zone, this is mine, this is where I belong, this is what I take care of.



This is the birch tree. I have never seen a birch tree get so big, and I can't believe it lived through the storm because it's very light-rooted. When we moved here, they said 'Well, it's probably gonna live another 10 years.' It's been here, thirty six years or longer. And it just – I can't believe it. It changed. The bark on it changed. It wasn't like that, it was white.

Betty shows me the side yard in front, where a large tree was sent into the upstairs during a destructive tornado in May of 2011, the previous year. As we walked to the back, I remarked that it is a beautiful big back yard.

It was so much fun. And laughter, and the lilacs. There was a lilac tree right here, I think. It was really the neighbor's tree, but it was all over here. And you could smell lilacs in the spring.

Like many other African American residents in North Minneapolis, Betty grew up in Chicago, the first generation after her parents moved north during The Great Migration.

We grew up with a yard, but not so much *garden*. We played in the *yard*, that's where we used to be, that was our home, outside in the summer. And the winter – we didn't do a lot. We never were a family that went out skating, or in the snow. It was like, just get in! But in the summer, when summer came, then the yard was *ours*. And just doing different things, just building stuff, making stuff.

Trees are the measure of things. A tree grows, and we measure ourselves against it. – Roger Deakin



This is a mason bee house. And it looks like they're dead or something. The mason bees bury their eggs in there in the mud, and then the mother/queen flies off and then they just emerge through the mud. When they were starting to have problems with honey bees then mason bees were what gardeners and people were using in Oregon, so my brother in law built that house. I asked him about it and he built the house for me, it's supposed to match our house. He said, if you see them in your yard, then you have them, and so if you put the house there, you'll help them – and I did go out in spring and see them around that tree and see them all over those blossoms, so I know we had them, and he said all the states have them, you just have to encourage them to come.

Barb is a former Master Gardener through the University of Minnesota Extension Services, and is considered by her neighbors to be an accomplished gardener. This was the only mason bee house I came across in this research.



In the summers I play, I recharge my batteries. I catch up on reading for fun, just being outside, playing with the dog. In the summer I'm relaxed and enjoying my neighbors and home.

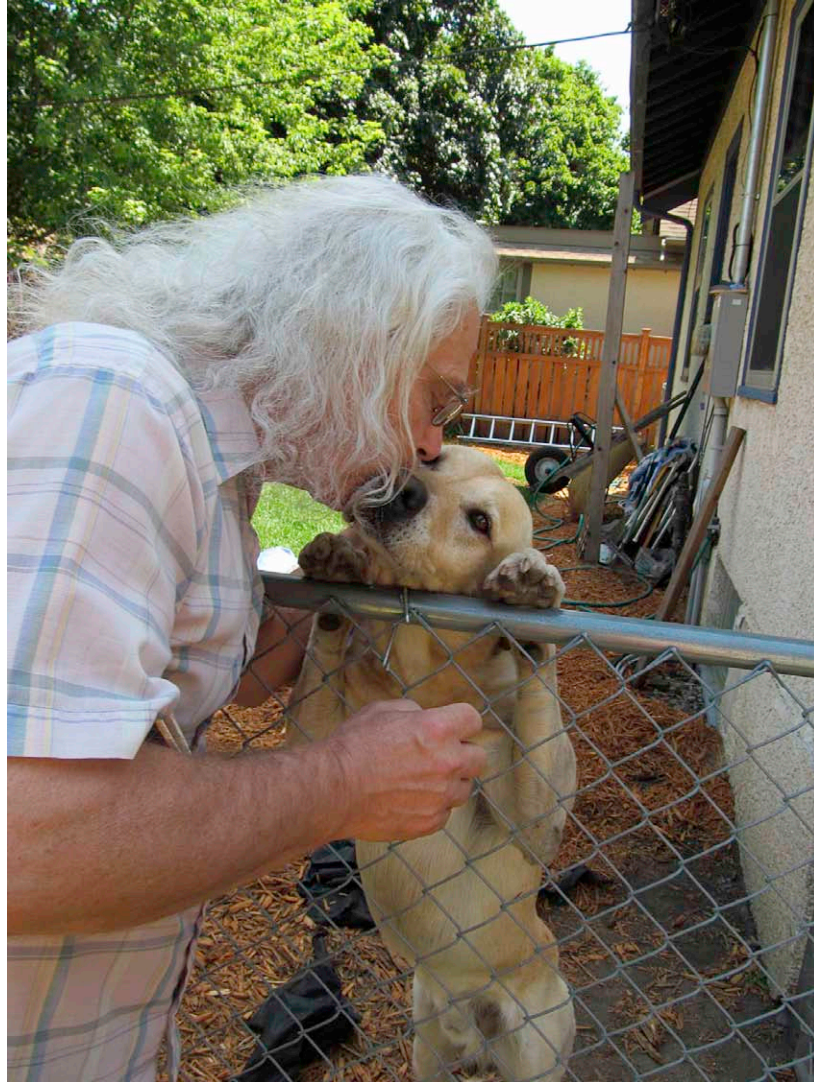
I enjoy eating together the most on the deck in back. Eating together is our time, family time. It is a time to talk about the day, to plan the next day or week or what is coming up, we get to be together. It's uninterrupted – we don't answer the phone, we don't get the door.

The back is fenced, so we don't have to manage the dog much, and we spend time there because it's shady in the late afternoon, which is nice in summer.

I always plant the impatiens around the tree on Memorial Day weekend.

Tina plays catch with her dog, Hoss, towards the end of our yard visit. She lives with her husband and two cats in South Minneapolis, and is a kindergarten teacher at a Spanish language immersion school.

Minneapolis has a population of about 240,000 cats and dogs, and a human population of about 380,000. Of those pets, about 110,000 are dogs. Of those 110,000, 8% are licensed with the City of Minneapolis Animal Care and Control Department. Licenses are required by city ordinance for all domestic dogs, cats, rabbits, and ferrets.



PLANTS

*People devour, anticipate, fret, destroy, cut, break, snap,
mow, water, share, move, compost, haul, dig, carry, sow,
wait, protect, divide, feed, trim, allow, scratch, sift, mulch,
pull.*

ANIMALS

*People trap, feed, walk, release, scratch, spoil, replace, fence
in, fence out, curse, house, observe, listen for, watch, notice,
smash, chase, herd, stroke, throw to, leash, unleash, kiss,
treat, swat, endure.*

Instead of thinking of organisms as tangled in relations, we should regard every living thing as itself an entanglement.

Thus, far from inhabiting a sealed ground furnished with objects, the animal lives and breathes in a world of earth and sky – where to perceive is to align one's movements in counterpoint to the modulation of day and night, sunlight and shade, wind and weather.

– Timothy Ingold



We've seen a Cooper's hawk, and red tail hawks come through. One night I came home and there was a barn owl sitting back here which I didn't realize are in the city. You know, the barn owl was right there. But – they were probably eating the voles and then the little black mice, with the short tail. And when they get under my deck, and that's when the house kind of smells. Supposedly they don't get in the house, but there's also some mice that I catch occasionally.

Well, actually I've got five traps now – so what I've done is covered up the hole, and I'm trying to see if there's some activity. Sometimes I put peanut butter on there, and then the ants come and eat the peanut butter.



What I enjoy the most is watching it grow. I just love watching it grow. And I love tending to it, like keeping it clean – but I like to just sit here and look at the greens. See the color and the leaves. Such a beautiful green color, with the veins and all that. I just love to look at it.

Get up close to those greens. Remember I told you about how beautiful the color is? I just love the color. And over here, these leaves are getting *big*. The leaves, they used to be pretty big – but now. *WOW*. Take one of these big leaves to Chicago and let my sister see it! Word about my garden is all over. All over. The word has been around, about that guy with that garden on the corner.

Mr. Morris' yard in North Minneapolis was one of the only yards in this research that also was a site for commercial activity. Mr. Morris has been gardening large areas of his back and side yards since 1989, expanding more and more. After two or three years of giving away his greens, he has been selling bunches of greens for \$1.00 to neighbors, friends, and passers by for the past twenty or so years.



Mr. Morris: About three to five years ago, a woman was really insistent about me *raising* my price. You know, you go to the grocery store? It's around a dollar. So I don't want to *outdo* the grocery store, so high that people don't wanna buy em. They want to eat them. If I got enough, I'm satisfied with it all.

If I keep at a dollar, I don't have to go through all that, making little change. But looking at it now, with all the expenses, you know, the water and feeding the plants. I *may* go to a dollar and a quarter. But like I said, that wasn't my plan. And you know, that would help me out as far as the expansion out here [planned for next season]. But then I gotta give people change, little change, coins and all that.

Ursula: Do you keep track? Do you keep track in your mind, how much you are making or how much you've spent?

Mr. Morris: No. *No*. But I don't touch it. I don't touch what I make! I put it aside and I don't touch it. I will not touch it during the selling season. There's been times I didn't touch it for two years and I didn't even know what I had. I won't count it, separate it, I don't count it – what I make. That's *irritating*, too. Every time you sell it, keeping track and all that – ugh.



Mary from the coffee shop always says your garden has to be an extension of yourself, so you need to put something in it that's you, so I think you should put car and motorcycle parts in it. So that was where the car and motorcycle wheels came from. I had some extras, so as my friends had their birthdays or moved, I would bring them a wheel for their garden. So, they dug a hole and put it in, I couldn't believe it.

The idea of a field of relationships may seem highly abstract, far removed from the reality of entities and events “on the ground.” Yet it is the very dominance of the genealogical model in our thinking, I would argue, that leads us to suppose that things exist, in the real world, independently of their relations. – Timothy Ingold



The Wild

In the empty lot – a place
not natural, but wild – among
the trash of human absence,

the slough and shamble
of the city's seasons, a few
old locusts bloom.

A few woods birds
fly and sing
in the new foliage

- warblers and tanagers, birds
wild as leaves; in a million
each one would be rare,

new to the eyes. A man
couldn't make a habit
of such color,

such flight and singing.
But they're the habit of this
wasted place. In them

the ground is wise. They are
Its remembrance of what it is.

– Wendell Berry

*We take turns standing on an overturned milk crate. Noses
poke over a fence in South Minneapolis. A back yard almost
abandoned. Habits of this place, without us.*



In the front, I have that moment of being house proud, where I like to have people walk by and say, “Oh!” And I also like to make them wonder why there are Barbies out. I had just the swing, a Barbie in a swing. And a friend gave me all the ethnically diverse Barbies her granddaughter had outgrown. So it’s perfect.

We are standing along a planted area with a low retaining wall, a strip between their driveway and the southern edge of the front yard. Ann leans over to rearrange the Barbies, positioning one with jointed knees upside down in the miniature rough hewn outdoor swing.

I never played with Barbies. I never liked Barbies. But I have to say that – you know. [pause] It just is – such a pleasure to make other people wonder what you’re up to.



Everything out here stays. I don't bring anything in. Everything stays. You can see my typewriter is rusting away. I will probably have to replace – yes, I have a replacement ready for her! – when that one goes. But everything stays out. That's the beauty of the metal, is that it gets better with age. See my desk is sinking on one side. But everything stays out. It's nice to see the new things, and to see all the stuff.

See, I'm ah – I'm a junker. I'm an artist, I like *stuff*. And so my yard would, to somebody who is a minimalist, be a nightmare! Because they would say, "Oh my god! This is just too much!" But that's what I like. That's why I say, it reflects *me*. It doesn't matter what anybody else says, I just like stuff.

Just like Big Girl – when I saw her, at Kerry's yard, he had like ten of them in various sizes. And I thought, "Oh my god, that's Big Girl, I have to have her!"

I think my yard is – it's welcoming. I just think it says welcome. It says hello to people. It speaks to people who like plants and things. And I like that. It's really me. It speaks solely about me. I love lots of textures, I love motion, and I love things that – it's that artistic side of me. It's my muse. That's what it is. It's my *muse*. Because I've already done the inside – I can't do anything else in there!

Wanda's yard.

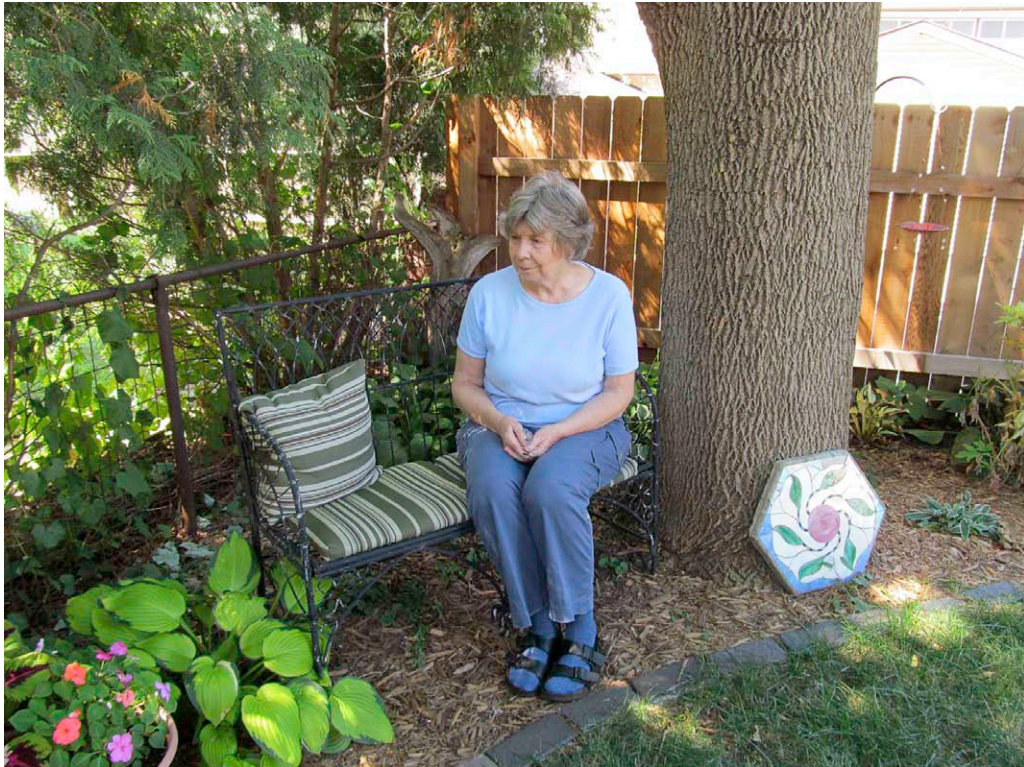


When I think of a landscape I am thinking of a time.
– Adrienne Rich

I would say our yard is kind of our pseudo up north oasis.

It just doesn't matter what's going on, all around you or even in your head, that you can come out here and it just really kind of washes away. I don't know what that would be. But, it's like taking a small, little – and a small little vacation at home. Everyday! Whenever you decide to use it.

Those are beautiful trees. You can go over there and it smells just like up north. You just feel like you're someplace else. When it rains, you can smell that piney scent.



Lorraine sits in one of her favorite back yard spots, an outdoor bench with cushions. To her left is a mosaic stone her parishioners gave her when her husband passed away.

She moved it with her to this yard from her previous yard.

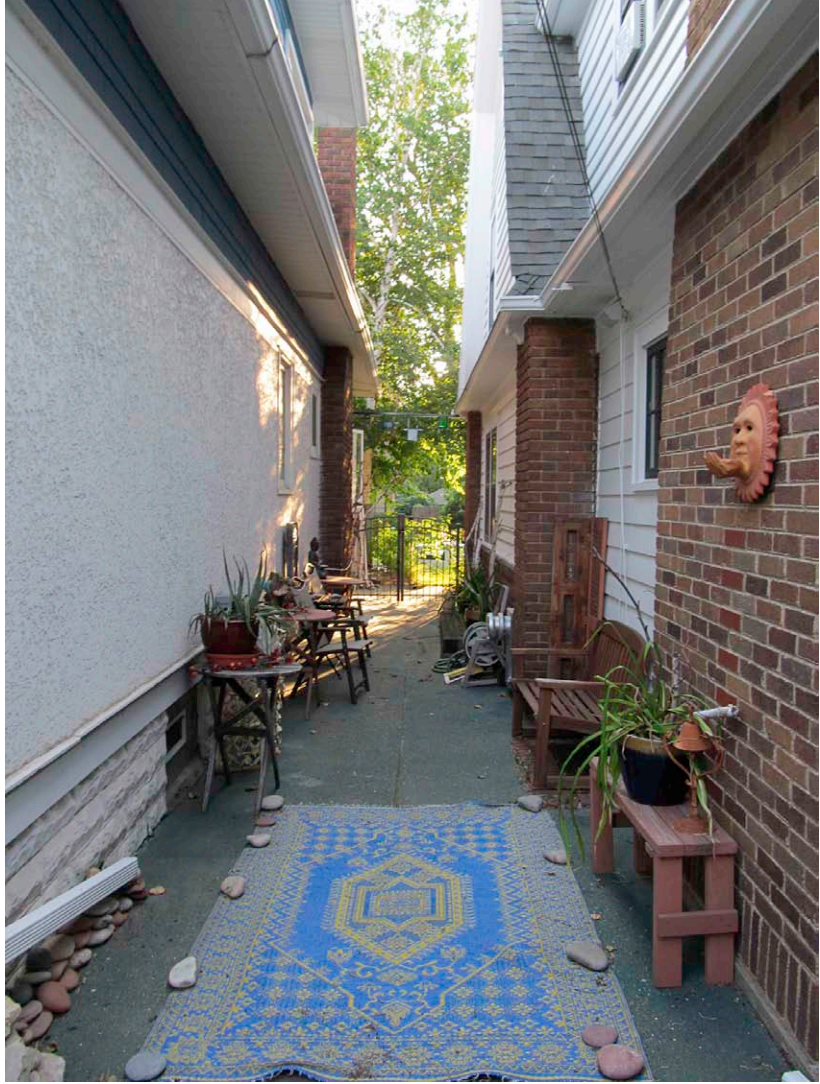
He told me – they were both musicians, they didn't garden – he said, if you ever take that tree down, don't tell me. Cause they planted that when they had a miscarriage. Probably twenty seven years ago now. So. It's a pretty nice tree, and so far, I've had it trimmed.

III OUTSIDE IN



I really like that the kids can just be out here – and I can be in the kitchen. That was one of the little things at our old house – that I couldn't keep an eye on them and work in the kitchen at the same time. I can be moving around here just to check on them every so often.

Juliana is a doctor who lives with her husband and two children under five. Her husband works part time and from home. They are relative newcomers to the block, moving to this part of South Minneapolis earlier that year – although when I asked about this, her identity as a 'newcomer,' it didn't resonate strongly with her. I thought it might after working with so many residents who have lived on the block for twenty years or more.



Though appearing to reside comfortably within the language of the majority, buildings may provide a medium within which a *minor* architecture might be situated.

The subtle aesthetic within these spaces will likely evade even the trained eye of an architectural photographer, though a canny journalist may be able to track the intricate relations of its existence, which are wrapped up in time.

A *minor* architecture is political because it is mobilized from below, from substrata that may not even register in the sanctioned operations of the profession. — Jill Stoner



Out here is *pure symbiosis* between house and yard, hand and glove, part and parcel, if you will.

I drive around on my bike, I look at houses and yards. I've always had a thing where – why don't people build *fences*? There are just all these yards.

Every yard should have their own fence. They should be wherever they should be in each yard. Every yard is different. Therefore, every fence should be different. And they should have gates on them. To me, all these expanses are just so incomplete! Why don't they have fences? They're so *easy* to make! Like this – these are just two by fours. I got all this wood free, that guy next door was just throwing it out. I said, I'll take it. I whacked it down, and I made these – you know, I took my saw, and made a little round thing on top. It's all free! People throw this stuff out.

I think just nobody has *time*. But there are people that do have the designer fences – they're crooked! Look at the top of this fence, it's real level. I'm picky about that kind of stuff. There's ugly fences and there's good looking fences.

To me, it's like – *complete* your house. It's like the house just stops. There's no intimacy, there's no effort, there's no entry, nothing you move through.

It should continue to the sidewalk, you know? Invite me in.

It changes everything. But. Well. Fences. A lot of people that have houses, they can barely make their mortgage payment the way things are now. So.

John showed me in great detail the fence he had just built, including a front gate requiring careful attention to level and swing. The slats to the right and left of the front gate, pictured, were modeled roughly on proportions from the Chartres Cathedral.



Ann: Bonnie's backyard is [pause] *Bonnie's backyard*. And then we got a dog, so we fenced the front yard, much to the annoyance of our neighbors to the north. Then, I don't remember what happened, but I pruned away the honeysuckle bushes, and then I spent a year sifting the dirt, getting the roots out, and then I started – I believe then I started sneaking hostas in. I thought if I just put in a few, she wouldn't notice. Every once in a while, I'd dig up another row of grass and put some plants in. Bonnie's very observant but not necessarily apt to comment.

Bonnie: The grass didn't do well out there because of the big trees, once the trees got big.

Ann: So I just kept encroaching on the grass. And you would be pleasantly surprised from time to time. Is this sounding familiar?
[laughing]

Bonnie: Yeah. But we don't *sit* in the front yard much. We occasionally do.

Ann: When there are drug deals on the block. The block club sends out emails periodically, and then, for a period of time, a lot more people are out in their front yards.

Bonnie: It's been fairly consistent. It's amazing. That if you know what you're looking for, you can see it happening. ... I think the drug dealers have learned to come to the good neighborhoods, as opposed to – they really don't cause any trouble.

Ann: It's not like they're knocking on the door.

Bonnie: It's usually affluent, young kids, because you know they don't have a job good enough to support that kind of car.



I love this porch. It's just a three season, but it's nice. Because it's so giving. These are the viburnum bushes, I have to keep them trimmed cause I don't want them to come too high.

I come out in the front in the night. Cause I don't wanna be seen – cause I have found out, people stop too much when I'm out here. And I don't want to be, you know, always disturbed. So I'll come out here, I find myself sitting out here in the nighttime more. But I still like the back. That pergola area, I just love that area. And I like to just sit there, and people come by and I can see things.

Like the environment of which it forms a part, the building
neither encloses the inhabitant, nor is it disclosed from
within. – Timothy Ingold



My dining room is draped to this sculpture garden. And it's purposefully done, and the curtains are pulled back and they're open all year round, so you can always see that. I'm going to take you inside to show you.

It's nice to see it from this vantage, isn't it? Just a little bit higher. In the winter, covered with snow – it's just amazing, just amazing.



The porch has really changed the way our family lives in the house. My husband works at home and has the basement, so that typically would be, in another house, a family room or maybe teenage kids would hang out there. I was very naïve and thought my teenage kids would want to hang with us, talk about naïve. [rolls eyes and sighs, with a smile]

So this has been a really good way for our kids to socialize with their adult friends, but not disrupt the house so much. And family, they come over and love it. I honestly don't know how we lived without it. It just opens it up. It's open from early morning, we'll have coffee and read the paper. I just love it. It was worth every penny.

We use it as late as we can. If it's a warm October, we'll be out there for sure. Once it starts snowing, raining and ickiness, it's basically storage.

If you saw a picture of a cabin we have up north, it looks very similar.

*Margaret's backyard, screened porch, and house in South
Minneapolis.*



Unlike the back, where Margaret experiences an escape, the fairly unusual main entrance located at the side of the house presents an area of friction with neighbors who recently arrived.

Having a side front door – I’ve always kind of liked it because it makes our inside front flow easier, you’re not coming into the middle of a room. Well, I didn’t like it initially, then I did like it, and now I don’t like it. We’ve got all this going on right here [pointing] – there’s an air conditioner condenser that’s right there, and – that’s our front door! So we’ll just use it less and less and less, which is unfortunate. You’re right next to someone else’s house, and you’re kind of hemmed in with whatever is going on with them.

When our kids were younger, on a Friday night I’d make popcorn and bring it out on the front stoop and kids in the neighborhood would smell it, you know, after playing night games, and they’d come over and we’d all eat popcorn and talk about their adventures.

So it’s been a great place to raise a family - oh! Look! There are some cardinals, on the wire.



But look at those trees, those lawns and those groves. To your eyes they situate themselves in a permanence, in a spatial simultaneity, in a coexistence. But look harder and longer. This simultaneity, up to a certain point, is only apparent: a surface, a spectacle. Go deeper, dig beneath the surface, listen attentively instead of simply looking, of reflecting the effects of a mirror.

You thus perceive that each plant, each tree, has its rhythm, made up of several: the trees, the flowers, the seeds and fruits, each have their time. The plum tree? The flowers were born in the spring, before the leaves, which will survive the fruits and fall late in the autumn and not all at once.

In place of a collection of fixed things, you will follow each *being*, each *body*, as having its own time above the whole. Each one therefore having its place, its rhythm, with its recent past, a foreseeable and a distant future. – Henri Lefebvre



Wanda's neighbors and friends, the "Alley Cats" as she calls them, in the garage across the alley. These three generations of fathers and sons, and friends, regularly help her with tasks around her place, as well as spend time in her yard – with her, or on their own. For instance, they regularly sit around her large outdoor fireplace that comfortably seats fifteen to twenty people.



Ursula: Show me your yard.

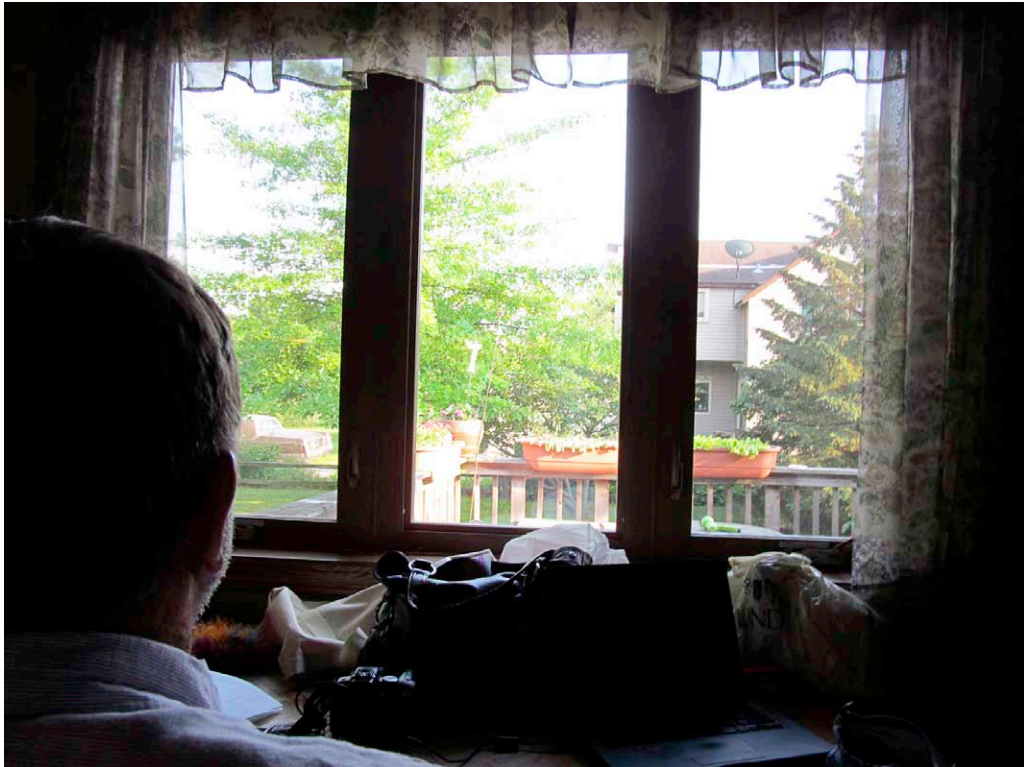
Marta: Where shall we start?



Nils' backdoor. He had one rain barrel set up in his yard.

The City of Minneapolis tracks the number of rain barrels as one of the sustainability metrics.

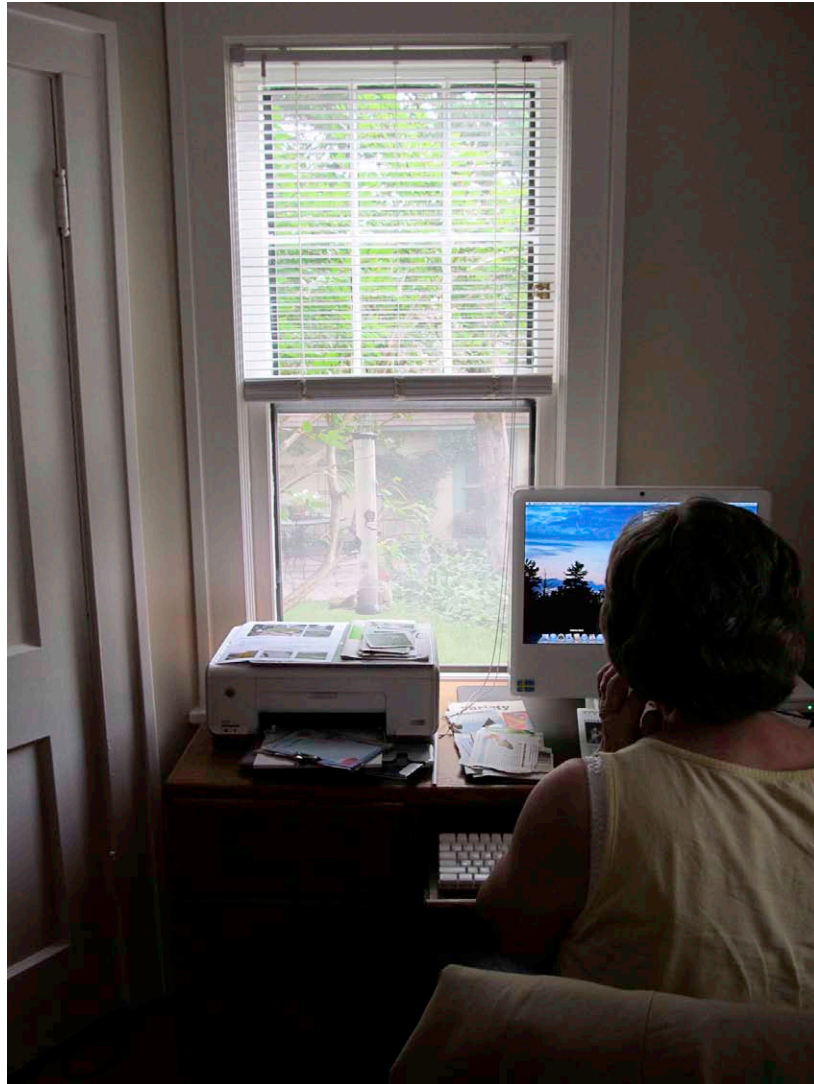
One of Nils' several cats looks on from just inside the door.



I wish I could give a clear account of exactly how one space in the house feels in relation to another. On a given day, I can do so, but the feelings alter from day to day; are not entirely consistent. From the outside, the state of weather and temperature will have much to do with it. From the inside, my own mood will affect things. – Roger Deakin



Morning coffee on the back porch in Northeast Minneapolis.



I wish I had more views to the back. But you know, your house is what it is. And I don't want my bedroom here, cause it's the smallest bedroom. So I have my study here. So when I'm in there I pull the curtains up and if I'm working at the desk, I can look out.

Lorraine's view from her desk frames a bird feeder hanging just outside the window.



I wanted to pull my car up to a backyard instead of into this driveway that goes on forever!

Sarah told me about the previous owner, a longtime resident of Northeast Minneapolis, and his pride at the “one hundred foot driveway.” She chuckled and groaned, but also appreciated that for him, this was likely a sign he had really arrived.

She and her partner built large planter boxes on wheels that can be reconfigured, though the boxes stay in the same place most of the time. In high summer and early fall, plants, many vegetables, almost entirely obscure views in and out of the yard, and form a zone around the door to the back porch.



I wish our house was more connected to the yard – there's one window on the landing of the stairs that looks out to the side and I sometimes stop just to look out whenever I can.

As the life of the inhabitants overflows into gardens and streets, fields and forests, so the world pours into the building, giving rise to characteristic echoes of reverberation and patterns of light and shade.

It is in these flows and counter-flows, winding through or amidst without beginning or end, and not as connected entities bounded either from within or without, that living beings are instantiated in the world. – Timothy Ingold



CHAPTER 6 THE COMMON LIFE OF YARDS

Nils lives on a corner lot, across the street in one direction from a large open area along major railroad tracks, and in the other a small community garden on a strip of land rented from a railroad company by the neighborhood organization. It's late summer, and we move slowly through Nils' carefully cultivated yard, as several trains rumble past. I ask him what it's like to live on this corner lot, and it turns out Nils' care extends beyond the boundaries of his own property in several surprising ways. He tells me,

It's a nice quiet area, so people walk a few blocks up to the garden, turn and walk back around into the neighborhood in a loop. Actually, I mow across the street. Although it's railroad property, people are out there, especially in spring, to play with the dogs, to throw sticks, and then summer comes and the grass grows too tall - so I started mowing so people could still be there.

Nils mows every week or two through the summer. He says, "It gets time consuming, hard to keep up with it. But it is fun to mow." A year later, Nils still mows these areas beyond his property boundaries, and he tells me one of his neighbors also started mowing. Nils' contributions to this informal common area in his corner of the neighborhood include also guerilla gardening. We stand in the area he mows, with his house across the street, near tiger lilies he transplanted from his front yard along a traffic barrier. Nils says, "People enjoy them, a nice bit of color as they walk past."

In this fragment from a series of interviews and yard visits, Nils' yard, the plants within it, and his everyday yard practices form nodal points in the making of a particular kind of urban commons. In Minneapolis, similar to many cities across the United States, front and back yards constitute a connective tissue that spans city blocks and neighborhoods. These spaces are largely privately-owned, but often make up contiguous

urban neighborhood landscapes which shape, and are shaped by, varying degrees of communal life. Yards afford particular possibilities for the production and maintenance of common urban experience and meaning. This chapter examines these everyday practices and meanings of the common lives of yards. The chapter draws on emerging literature on urban commons and commoning, as well as everyday rhythms and encounters in the more-than-human city. Together these perspectives provide further inflections on the entanglements between property, everyday practices, and experiencing common urban life. Beyond yards as spaces of private meaning and experience, yards also embody a variety of modes of living in common. Yards make possible one way to see urban commons in tangible terms, through which variations in spatialities and temporalities, as well as the role of nonhumans, add to emerging conceptions of urban commons. In and through yards, commons and commoning can be found in the interweaving of the logics of private property and commons.

Urban commons and commoning

Recent scholarship has begun to reimagine the commons beyond traditional meanings as collectively owned and managed natural resources primarily seen to provision raw materials for subsistence and livelihoods. These traditional commons such as forests, fisheries, or grazing land, continue to be central to the ways capitalism functions and expands, as enclosure and privatization enfold ever more land and resources towards commodity logics. An extensive body of literature has approached these commons from perspectives in natural resource management and ecology, development studies, political ecology, and economics. Here, commons are considered in

terms of discrete territories, livelihoods, and resource management, and as largely distinct from private property. By the mid-1990s, the idea of a “new commons” emerged within economic and cultural scholarship on commons, and has continued to develop.²¹⁴

Conceptualizations of these new commons share a more expansive view of how common resources might be constituted, emphasizing these resources as not only material, but also social and cultural – for example, commonly held scientific knowledge and intellectual property, or even shared culture itself.²¹⁵

Beyond both these material and immaterial imaginaries, commons have come to resonate politically as a means to resist enclosure and privatization, or what Paul Chatterton calls, “the excesses of contemporary capitalist encroachment and expansion.”²¹⁶ This formulation is multiple, and has been based on a wide variety of research and writing that shares the aim to see the political implications and potential of human social relationships forged through living in common, and in excess of the conceptual and material confines of advanced capitalism.²¹⁷ Furthermore, this valence on commons as political potential is built around observation and analysis of diverse sets of practices, through which potentially transformative socialities may be produced in conjunction with shared resources.²¹⁸ Consider, for example, Peter Linebaugh’s manifesto towards recognizing already existing commons all around us, drawn from his

²¹⁴ For review, see Hess, C. "Constructing a New Research Agenda for Cultural Commons." In *Cultural Commons: A New Perspective on the Production and Evolution of Cultures*, edited by E. Bertacchini, B. Giangiacomo, M. Marrelli, and W. Santagata. Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2012.

²¹⁵ Hess 2012

²¹⁶ Chatterton, P. "Seeking the Urban Common." *City* 14, no. 6 (2010): 625-628, 627.

²¹⁷ Hardt, M. and A. Negri. *Commonwealth*. Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 2009; De Angelis, M. *The Beginning of History: Value Struggles and Global Capital*. Pluto Press, London, 2007.

²¹⁸ Gibson-Graham, J.K. *A Postcapitalist Politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006.

historical account of Magna Carta.²¹⁹ Linebaugh traces past and present commons, and draws on these to argue for the political potential of commoning - practices to preserve, maintain, and establish commons of all varieties. The transformative power here, according to such recuperated interpretations of commons, arises out of commoners producing shared resources, and recognizing previously unseen means of provisioning human needs together, on different terms than logics of capital.

In each of these major veins of work on commons as shared territories and commons as more immaterial shared practices, an interest in particularly urban commons has emerged in the past decade or so.²²⁰ From their original rural contexts, traditional forms of commons which support livelihoods (such as common-property and common-pool resources) have increasingly been studied in urban contexts. These commons are most often considered in terms of biophysical resources such as water, waste, or urban forests. Scholars have focused on questions of territory, how and by whom these resources are accessed in and through public spaces, as well as the role of formal institutions and private interests in mediating and enclosing such resources in the city. For these commons, the urban dimension largely serves as a shift in setting, with concomitant particularities to do with urban governance and politics, uneven urban development, and often socioeconomic relations related to rural to urban migration. Within this emerging work on urban commons, however, the production and handling of meaning through people's more mundane lived experiences remains largely unexplored.

²¹⁹ Linebaugh, P. *The Magna Carta Manifesto: Liberties and Commons for All*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008.

²²⁰ Gidwani, V. and A. Baviskar, A. "Urban Commons" *Economic and Political Weekly*. 46, no. 50 (2011):42-43.

Gidwani and Baviskar write that “the distinctive public culture of a city is perhaps the most generative yet unnoticed of urban commons.”²²¹

At the same time, through emerging research on the new commons, immaterial and sociocultural dimensions of city life have increasingly been seen as shared common resources, providing a diversity of encounters and proximities by the very nature of urban environments as dense, uneven and variegated. The city is seen to give rise to urban commons as resistance in both sociopolitical and territorial registers. The city is seen, for example by Hardt and Negri, as a kind of crucible in which the most rampant forces of advanced capitalism pursue ever new frontiers within the socialities of urban daily life.²²² Urban environments also hold the potential for new forms of resistance and alternatives for communities of commoners to try to produce and maintain forms of meaningful common life. Chatterton highlights the importance of everyday sociality in urban commons, because the very nature of living together and experiencing the metropolis in common provides the basis for social relations beyond the confines of capitalist commodity logics.²²³ Resonant with this has emerged a growing body of activism around urban commons and commoning which looks for the spaces and practices which disrupt and complicate dominant privatizing tendencies. For example, Hodgkinson shows how contemporary British public housing has been subjected to processes of enclosure, arguing a new sense of an urban commons can be a foundation for political resistance.²²⁴ Community gardens have been another setting in which urban commons are understood

²²¹ Gidwani and Baviskar, 2011, 43.

²²² Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth*, 2009

²²³ Chatterton, “Seeking the Urban Common”, 2010

²²⁴ Hodgkinson, S. "The New *Urban* Enclosures." *City*. 16. no. 5 (2012): 500-518.

in territorial and social terms.²²⁵ These often echo and reinforce a sense of commons as shared territorial resources, focusing on commons as discrete public spaces in the city. Furthermore, emphasis remains on a sense of commons as distinct from private property, and the political stakes of commons are often implicitly drawn in opposition to private property. But these analyses also draw new attention to commoning practices, and it is this emphasis on which the current paper builds a more variegated understanding of such urban commons and commoning.

Rhythms, property and commoning in the more-than-human city

In addition to this focus on varying spatial forms of commons in the city, multiple temporalities constitute important dimensions of commons. While the question of long term sustainability has often been posed about commons, more invisible everyday temporalities may also be key to the making and maintenance of urban commons. Cities are constituted in large part through all the mundane, ordinary, and overlooked second natures of daily habits, activities and familiar places. Daily life is full of these routine repetitions, perpetuating sedimentation and the reproduction of certain social and political relations. At the same time, the potential for difference within these habitual repetitions animates calls for alternative and emergent modes of collective life.²²⁶ These temporalities of daily life have been described by Henri Lefebvre as rhythms, constituted through the relation of two major aspects: regulated time, often integral to and in the service of modern linear systems such as capitalist production; and cyclical rhythms as

²²⁵ Eizenberg, E. "Actually Existing Commons: Three Moments of Space of Community Gardens in New York City." *Antipode* 44, no. 3 (2012): 764-782.

²²⁶ Lefebvre, 2008 [1947, 1957, 1981]; de Certeau, 1984; Amin and Thrift, 2002; Goonewardena et al., 2008.

visceral, vital and lived in excess of narrowly imagined economic terms.²²⁷ These dimensions of rhythms constantly interact and interfere, with serious social, material and affective consequence. Geographers have engaged with this sense of rhythm,²²⁸ within a much longer trajectory of theorizing and studying relations between space and time.²²⁹

Just as temporalities are multiple and entwined, the logics of commons and commodities need not necessarily be distinct or mutually exclusive, and may even be dependent on one another in unexpected ways.²³⁰ How then might private property participate in urban commons? Privately-owned yards are inherently interstitial. For example, in spatial terms alone, they are situated between homes and also between home and street. This in-between nature of yards offers rich opportunities to further understand and complicate distinctions between private and public property in lived space,²³¹ as well as the variety of practices that constitutes everyday domestic and neighborhood life. There may be no more potent trope of private property in the United States than the single-family house, surrounded by a moat of uniform lawn – but this image obscures the “variety and inventive ways in which property actually get put to work in the world.”²³² Tied up as they are with home ownership, yards also provide insights into how the deep and lasting inequities based on race, gender, and class in US cities shape the possibilities and constraints of accessing and bounding urban commons, and how and for whom commons might come to be meaningful. If we are to consider the urban commons within

²²⁷ Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis*, 2004.

²²⁸ Edensor, T. "Introduction: Thinking about Rhythm and Space." In *Geographies of Rhythm: Nature, Place, Mobilities and Bodies*, edited by T. Edensor. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010.

²²⁹ May, J. and N. Thrift, eds. *TimeSpace: Geographies of Temporality*. New York: Routledge, 2001.

²³⁰ Gidwani and Baviskar, 2011

²³¹ Blomley, N. "Flowers In the Bathtub: Boundary Crossings at the Public-Private Divide." *Geoforum*, 36(2005a): 281-296.

²³² Blomley, N. "Remember Property?" *Progress in Human Geography*. 29, no.2 (2005b):125-127.

and amongst the variety of property regimes and practices in the city, yards offer multiple ways to see how people cultivate urban commons. These commons – as all do – entail variegated communities, boundaries and points of access.

Everyday urban inhabitation may seem to be dominated by regulated time and routines of work, productivity, profit, and property. But beneath the surface pulse other resonant and dissonant rhythms – affective, embodied, nonhuman. Recent geographical perspectives on person-plant encounters have followed the broader shift towards rethinking urban environments in terms of more-than-human organisms drawn from theoretical approaches such as actor-network theory, hybridity, political ecology, and an interest in reinvesting materiality with enchantment.²³³ Person-plant relationships have been understood in terms of complex embodied assemblages, often emphasizing the moment of encounter between person and plant, as well as the ways networks can be reimagined to include actants such as nonhuman plants.²³⁴ Plants have long been important to society in a variety of ways – religious, symbolic, social, biology, ecological, economic, and central to the construction of meaning in place.²³⁵ These experiential dimensions to person-plant encounters dovetail with a broader renewed interest in a critical humanism that takes as a starting point embodied experiences.²³⁶ In the discussion below, this paper draws from these multiple and fluctuating emphases on more-than-human urban environments the need for an attentiveness to human experience in and through this vibrant matter. It is in this spirit of what anthropologist Kathleen Stewart calls “attunement”, or an attentiveness to affective atmospheres – the rhythms

²³³ For review, see Braun 2005; Heynen 2014.

²³⁴ Hinchings 2003; Robbins 2007; Latour, B. *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. Oxford University Press, New York, 2007.

²³⁵ Jones, P. and P. Cloke, P. *Tree Cultures*. Berg Press, New York, 2003; Head and Muir 2007.

²³⁶ Simonsen, “In Quest of a New Humanism”, 2012.

and labors of “becoming sentient in common”²³⁷ – that this paper looks for urban commons within the constraints of urban experiences.

Yards and urban commoning

Drawing on research with urban inhabitants living with yards, this paper asks three central questions. First, emphasis in the literature remains largely on the study of urban commons as public territory, or as immaterial and abstract sociopolitical connections. What can we add to understandings of commons by looking at lived experiences with commoning practices which may occur in and through privately owned property such as residential yards? Second, how do yards in particular shape possible commoning practices? And how do these practices in turn shape yards and their meanings for residents? Yards can be understood as a complex assemblage of human and nonhuman relations. Here the role of plants, gardening, and cultivation is clearly central. Yard configurations also set up particular and multiple spatial scales and rhythms which become meaningful to people in their everyday lives. Third, what do yards as commons provision for people (and for whom)? How does this contribute further valence to understandings of commons, especially when looking for commons in some of the most familiar urban and suburban landscapes? Taken together, yards offer a lens into complex and diverse urban worlds already being produced, cultivated, and adapted – in part through commoning practices.

The paper is based on ethnographic fieldwork in three study areas across diverse Minneapolis, MN neighborhoods, conducted by the author from 2008-2012.

²³⁷ Stewart, “Atmospheric Attunements”, 2011, 445.

Minneapolis' residential landscapes developed as a network of streetcar suburbs in the 1910s and 1920s, with rectilinear streets and alleys, and dominated by lots with single family house, yard, and garage. Within this landscape, three neighborhoods were selected in order to capture a range of spatial and socioeconomic characteristics. These include a primarily affluent, older and white neighborhood (South Minneapolis); a part of the city shaped by railroads and industry which was historically a white working class area, now diversifying with new immigrant arrivals, younger families, and some art-driven gentrification (Northeast Minneapolis); and a part of the city originally developed for affluent residents during the Great Depression, which subsequently was inhabited by mainly well to do Jewish immigrants, then upper middle class African American residents, and which has borne the brunt of urban disinvestment, white flight, and falling property values (North Minneapolis). Study areas were each comprised of about 10 adjacent blocks in these three distinct parts of the city. The paper draws on fieldwork primarily based on in-depth interviews and yard visits with approximately 45 households. Yards varied across these broader neighborhood distinctions. For example, the most affluent area, South Minneapolis, included more yards with 'shaggy' plantings of native species. But variations within the micro-scales of immediate adjacencies and nearby proximities between yards at the scale of a block or two make the most significant impact in the ways people understand their yards.

This paper's central claim is that yards and the everyday practices which take place in and through them constitute one kind of nodal point in the making of urban commons. In so doing, logics of private property and logics of commoning become interwoven. Yards are some of the most iconic forms of individual and private property

in American urban and suburban landscapes, and yet what I argue in this paper is that they also function for the people who live with them in a variety of ways as commons, specifically as shared territories and as sets of shared practices. Furthermore, it is through affective and embodied encounters with yards as diverse assemblages of organisms and materials, as well as lived rhythms, that yards become meaningful to people. Yards add up to something more than the sum of their parts, into meaningful landscapes beyond individual property boundaries.

The chapter is organized around two main sections. First, informally shared yards highlight how heterogeneous urban commons are maintained and experienced by residents, and the ways yards can be understood to participate in commons as shared territories. Second, yards can be understood as facilitating commoning by providing places for shared practices and meanings to emerge through plant sharing and exchange. Neighbors routinely share and exchange particular varieties of plants – planting and cultivating commons distributed across property distinctions and made possible through the plant tissues themselves. Across these cases, surprising diversity emerges in how common experience is forged and cultivated, the roles of plants and gardens within these experiences, and the rhythms of living in common.

Living in Common

Yards as shared territories

Urban commons are made in many ways beyond formally organized publicly owned territories, and beyond the needs for livelihoods. In this section, I present

examples illustrating a range of forms through which commons and yards are co-constituted. There are lasting biophysical and social links between private individual yards with the common life of a city block or neighborhood landscape. I discuss encounters from fieldwork in which urban inhabitants informally and collectively cultivate common spaces in neighborhood landscapes in a variety of ways. In this section, the role of yards within commons as shared territories can be seen in terms of scale, as well as the context of social and natural resources.

Yards in common – for some

The scale at which urban commons are bounded and experienced matters. In the following case there is a double nature to cultivating common spaces. In Robert's and his adjoining neighbors' yards, there are efforts to share three yards. At one scale, this backyard commons opens up conventional logics of domestic private property ownership and territory. But at another, these are further reinforced. This small shift in scalar resolution of urban commons presents multiple ways to see how commons are bounded and experienced differently. Robert lives with his wife, both in their 40s, white professionals, and their five year old daughter. Two neighboring families also have five year old children, and these three families live in adjacent lots and have practiced their yards communally for several years. They have made openings in fences and new paths across property boundaries, and they regularly share meals, childcare, and like to just spend time together. At the same time, decisions about whom is welcome and participates in these shared yards is significantly informed by socioeconomic differences, marked

spatially by the back alley. It is clear that bubbling through Robert's experiences with his yard are tensions about how to negotiate the setting up of these boundaries.

After a long yard visit with Robert, it turns out he is in the midst of a decision to build a short length of fence across the back of his yard, near the vegetable garden. In a round about way, he ascribes the differences between the people on his side of the block and across the alley as a central part of this decision. He seems conflicted about how to describe the differences he experiences across the block when he says, "On this side of the block, we all know each other. We all have professional-type jobs. That side of the block is very different. That side has section 8 housing, there's a woman who fosters kids, and the kids are fine, you know, but there are a lot of unsupervised kids running around." Robert was choosing his words carefully and continued, "We don't have a squabble with them, but they have a tendency to run through the yard, and if I put in a fence that would be the main reason. It's not really ideal to have kids trampling my plants." He then paused and added more easily,

And I don't know, once in a while the neighbors want to me to do things, certain things that they want to see in my yard. So I'll go ahead and do it, if for no other reason than they might say, "Wouldn't it be great if you could do this?" and so I say, "Okay, sure, why not?"

Robert moves back and forth between explaining the building of this fence in terms of plants and other material features of the yard, to his perceptions of class distinctions between the two sides of his block. Robert, with his neighbors, forges new openings and possibilities with adjacent yards, but only in certain directions: yards in common – for some. Here, private property logics expand in certain directions, along with the spatial configurations of the shared yards. Although significantly stretched with regards to

sharing usually quite intimate spaces with what were once relative strangers, Robert and his neighbors still fortify the boundaries of their shared yards, and the shared yards serve largely similar functions to conventional individual yards. This points to the ways commons are always bounded – spatially and socially, and they are constituted of, and by, particular communities of commoners. This also shows how commons articulate with property logics at multiple scales. Shared yards might serve as a sort of commons in significant ways to those involved, but when examined within a broader context – in this case, the scale of a city block – the way the shared yards are experienced and maintained reinforces more conventional and dominant private property regimes and related social relations.

Front yard commons

Commons are always in conversation with their surroundings. In a different way from Robert's shared yards, the following case of Tim's front yard forms a collectively cultivated commons shaped by the resource constraints along the rest of the block, in conjunction with social connections between neighbors. Tim's front yard is a thick jumble of plants, reused metal fencing and supports, and wire sculptures. Vegetables grow in and amongst the waist high tangle. Walking north along the block, you feel the difference of moving from the more prevalent grassy front lawns and boulevards, through two shaggy green edges that brush past your legs.



Figure 18. Tim's front yard vegetable garden, collectively cultivated with six or so neighbors on his block. The yard stands out amongst the rest of the front yards along the block. Photo by author, Summer 2012.

Through Tim's striking front yard circulate social relations with his neighbors. He and six or so neighbors on his block have cultivated an informal community garden here. This collective use of front yard space produces food, as well as less tangible but meaningful encounters and habits.

Contrary to many urban gardening projects, Tim's front yard garden emerged as an informal community space with little forethought or intentional planning. He's nonchalant when describing how the front yard community garden emerged,

Five or six years ago, I planted squash and pumpkins in the front yard, as a way to try to limit the mowing. And then I guess it was four years ago, when I was looking out there in the springtime and it was maybe April, and a couple of my neighbors said, 'If you're gonna plant this, why don't we make this a community garden

idea?’ And then not even an hour later we had six people with shovels digging the whole thing up. Dig it up!

The garden has no formal or individual plots – it’s just one garden and people take what’s available when they want it. Tim says, “It’s not like a lot of community gardens are, where everybody gets your own fifteen square feet. It’s more like, what do we want to plant, what do we want to grow, and where is the best place for it to grow?” Basic decisions about what to plant happen all together early in spring, and then the six or seven other gardeners bring seedlings and plants. One involved neighbor works at a nursery and has significant gardening experience. Another built fencing that serves as a trellis system. The tasks of cultivation and maintenance over time are generally loosely shared. Tim pays for water, and so the others involved provide more seeds and seedlings, as well as materials such as tomato cages.

The ways Tim practices his property are important to his own sense of self and how he positions himself in terms of wider social expectations. He jokes about being the “baron landholder” with his neighbors as serfs working the land. His approach to his property is unconventional and relatively open to what might emerge. “When I say to people, ‘Well, why wouldn’t you turn it into a community space?’ they say – ‘Why do that? You can do that?!’ and I’m like, sure, why not – property ownership is a bit fleeting anyhow, and many cultures don’t have that same view of property anyway.” Later, he tells me he thinks he just has “more tolerance for people just wandering in, willy nilly.” A trampoline in the back yard intensifies this communal nature of Tim’s property, and he attributes much of the use of his trampoline by neighborhood kids as reflecting his block’s relatively far proximity to neighborhood parks.

Like many decisions about planting vegetables in fairly dense urban areas, enough sunlight and accessible terrain can determine a lot about where and how gardens are made and maintained. These resources are in high demand along Tim's block. When I asked how the community garden got started, he explained it in terms of natural resource constraints along the block. He said, "My yard is the only one with late afternoon sun. The sun is so intense, it just bakes the house. On this side of the street everyone north of me has trees, everybody south of me has a hill, so I'm really the only one with the ability to do this." Down the block, Kenneth - a stay at home father of two kids under ten who is also an experienced gardener - told me that it is fun to work the nearby garden with his kids. "We go down there, check out how things are, pick what might be ready. In the spring, I help with preparing the soil," Kenneth modestly said. Many people on the block talked about the ways Kenneth had helped them with tasks around their yards. Others referred to Tim's yard as a "community garden", curious if I'd spoken with him. I was surprised to hear no negative assessments. In fact, neighbors called it out as an interesting feature of the neighborhood, something about which they seemed not just tolerant, but positive.

Tim's account of his front yard garden offers a self-effacing and action-oriented reimagining of the possibilities of what a front yard might be - materially and socially. The loose way his yard was originally transformed into a collective space, and the way each season it has been planted in response to the availability of natural resources such as sunlight and topography speaks to the ways material conditions shape capacities of urban commons. But beyond the sheer material features of the front yard, there is clearly a strong sense on the part of neighbors of satisfaction and enjoyment with one another.

Tim's front yard provides a space and time for neighbors to work together, respond to biophysical conditions along the block and throughout the changing seasons, and cultivate an unusual use of a front yard – important to a sense of self and meaning in place.

Cultivating common practices

The above section of the paper explores the practices of collectively cultivated commons as shared territories, and the common experiences these enable. In this next section, I show how through the everyday practices and labors of plant sharing and trading, commons can be forged in and amongst individual yards through the tissues and biophysical capacities of plants themselves. In particular, certain perennial varieties persist and thrive in a range of environments (and without much human involvement), which enables especially working class areas of the city to cultivate and foster a particular kind of common life amongst yards. Exchange is seen as meaningful here as a way to provision yards with plants considered appropriate in terms of aesthetic taste and biophysical climate, and as a recognition of home ownership and inhabitation. These practices of plant exchange and sharing also can be understood as an exchange of socially meaningful matter, responsive to common cultivation, seasonal rhythms, and skillful experience. Such exchanges provision meaning within the neighborhood landscape, and open up possibilities for relationships between more and less experienced and skilled gardeners.

Tiger lilies and hostas are the two varieties of plants that came up again and again, across all neighborhoods. Both are known for their ability to thrive under resource

constraints. Tiger lilies, or orange day lilies, are almost indestructible, able to grow and thrive even in very dry, sunny, and hot conditions. Hostas thrive in shady areas, under heavy tree or shrub canopies. In both cases, the plants tend to survive and spread fairly well on their own. People talked about them together – tiger lilies for sunny areas, and hostas for shady areas. For most participants, often the implication is that these perennials are necessary for challenging areas of the yard, or good “starter” plants for those less interested or experienced at gardening. Except for a few enthusiasts with a wide array of specialized varieties, the sense of these plants by residents across different neighborhoods and degree of gardening skill is a kind of obligatory acceptance of their sturdiness, necessity, and role in social exchanges between neighbors and friends.

In addition to the resigned sense of lilies and hostas as robust and necessary, some participants articulated class, history, and generational changes in garden ideals as some of the ways these particular plants are understood. Different plants enable different relations, and are marked by class distinctions. For Dan, a longtime resident of Northeast Minneapolis, tiger lilies and hostas are shot through with markers of class and neighborhood identity. This part of Minneapolis is a historically white working class area in which major industries such as rail road yards and manufacturing are situated and continue to shape the physical and social dynamics of the area. When I first spoke with him about my research, Dan was fixing his kids’ bikes in the garage on a Saturday afternoon. He teased me a bit when he matter of factly said, “Well, I’m pretty blue collar about my yard – yep, it’s tiger lilies and hostas for me.” He is active on the neighborhood

organization board. At the time, Dan was trying to engage residents in the area to install rain gardens²³⁸ in their yards in conjunction with a metro-wide nonprofit organization:

In other parts of the city, you say “rain garden” and 50 people show up spontaneously. Up here, it’s different. It takes longer for ideas to catch on. We’ve got mostly yards with just grass, maybe some hostas. But hopefully one by one, we’ll have something more unique.

Dan expresses both pride in the neighborhood, and a sense of how outsiders might see plant choices in the neighborhood, nested within an awareness of broader urban geographies.

Becoming established: new homeownership and gardening skills

Although perennial plant sharing is practiced throughout all three study neighborhoods, there is a stronger sense of commitment and articulation of this kind of exchange as a philosophy in the two neighborhoods that are more working class: Northeast Minneapolis and North Minneapolis. The most common refrain I heard from longtime residents and new homeowners in these areas is that practices of sharing perennial plants can be a means to help newcomers get established in their yards precisely at the moment they might have little extra cash or gardening knowledge. In Northeast Minneapolis, Jack has been actively trying to trade perennials to replace the tiger lilies and hostas he inherited when he bought his first house. Jack is a relative newcomer in his Northeast Minneapolis neighborhood, having lived there about 8 years. He sees nearby yards as sites for swapping and sharing plants, as well as a connection

²³⁸ Rain gardens usually take the form of a shallow depression planted with a variety of water-loving plants, and are designed to capture rain water from downspouts or impervious surfaces such as driveways and sidewalks. Ideally, these plants slow and divert storm water runoff, keeping the flows of water from polluting storm sewer systems.

between his plants and a sense of position within the broader urban area. He is a self-employed 42 year old man, and discusses the role of plants and sharing perennials within the context of first time home ownership and neighborhood:

It was my first house and my first yard – I didn't really know what to do. You get kind of overwhelmed, you don't know what to do first. So I just let all the weeds grow up and then by the second summer I was here, I decided I want to change this out and do some work. ... I learned a ton from my friend Susan, and she taught some other dudes who live around here, too. She sort of paid it forward, so then I thought well I should pay it forward, so – that was where the plant exchange and working with some of the ladies of the neighborhood came from.

For Jack, these “neighbor ladies” welcomed him into the fold of neighborhood gardening, and now also provide a means through which he can translate these skills and experiences to “other dudes” by sharing his plants, that might be overwhelmed by their home ownership experience. He sees himself connecting with other men in the area, as he shares his own plants and expertise with them. He sees his position as a single male gardener as fairly unique, and one with the potential to inspire and educate other men like himself to take up gardening. Jack talks about sharing plants in terms of his own evolving expertise as a gardener enabled by the help of several “neighbor ladies” and their informal networks of plant sharing and exchange.

Sharing perennials for experienced gardeners is seen as a way to pass along unwanted plants to others. Often plants from others are not considered very desirable in return unless they are unusual or known. As Jesse showed me around his front yard, he pointed to a newly planted area with several unusual sedums and ground covers. He said, “This was literally all tiger lilies when I got here and I was just on a mission to get rid of them. I put some out on the boulevard with a FREE sign, and gave the others away to some friends a few blocks away.” For Jack, common tiger lilies and hostas conjure up

images of yards counter to a more progressive, newer style of gardening to which he aspires.

I totally appreciate them for what they are, they're great for certain shady and sunny spots. But I usually find plants from the neighbor ladies. We do a casual plant trade, and I say yes cause they're almost always pretty unique plants. And then in turn, if they want anything I have, I'll split that up, or if they want some vegetables from my garden, I'll share them.

Sharing plants entails anxieties and uncertainties about the trustworthiness and degree of interest of a given plant, especially for more seasoned gardeners. One of the labors of commoning through plant exchanges and sharing, especially on the part of skilled and experienced gardeners, is a quelling of this anxiety through loose but sustained ties between people, yards, and plants. Barb remembers her experience forty years ago when she talks about her broader aversion to buying plants for her yard:

Almost everything you see here is stuff we've traded, so I've not bought things... We didn't have any money when we first moved in! We were busy making the inside of the house livable, and with the kids and all the expenses of a young family. I tell people, You don't have to make a big investment, because you can trade with people and get things that work in their yard. ... So everything in this yard came from someplace else, came from somebody else, which, as I said, is kind of my philosophy.

Barb folds geographies at several scales within this commitment to plant exchange and sharing, rather than cash investment: the micro-geographies of adjacent and nearby yards, and "inner city" skills and qualities as embodied in the hardiness of certain plants. Barb is an accomplished gardener, and currently has been helping with two relatives' yards in other parts of the metro area, each she considers to be relative "blank slates". She told me what she has told them as they get started trying to decide on plant varieties and what

they like: “We can get things that grow in neighbors’ yards. If it works in their yard and it’s two blocks away, it’s gonna work in your yard!” She laughs and says,

The plants are gonna have to survive – and frankly, that’s my philosophy, too – I say, we’re an inner city garden with inner city values, so if you’re gonna make it, you have to really get out there and scrap and duke it out, and say, ‘Okay, I’m here!’ So the garden has to be that way, too.

Barb’s understandings of a hands off gardening style resonate with her understanding of her place in the broader urban landscape.

Knowing nearby yards

Along Barb’s block in North Minneapolis, neighbors share a deep and situated knowledge of one another’s yards and plants, shaped over decades. This makes for an exception to some of the ambivalence or uncertainty about shared plants. Barb told me,

Well, we’ve almost all been here for 40 years, we’ve lived here for a long time, so we kind of know what everybody else’s yard is like, who has what and what we can share. Like when Kay was moving a lot of her stuff to the community garden at the end of the block, we’d all say, “Okay, when you get to that one, I want that one!” So people would kind of know.

About thirty years ago, vocal residents approached the city, and this small park was built from a large open intersection, in the hopes it would act as a traffic diverter, to slow cars that sped through stop signs. A dedicated handful of some of these same people still living on the block have been tending and shaping the space over time, and now cultivate several small gardens there. This area within North Minneapolis has relatively large homes and lots, first developed in the 1920s, and subsequently inhabited by waves of upwardly mobile Jewish residents, then primarily middle class African Americans from the 1960s to the present. The park illustrates some of the ways micro-geographic

proximities and adjacencies come to matter in an urban commons through material and practiced linkages with privately-owned spaces, as well as the multiple ways these commoning practices are experienced by those involved. Involvement in the garden varies – as a way to make something for others in the area, as a means to fortify and reform boundaries and buffers, as well as a space for creative expressions and enjoyment of the embodied practices of gardening.

This shared public space highlights the ways rhythm and time is experienced through commoning practices entwined with private yards. There are no formally assigned plots in contrast to many other community gardens – the vegetable area is a free for all, with whomever is interested planting what they like.



Figure 19. Barb shows me the vegetable bed in the park-garden. Neighbors involved plant their own vegetables without much coordination. When this photo was taken, about half the bed was cultivated. Photo by author, Summer 2012.

There are waves of interest and involvement in the garden that come and go, from year to year and season to season. Although largely informal, each year the block club has a meeting and those who are interested get together to talk about plans for the park/garden. Barb told me her philosophy about these community projects is that “the right people always show up,” and explained that some people’s interest and ability to be involved has waxed and waned over the years. As those whom are most engaged in the garden get older, these shifting capacities for doing this sort of ‘community work’ may become more and more significant in the maintenance and continual reinvention of the park. Ann, a semi-retired white woman who lives seven houses away, told me,

You know, much of it depends on the mood. Who’s doing what, what’s going on in their lives. It’s all volunteer, so it’s when people have an interest and a concern. One year someone was going to put in a great garden, put in all kinds of rocks for edging, and then I guess her interest just waned.

The residents most involved are veterans of a variety of community projects, initiatives, and programs – and all share a sense drawn from these experiences that the less something depends on one or two key people, the more sustainable it would be. Although at the moment, they each are involved closely with the gardens and contribute a lot, the ideal in the way they talked about such communal efforts is to have a diffused sense of obligation and responsibility. This is a concern, as the primary people involved in the community garden are over sixty, and semi-retired. The physical capacities to keep up with the gardening tasks will increasingly inform how and how often these inhabitants are able to cultivate the community garden, in addition to their own yards. At the same

time, their years of experience enable a kind of ease and skill that shapes and responds to the plants and space. Commoning entails embodied labors, and abilities of commoners to engage with these changes as communities age.

The commons of the park-garden is linked materially and socially with nearby residents' yards, through the practices of neighbors moving plants. The park-garden has become a repository for unwanted plants – a destination to share plants that people may be phasing out of their own yards and gardens. Here, the excesses of cultivated private yards become the plants which shape the commons. Ann has made major additions of perennial plants to the park in the process of reworking her front yard gardens the past two seasons.



Figure 20. View of Eve's house and front yard, bordering the park-garden commons. Plants transplanted from Ann's front yard can be seen in the foreground to the right. Photo by author,

Summer 2012.

This transplantation and the subsequent necessary cultivation – weeding and watering – has become embedded in Ann’s routines. She wanders down to the garden early in the mornings to weed. “There are some people who can’t stand weeding, and this – I can spend hours here, weeding,” Ann bent over to pull at creeping charlie plants. She continued weeding, “Sometimes we end up meeting here. And someone will be weeding, and someone else will come down, and we have a little coffee klatch.” Her hands grab at the low plants. “Or the other morning, I was here at seven, and our neighbor was walking to church – so we had a morning conversation.”

The sense of time people experience being in the garden is part of a rhythm – a daily routine, but also a temporality outside of regulated time. What I later learned is that Ann has also done more with the community garden in recent years as a way to cope with her husband’s faltering health – it has become a destination close by, but also a place she can lose herself in the physical motions of being outside, digging, weeding, and watering, as well as making social connections. The garden serves a similar function for Jean and the others. She regularly waters the gardens, unfurling a long hose early most mornings from her yard along the sidewalk to the community garden. Ann told me, “A lot of us, we wander over in the mornings, and start weeding or doing whatever, and suddenly it’s two in the afternoon and people are wondering where we are!” This common rhythm of the day resonates with longer life rhythms of retirement and time away from paid work within the lives of these neighbors. Further, there is the shared sense of time outside of time. All of this resonates further still with the plants’ own rhythms of growth and change

over the seasons. These nested resonances enable the cultivation of this common space and its shared sense of meaning to those involved.

Experiences and labors of commons vary, even amongst the commoners most involved in commons' production and cultivation. What labors for Barb and Ann may be more communitarian in nature, for another neighbor they are a way to tame and keep at bay the wild edges of gardens interfering with her own yard. Eve, a newer resident of about five years, has transformed her front yard into a formal garden, and she devotes hours to creating and maintaining elaborate blooming perennials, topiary hedges, and ornamental trees. She became involved in working on the community garden primarily because an adjacent and shaggy wildflower garden infiltrated her yard with seedlings, wreaking havoc on her meticulous gardens. Eve's experience is a mix of frustration with others not following through on their visions, and a resistance to loose or unplanned gardens that complicate the ability of city workers to mow the grass. At the same time, she also clearly enjoys the aesthetic challenges of working up a "new" space. She was careful with her words when she told me about how she first got involved and her activity reworking the garden area closest to her house,

It was all outta control and all these seeds are blowing all over the garden. And it's a problem because, you know, people want things, but they don't really want to do the work. Or they're not able to. So - because this is so close to my house, how can I, um, harmonize with what's going on here. And have it be less maintenance, too.

She went on to describe the plants she is putting in - some purchased with the neighborhood funds, some transplanted from her yard as a means for aesthetic continuity. Maintenance and legibility are major concerns for Eve and her take on the community gardens:

I told my neighbors, I'm sorry, but that community garden is gonna have to take care of itself, I have enough going on. And this new area is gonna be really beautiful, and it's gonna take not that much maintenance, and then the rest of the community is gonna have to figure out what they're gonna do with these spaces. Now, Kay has done a lovely little thing here [pointing], but then she has to come in and weed it, and do all that. So I don't really know exactly how long that will happen. I think the design of the garden has been really disturbed by all this busyness. ... There's not a clear delineation around some of the planted areas for someone from the city who's coming in with a riding mower and mowing the grass in ten minutes.

In this commons, cultivation practices are varied, multiple, and shifting, and centrally tied to the broader contexts of commoners' lives. Eve's comments also rests on the position of the park within the broader institutional context. The position of the park within larger formal institutions is important in the way people feel about these contributions of time and effort they make. It doesn't define how they see the potential of the park, but recognition does strengthen the sense that it is not an individually-driven project, and that it might survive over time. Each year the block club has received a small grant from the neighborhood organization,²³⁹ and Barb told me, "We get little bits of money that comes along. So you don't have to spend your own money, you feel like you're part of a system and the system is supporting it." Here, commons articulate with existing institutions, in a fairly minimal monetary amount (about \$500), but is a meaningful recognition to those directly involved.

Plants are the primary means through which these labors of cultivating common practices take shape and come together – through plant bodies as they move and are

²³⁹ These grants are about \$500. The City of Minneapolis enacted an innovative and unique program in 1990, the Neighborhood Revitalization Program (NRP). This channeled funds more directly to neighborhood organizations, to be allotted to public services and projects identified as priorities by those neighborhood organizations with community involvement. It was seen as a novel way to do "planning from below." For background and further reading, see Martin, J. and P. Pentel, P. "What the Neighbors Want: The Neighborhood Revitalization Program's First Decade." *Journal of the American Planning Association* 68, no. 4 (2002):435-449.

moved from place to place, as well as how their material characteristics are understood and made meaningful. All of this sharing and trading takes place within a broader field of high plant mobilities within and between yards. This might be somewhat surprising to non-gardeners, as plants are so often seen as stationary in space, but again and again, participants who were active gardeners told me about moving plants, often in great detail – around their own yards, and through the origin stories of particular plants from friends, neighbors, or found for free. In addition, the garden/park calls attention to the minor but important role of state recognition, and the legibility of communally produced green space. For passers by, the small park is a place through which to walk on the way to other places, maybe to stop and sit, to chat. All of these neighborly activities take place there on a regular basis. As the older generation instrumental in the creation and cultivation of the park/gardens moves on, newer residents may understand it less as a commons produced and maintained through collective action, and more as a public park. This may be the end of the kinds of commoning practices currently at work in this space, or perhaps the potential for new forms to take shape.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown some of the heterogeneous ways yards and the everyday practices which take place in and through these spaces constitute one kind of nodal point in the making of urban commons. In the cases above, everyday practices in residential yards make possible commoning through shared territories, and also shared cultivation practices. In this chapter, I argue seeing the diversity of yards and yard practices enables us to see logics of private property interwoven with logics of commons and commoning.

Yards may not be singularly one or the other of these logics – they enable one another in lived experiences. By looking for the common life within the lives of urban yards, and finding a diverse range of spaces and practices, the chapter adds to emerging conversations about the nature of urban commons and commoning. More broadly, the chapter enriches how we think urban geographies by making legible some of the diverse practices and experiences in these often overlooked yard spaces, as well as the ways plants in particular shape and are shaped by social relations at several scales.

Private property in these cases sets up possibilities for common life, but also constrains it. People have the potential to form meaningful connections across property boundaries in and through yards, but access to these urban landscapes is primarily limited by home ownership. Yards do provide the potential to reimagine urban landscapes, neighborhoods, and everyday encounters. But, as with any commons, this is a textured terrain of openings and closures. Micro-geographies of adjacency and proximity between commonly cultivated spaces and individual yards reveals an interconnectedness that crosses legal categories – through plant tissues and bodies, and also through everyday commoning practices and rhythms. These findings expand conceptions of urban commons focused on commons as discrete and publicly-owned physical territories, towards more spatially dispersed and practice-oriented meanings of commons. Furthermore, the paper contributes to complicating dominant notions of property as singularly private or territorial.²⁴⁰ In the above cases, the ways people live with their own and others' yards over time involves a variety of practices and understandings of property. Looking for commoning in and across existing yard spaces and practices might

²⁴⁰ Blomley 2005b

enable seeing concrete foundations for the kinds of sociopolitical transformations implicit in much of the literature about urban commons.

Urban commons are shaped here by the biophysical capacities of plants, as well as the labors these require from commoners. Commons circulate. These can be caught up in the bodies and tissues of particular plants, and be diffused across property boundaries. This makes possible, and also invites, certain social relations of exchange, shared skillfulness, and embodied labors. It is not only that socionatural relations take shape through material worlds, which so much recent geographical work on more-than-human urban environments has emphasized. The yards discussed above show how the meanings these relations come to embody are also produced and maintained through lived experiences in multiple temporal registers. The common endeavors of cultivation, maintenance, and care provision a certain sense of meaningful common life at fine-grained city block and neighborhood scales.

The common life of yards entails specific geographies shaped by the lives of plants, rhythmic and routine encounters, as well as a situatedness within broader urban contexts. The circuits of plant tissue described above, and the ways these are experienced by residents, form intersections of ownership, care, cultivation, and land. In them, commons are cultivated beyond shared territories or public spaces. Commons can be mobile and carry the shared life-force of plants themselves. In yards, commons grow.

CHAPTER 7 CONCLUSIONS CULTIVATING URBAN LIFE

Policymakers, activists, the general public – all are beginning to rethink relationships between people and environments in the context of climate change, environmental change, and what seems like a variety of increasing environmental risks. Urban environments in particular are sites where relationships between people and environments are being reshaped and reconceptualized. City governments now must respond to these imperatives, in addition to concerns such as falling tax revenue, aging infrastructure, and the relentless competitive drive deemed necessary to attract and retain capital investment. As city regulations and plans are adapted and developed in response to environmental concerns, cities tend to be known through ways they can be measured, tracked, and estimated. The power of this quantitative mode of knowing the city is not new, but environmental concepts such as sustainability constitute the current iteration of knowing and planning the city through regulations, plans, and incentives. These official visions are only one part of a complex terrain of sustainable urbanism, involving much broader practices and projects than are usually considered in official plans or critiques which focus solely on those plans. Urban environmentalisms range widely in approach, scope, and motivation. There is the growing sense that there will be no one solution to these challenges. That instead, the contemporary moment requires a multitude of responses at all scales. Urban gardening has been one area around which a host of complex social and environmental efforts have been organized. This dissertation has shown how sustainability in Minneapolis has been imagined and implemented through

urban gardening regulations, as well as aspirations on the part of the city and nonprofit organizations.

Meanwhile, people are engaged with their urban environments through the patterns and activities of their daily lives. People make their worlds, and domestic landscapes are one place where these routines intersect and mingle with more than human organisms, desires and frustrations, skills and experimentation, and iteration and adaptation over time. This kind of everyday environment is a realm with a double nature. On the one hand, repetition can be rote, crushing, routine. On the other, repetition makes possible difference to emerge. With each day, there is the possibility of something new, however remote. One of the unifying ways everyday life has been understood is through the idea of practice – all the activities, routines, habits, and gestures through which people are engaged with their surroundings. For Lefebvre, everyday life is intimately caught up with the advent of industrial capitalist production of the nineteenth century, growing out of the emergent interests in the mundane repetitiveness of new production techniques, new ways of experiencing urban life, and new relationships within the family. Lefebvre tries to expand classic economic concepts, even when deployed by those trying to radically change the systems which reinforce their influence, to include the socially meaningful and material ways these relations actually take shape. Ultimately, the way social relations produce space and time. Lefebvre's everyday always holds out possibilities for radical transformation, with an openness to unforeseen endpoints and relationships. However, Lefebvre also sees the dominant ideologies of collective life as participating in individual and particular lived everydays, making them routine and unchanging.

I have built on a distinction from Henri Lefebvre between the city as *habitat* – known and designed by experts in largely physical and economic terms; and the urban as *inhabited* – lived and experienced by people in everyday life. I argue inhabitation must be understood in terms of the physical habitats in which it occurs. But this is not enough, and inhabitation must also be understood in conjunction with the many embodied practices, affective attachments, and collective meanings which shape and are shaped by such spaces. The central argument of this dissertation project is that people live with their yards through diverse material engagements – as inhabitants, property owners, environmental stewards, commoners, and caretakers. This inhabiting of yards involves a broad range of embodied engagements beyond the familiar activities of cultivation such as gardening, including developing attunements of the senses to outdoors, pausing by sitting and reflecting, and responding to both human and more than human demands and invitations. Affective attachments and social relations circulate throughout this inhabitation.

To understand these relations, it is necessary to understand and see the particularities at a very fine grain – in ways only sketched out by Lefebvre’s theorizations. To do this, I have drawn on phenomenological approaches with a focus on embodied engagements, skills, and affective attachments to others. To intervene in transforming such relations, especially for experts, it is necessary to understand how urban environments are already sites of ongoing formation through these social and natural relations. I study these issues through a detailed case study approach in which I examined how people practice and experience urban landscapes in Minneapolis, MN, with a focus on residential yards. Using multiple methods centered around ethnography,

in this project I offer a textured analysis of people and their home environments. I also examine sustainability through analyzing municipal policies and metrics, conducting expert interviews. Ethnography allows me to learn about what residents say about yard spaces, in relation to what they actually do, make, and feel in these spaces. This approach allows me to be in the time and space of study participants, in order to approach some understanding of their lived experiences with yards over time.

When yards are approached in this way, it is possible to see some of the affects and capacities of bodies to shape one another, and to appreciate how central social relations really are to the cultivation and care for yards in all of their diversity and varying complexity. Inhabitants' practices and experiences involve highly intimate, creative, complex, and communal capacities which shape, and are shaped by, residential yards. These exceed many of the narrow confines of dominant concepts through which expert planners and designers have known yards. Throughout these encounters, affective attachments circulate. Even in these most iconic of American landscapes of private property – neighborhoods of single family homes with yards – there can be found particular urban commons through shared territories cultivated together, and through shared practices of plant exchange, gardening knowledge and skills. Such urban commons complicates the ways commons have been considered through a focus on clear distinctions between public and private urban space. These findings reinforce arguments that even the act of looking for commoning practices widens the cracks in dominant logics of thinking about urban space. What I hope this work has shown are the ways habitats and inhabitation supplement and exceed one another.

How might these insights inform future efforts to plan and know such everyday urban environments? For contemporary debates about environmentalism, knowing more about experience in everyday life makes possible more resonance between shifting environmental impacts with how people live in their day to day surroundings. To move towards more sustainable ways of relating to our environments in its fullest sense – including the social justice and equity dimension which so often drops out of plans in practice – it will be necessary to add to narrow quantitative metrics. Better understanding relationships with environment which include aspects of love, care, labor, memory, and enjoyment could inform the registers in which environmental efforts are framed and communicated.

In terms of yards specifically, it is clear that for the most part people are invested to some extent in these immediate environments, and many care deeply about the plants, animals, and encounters in yards – whether they consider this to be motivated by their own individual experience and interest, or by connections to neighbors and their broader communities. It is interesting to consider the specific role of plants in these terms. Plants are divided, shared, transplanted, given away. There is a rich life circulating with these plant tissues – whether as a one time encounter and exchange between neighbors, or ongoing advice and attunement. The power of such small scale actions should not be underestimated. Are there possibilities for cities and organizations to make plants available to those interested in sharing them throughout their communities? This could be an even simpler, less intensive, and more affordable way to “build community” – similar to the rain garden projects, but perhaps with less specialized knowledge required, tools and skills, normative judgments about garden aesthetics, as well as commitment over

time. Fostering networks of plant exchanges would be just one example of a very small step, but one that might be incremental towards sustainability goals.

The broader implications for urban studies are multiple. First and foremost, even without seeking out these differences, I have found through this project an incredible diversity of yard experiences, practices, and spaces. If this is all possible here, in the routines and repetitions of the most iconic of everyday environments which have been largely dismissed as politically important spaces by urban scholars, imagine what would be possible with specific focus on some of the relationships explored in Chapters Four, Five, and Six. It is not hard to imagine a program that might pair up more experienced gardeners with aspiring gardeners, or to organize efforts to help a neighbor who is having trouble keeping up with yard demands. The point is that loose and informal networks are already established throughout neighborhoods. With not much effort, perhaps these can be better seen and subsequently provide new avenues for the elusive projects of building community so many organizations are engaged in. Second, the project provides narratives of yard experiences that are underway. At least some people on any given city block are engaged in these activities all the time, day in and day out, season after season, year after year. This production of space and time is ongoing, with the potential to constantly adapt, change, and morph. This is a lesson for planners and designers working towards static goals and measured outcomes. It is in the nature of a plan to move toward something, but this does not mean it is fixed in space or time. Yards show how this is always the case, there are always adjustments, attunements, and unpredictable emergences.

It is concerning to think that this all might feed into neoliberal narratives to strengthen the dominance of private domains, especially the limited view of the

importance and value of private property. That all of this is happening in daily life “from the ground up” perhaps could be read to mean that state structures are not important. However, as with the shared park garden in North Minneapolis, or with the rain gardens, even very small financial amounts from a larger system can make such projects more lasting, as well as the people engaged in them feeling less isolated. Furthermore, the yard experiences in the project range in terms of the ways people’s yard activities matched up with the bounds of the territory of the yard, or their own or others’ expectations of the rights and responsibilities of being a homeowner. It is impossible to contain the directions this work might reinforce, but the spirit of the project is to show how even within these fairly rigid, static, and unequal domestic landscapes many people find themselves inhabiting, there are cracks and fissures to be widened towards more communal, caring, and affirming experiences. Yards are not only that. The project has shown frustrations, limitations, constraints, and exclusions. But yards do make possible imagining in very concrete registers urban environments of inhabitation beyond habitat.

CODA HOW TO LIVE WITH A YARD

Plant a plant. Select a spot, dig in the dirt, hold up the stem with one hand while filling in the gaps. Press the earth, it presses back, water ring around stem. Fingernails dirty because you can't stand the feeling of gloves. Because you want to touch the dirt itself. You want to touch your yard.

Get a blister from your efforts. Feel frustrated it doesn't look the way it should, plants languishing. Feel failure. Where to even begin? Be uncertain about what to plant, and where. Struggle with hose and other tools, if you have them.

Look out this window. See what is there and what might be, also what was. Wonder about what it needs. Notice big and small things. Attune. Tune out everything else for a time. Watch and wait. Watch and plan. Watch things grow.

Talk with a neighbor across the yard. Call out. Reach out. Wave. Throw something back to them. Offer them something grown. Make friendly, neighborly, pleasant conversation. Affirm what they say, what they do. Most of all, admire something alive together.

Sit. Notice the world around you. Watch it. Swat at insects. Drink something cold or hot. Keep watching that world. Notice the squirrel that watches you. You have chosen a spot. On steps. On a chair. Next to a tree. Under an overhang. Do this at the end of one day or the start of another, or both. Feel air shift across your skin.

Smell the blooms. From inside your kitchen window. Through the screens, the scent reaches you and tells you things. Summer is here. A time. A place. This lilac.

Mow the grass. It's there, it needs to be maintained. Or don't. It doesn't. Dig it up in places. It shows you and others about your self.

Pull the weeds from their footings as you talk with someone on the phone or to a dog. Feel the resistance and release. This is best done fairly soon after a rain. Cast aside the small weed bodies. Their white roots will be thin and bent amongst the green.

Water the plants, the trees really. Smell the water soak into the earth. Drag the hose behind you as you go, feel its weight. Make a spray with your thumb, which will get cold. Or set up the sprinkler on particular days. Or use a watering can, carry it heavy then light. Repeat. Hope for rain. Water from a hose is never as good.

Circumnavigate your house at the end of the day. Notice things which need to be fixed, changed. Start to make a list in your mind, then forget some of the details later. Notice what plants are doing differently from the day before, week before, year before. Admire them as you scrutinize. Are they happy? Are you?

Stretch the boundaries of yards to breaking. Move through the edges of others' yards. Take someone into another backyard that you've known for forty years. Fling open your gates to neighbors who want to dig in your dirt. Share your sunshine. Provide water to plants others planted. Make openings in fences, widen the cracks. Divide your hostas and give them away, circulate in widening circles their tissues.

Remember past yards. Stake the raspberries like your grandfather did. Move your great grandmother's Siberian iris from house to house, yard to yard, decade to decade. And how did your mother use the space in front of that Chicago townhome? What kind of roses did she grow?

Think about how your city yard now raises a city person, not like the farm person your parents' farm garden grew.

Imagine future yards. What else can a yard be? What else might a yard make possible?

Be outside. It really doesn't matter much what else you do.

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APPENDIX I
RESEARCH MATERIALS – YARD VISITS

1. Background worksheet for yard/household

I used the following worksheet as a means to start interviews and yard visits. It helped to gather basic information about each yard/household, as well as provided a way to settle in to the conversation. On the third page, I outlined a rough guide of less structured topics and questions to discuss. Many times, these came up organically in conversation across the whole yard visit, and in varying order, but it was helpful to have it as a reminder. When it was possible to make follow up visits, these topics often came up again. After the initial interview organized around the background worksheet (usually conducted sitting someplace in the yard), I would ask participants to “Show me your yard,” and follow their lead throughout the yard. Most often, this involved going in a circle around the house, and talking all along the way about plants, neighborhood dynamics, past experiences, worries, and joys. Sometimes people showed me certain features first, then returned to places we’d walked earlier. I let participants take the lead as much as possible, in order to find out the places and sequence of spaces important to them.

2. IRB required Information/Consent Sheet (no signature required)

Participants were given a hard copy of this information/consent sheet, as required by the UMN IRB.

PROJECT YARDS: URBAN YARDS AND NEIGHBORHOODS
Household / Home Background Worksheet

YV Code # _____
Address _____

Date _____

HOUSEHOLD INFO

Who lives in the household?

name (people, pets)	age	employment	education	self identify – ethnicity/race	self identify – gender	approx. hshld yrly income
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How long have you lived in this home?

Approximately when was this house built?

Do you own your home?

YARD ACTIVITIES

Approximately how much time each week do you and/or other members of your household spend in the yard, at this time of year?

name	0-2 hrs/wk	2-4	4-6	6-8	8-10	10-12	12+
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What activity you tend to do the most?

enjoy the most, if any?

enjoy the least, if any?

PLANTS & GARDENING

Where do you usually find plants to put in your yard/garden? (e.g. nursery, plant sales or swaps, gleaning)

gardening supplies?

gardening equipment/tools?

Roughly how much, if any, money do you think you spend on plants and related supplies throughout the calendar year?

Yard maintenance and help – e.g. lawns, trees

Lawn: Do you hire an individual or service for lawn maintenance?

If so, how frequently do they work on the lawn?

About how often do you:	mow?	kind of mower?
		gas / push
	water?	
	aerate?	
	fertilize?	
	other?	

Trees: Do you hire an individual or service for tree maintenance?

About how frequently do you or an outside service work on the trees, and what do you/they do?

Have any of your trees been removed?

Other: Do you have any other outside/professional help with your yard (lawns, gardens, trees, etc.), paid or unpaid?

Themes for discussion

How would you describe your yard and what you do there?

What is your yard like? What do you do there?

What does your yard mean to you? to neighbors? to the city?

What are the motivations for your yard and yard practices?, i.e. Why do you garden?

How/does your yard participate in your daily life?

Are there places inside your house from which you like to look at your yard?

Do you enjoy certain views from places within your yard?

How do yards participate in the social life of your neighborhood?

adjacencies – immediate neighbors

how situated in the neighborhood – near parks, schools, shopping, streets

identity as a gardener in your neighborhood/block? – what is that like?

What have been your past experiences with yards, gardens, gardening?

Do ideas about environmentalism influence what you do with your yard?

PROJECT YARDS: URBAN YARDS AND NEIGHBORHOODS

Consent Information Sheet

You are invited to be in a research study of people and their yards. You were selected as a possible participant because you responded to an invitation. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Ursula Lang, PhD Candidate, Geography Dept., U MN.

Background Information

I am conducting a research project about how people use their front and back yards, and how yards fit into neighborhoods and cities. In this project, I will be studying the ways that people describe their yards, how they use their yards, and how they feel about these spaces of their homes.

Procedures

If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:

- **Yard Visit:** Participate in an interview about your yard and household, including showing Ursula Lang (the Primary Investigator) your yard. This interview and yard visit will be audio recorded with your consent, and should last not more than one hour. You would also allow access by Ursula Lang to your front, back and side yards to document these spaces with drawings and photographs.

- **Additional participation:** If you are interested in participating further in the project, you may also be asked to photograph your yard, and/or keep a journal of your yard activities (including use of a disposable camera to document these spaces and activities). You will be given copies of all these additional materials, if you wish. You may be asked to participate in a focus group discussion.

You do not need to participate in any of these additional ways to be involved in the project.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study

There are no risks or benefits to participating in this study.

Compensation

You will not receive monetary compensation for your participation. If interested, you may request copies of drawings and photographs of your yard made by the Primary Investigator (Ursula Lang).

Confidentiality

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we might publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only researchers will have access to the records. The Primary Investigator (Ursula Lang) will have access to all recordings (audio, visual), and all data (notes, written correspondence, sketches), collected during the study. No other investigators will have access to

any of this data. The data will be kept for the duration of the study, and may be used for educational purposes, with the exclusion of any and all identifiable information.

Voluntary Nature of the Study

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of Minnesota. If you decide to participate, you are free to NOT answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions

The researchers conducting this study are: Ursula Lang. You may ask questions you have now.

If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact:

Ursula Lang, Primary Investigator

projectyards@gmail.com

612-703-6055 (Ursula's cell phone)

Geography Department, University of MN, 612-625-6080 (main office phone)

Please also feel free to contact Ursula Lang's academic advisors with any questions:

Professor Vinay Gidwani, Geography Department, U of MN, 612-625-6080, gidwa002@umn.edu

Professor Helga Leitner, Geography Department, U of MN, 612-625-6080, eqj6139@umn.edu

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), **you are encouraged** to contact the Research Subjects' Advocate Line, D528 Mayo Building, 420 Delaware St. SE, Minneapolis, MN 55455; (612) 625-1650.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

APPENDIX II

PROLOGUE ARCHIVAL IMAGES

Captions and information from Minnesota Historical Society.

Figure 1. Mothers with children talking in their backyards. Approximately 1925. Photographer: Sweet. Subjects: Social Service. People in Need. Italian Americans in Minnesota.

Figure 2. Chickens in the backyard of August Hansen residence, 844 Conway, St. Paul. Approximately 1920. St Paul Residences. Hansen, August.

Figure 3. An example of extremely poor outdoor housekeeping and drainage problems on a residential lot in Queen Avenue, Minneapolis. 09/1960
Photographer: Purcell. Near North Neighborhood, Minneapolis, Hennepin County, MN.

Figure 4a. Abby Foster working in her garden, Minneapolis.

Figure 4b. Woman sweeping. 1979. Photographer: Perez, Juan

Figure 5a. Carol Horihan in backyard of Ray Horihan residence, 732 Euclid, St. Paul.
n.d. Place: Dayton's Bluff Neighborhood, Saint Paul, Ramsey County, MN.

Figure 5b. Marie Madison King standing by flowering plants in yard of Dr. Emil King residence. Approximately 1910. Fulda, Murray County, MN.

Figure 6a. Wedding in front yard of a residence, Minneapolis. Approximately 1985.
Photographer: Charles Chamblis

Figure 6b. Wedding in the family of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Kruse; bride and groom with female attendants at table outside at reception in backyard at private home. 1955. Photographer: Lee Brothers

Figure 7a. People relaxing in their backyard; man in hammock, Hutchinson. 1899.
Subjects: Hammocks. Meeker County. Hutchinson.

Figure 7b. "Life comes easy, June '64," (Mary Heaton seated on a chair in a backyard). 1964.