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## **Transplanting, plotting, fencing: relational property practices in community gardens**

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## Transplanting, plotting, fencing: relational property practices in community gardens

### Abstract

Community gardening is an increasingly popular phenomenon. Local governments wishing to 'green' the city and make the urban environment more 'inclusive' sometimes promote community gardening as a means to meet policy goals. Scholars from various fields have been keen to focus on these positive promises of community gardening. However, community gardens are not inherently different from their surroundings or good in themselves as they are connected to wider urban landscapes and routines through practice. Building on empirical research that I conducted at three community gardens in Sydney, Australia, I reveal how property is practised in three gardens with different property models, focussing on three practices - transplanting, plotting and fencing. I show that community gardeners produce property relationally and that through each of these practices, they create overlapping understandings of common and private property. Gardeners have contradictory motivations that are geared both towards community inclusion and the protection of personal interests. The paper reveals that while feelings of ownership contribute to a sense of community belonging, they also help legitimatise a defensive and exclusive spatial claim.

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1 Transplanting, plotting, fencing: relational property practices in community gardens

2

3 By Ellen van Holstein – University of Wollongong

4

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7 to ‘green’ the city and make the urban environment more ‘inclusive’ sometimes promote  
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9 been keen to focus on these positive promises of community gardening. However,  
10 community gardens are not inherently different from their surroundings or good in  
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18 interests. The paper reveals that while feelings of ownership contribute to a sense of  
19 community belonging, they also help legitimatise a defensive and exclusive spatial claim.

20

21 Introduction

22 Urban community gardens are collectively managed urban spaces where people garden  
23 together or alongside each other. Other than allotment and victory gardens, community  
24 gardens are strongly associated with grassroots initiative, and traditionally exist in tension  
25 with formal urban land use regulations before they are either evicted or formalised (see

1 Staeheli and Mitchell, 2008). However, local governments are becoming more hospitable to  
2 community gardens and increasingly include these projects in policy documents.  
3 Governments do this for a variety of reasons, for example because community gardens are  
4 thought to have various beneficial outcomes for citizens and neighbourhoods, such as healthy  
5 lifestyle choices (Guitart and Pickering, 2014), environmental awareness (Turner, 2011) and  
6 cost-efficient upkeep of green space (Rosol, 2012). The association of community gardens  
7 with social capital, community resilience and social inclusion, has perhaps been most  
8 influential in encouraging local governments to adopt this grassroots phenomenon into policy  
9 (see Kingsley and Townsend, 2006).

10 A substantive branch of social science literature on community gardens approaches  
11 these projects optimistically with regard to their inclusive characteristics and capacity to  
12 foster resilient communities (Beilin and Hunter, 2011; Firth et al., 2011; Glover et al., 2005;  
13 Holland, 2004). Policymakers adopt this optimistic outlook. In Sydney, Australia, where this  
14 paper takes its empirical focus, most local councils encourage citizens to join or start a  
15 community garden. As reasons for people to join a community garden, their websites mention  
16 benefits such as waste management, access to fresh food, and that community gardens  
17 potentially bring community members together (for an example see City of Sydney, 2016).

18 These messages stand in stark contrast with my fieldwork experiences. Attempting to  
19 be involved in community gardens, the exclusionary effects of community gardens become  
20 immediately noticeable as I bump into fence after fence. Sometimes a sign directs me to a  
21 website or provides me with a phone number. However, in neither of the three field sites in  
22 which I eventually get involved is access straightforward. Community gardeners I meet in  
23 these gardens often bring up this issue. One community gardener for example describes the  
24 project in her neighbourhood as ‘a gated community’ in which the gardens do not achieve to  
25 create a sense of community, because it feels like an exclusive club of gardeners. Other

1 gardeners consider exclusive access to the garden fair because the people who invest in the  
2 garden should be rewarded for their effort.

3         Taking its cue from recent developments in property research, this paper builds on the  
4 insight that property and associated rights to include or exclude are not absolute, but  
5 constantly subject to changing enactments and interpretations that can make property do  
6 different kinds of work with both inclusive and exclusive effects (Blomley, 2004; 2015). As  
7 Staeheli and Mitchell (2008) argue, no community or public can exist without exclusion.  
8 Rather than accepting the inclusionary characteristics attributed to community gardens, or  
9 judging the exclusionary practices of community gardeners as materialized in garden fences,  
10 I ask how community gardens sit in a wider landscape of property relationships and what  
11 kinds of property relationships are produced through gardening practices and gardeners’  
12 movement between different property spaces. These explorations lead to the main argument  
13 that community gardening practices are partly motivated by community objectives but  
14 equally relate to private gardening practices and to gardeners’ personal lives. Gardeners  
15 produce understandings of property relationally which leads to contradictory motivations and  
16 relationships that are at once geared towards community belonging and personal interest.  
17 Consequently, the current support for and scepticism towards community gardens can be  
18 replaced with a more nuanced consideration of the property practices these spaces facilitate  
19 and what the effects of those practices are.

20         First I conceptually frame community gardens as spaces for studying the complexity  
21 of property practices and relationships. I then move on to an exploration of community  
22 gardening in the Inner West of Sydney. After an introduction of the field sites, I identify three  
23 property practices that came forth out of the empirical work – transplanting, plotting and  
24 fencing. I use these practices to guide a discussion about property relations in and around

1 community gardens and shed critical light on discourses in which the ‘community’ aspect of  
2 community gardening is put forward as inherently inclusive.

3

#### 4 The complexity of property relationships

5 The concept of property has an extensive theoretical history encompassing various  
6 approaches towards understanding what it means to own something. Most recent  
7 developments emphasize the contextual and complex nature of property relationships (e.g.  
8 Blomley, 2016). Even in its most simplified form - an individual right to exclude others from  
9 a particular thing or resource - property requires that people understand property rules and  
10 conditions regarding access to goods and other resources (Rose, 1994). Or in Blomley’s  
11 words (2016, page 227): ‘Property is only good against the world if lay people understand the  
12 nature of the rights to which it is attached’. Even when approached as an individual  
13 entitlement, property is an inherently communicative and hence social phenomenon. This is  
14 why Rose (1994) argues that any private property regime as a whole is common property  
15 shared among its subscribers. This key insight illustrates how property is more complex than  
16 an individual’s exclusive right to access or use something.

17 Complexity also plays out where vernacular understandings and workings of property  
18 are substantially different from formal or bureaucratic inscriptions of property. Property  
19 practices might then exist in tension with formally inscribed property rights. For example  
20 Blomley (2004) shows how private property holders adopt adjacent public spaces through  
21 their gardening practices. Private gardeners inscribe a layer of private property practices onto  
22 public space without an agenda to gain formal ownership, thus creating a complex meshwork  
23 of informal property relationships with other neighbours and passers-by.

24 This insight is important because law has an interactive relationship with everyday  
25 life. It is shaped by everyday understandings and practices of property and simultaneously it

1 'continues on through causal chains into the world of stuff' where it affects real matter and  
2 real life (Delaney, 2002, page 78). Concurrently, a strong effect of property is that it makes  
3 itself seem natural, secure and fair to the extent that it masks the exclusion, injustice and  
4 reliance on community resources that were necessary to create an illusion of stability  
5 (Blomley, 2013; Nedelsky, 1990). So although research shows that many property  
6 relationships are shaped by and affect community dynamics, the private property regime in  
7 which property is understood as the exclusive right of one person to exclude others, remains  
8 dominant. This effect is described as the agency of property itself (Blomley, 2013).  
9 The tendency of property to make itself seem natural combined with its power to affect real  
10 life creates a need for ethnographic research that uncovers how property is practised in  
11 everyday life, how the effects of those practices are felt and how people make sense of its  
12 results (Blomley, 2015; 2016).

13

#### 14 Property as practice

15 Aside from asking what property represents, researchers ask through which practices –  
16 naming, fencing, repairing and policing – property is made and what property subsequently  
17 makes people do (Blomley 2015; Lang, 2014 Wekerle and Classens, 2015). A focus on  
18 practice shows how in everyday life people put property to use in ways that transgress the  
19 two classical categories of private and public property. Private entitlements are partially  
20 waived for the sake of common interest (Lang, 2014; Wekerle and Classens, 2015) and  
21 conversely, people take responsibility over public space through private property practices in  
22 order to take temporary control over common areas (Blomley, 2004; Lang, 2014).

23 Gardening is one set of practices which allows social scientists to explore the  
24 production of ownership (e.g. Cerwonka, 2004; Lang, 2014). Spatial practices such as  
25 weeding and planting situate subjects in place and create an imagined sense of community

1 tied to a certain territory (Cerwonka, 2004). At the same time scholarship shows the  
2 transgressive potential of these practices, for example where gardeners care for plants beyond  
3 the private property fence (Head and Muir, 2006). Lang (2014) provides insight into how the  
4 sharing and caring for plants across private yards produces understandings of private  
5 properties as shared spaces and that these understandings might differ from legal  
6 representations of property. Property scholarship reveals the inclusive and exclusive  
7 capacities of property practices and draws attention to the instrumental role of plants in the  
8 constitution of property relationships.

9         Research on urban agriculture shows that gardening practices are potentially radical  
10 which might subvert the hegemony of neoliberal market logic and modes of thought.  
11 Gardening practices open up private spaces to be used by third parties and in ways that can  
12 exist outside the dominant market (Naylor, 2012; Lang, 2014; Wekerle and Classens, 2015).  
13 There are hopeful expectations that practices of commoning might enable more inclusive and  
14 ecologically just food chains. At the same time urban gardening and other alternative  
15 agricultural practices relate to neoliberalism in problematic and contradicting ways  
16 (Guthman, 2004; Pudup, 2008; McClintock, 2014). For example because the very gardening  
17 practices that create independence also create an understanding of personal responsibility and  
18 accountability. Acknowledging that property is a complex construct that can be practised and  
19 play out in varying and contradicting ways, I argue that community gardeners' property  
20 practices create entanglements of individualized and communal property relationships. This  
21 problematizes the idea of community gardens as commons.

22

### 23 Community gardens as commons

24 Community gardens are eccentric cases of property ownership. They 'transcend the  
25 separation between the public and the private' (Schmelzkopf, 1995, page 379), and



1 complicate the relationships between private ownership and the public good (Lawson, 2007).  
2 In the past, community gardens have proven to be constructive community spaces in  
3 impoverished urban environments, and have therefore been flagged as a spatial  
4 materialisation of the right to the city (Schmelzkopf, 1995; 2002; Staeheli and Mitchell,  
5 2008). In light of these benefits, community garden researchers advocate for security of  
6 tenure, especially where projects are situated in decaying urban landscapes and are  
7 functioning as spaces of empowerment for marginalised social groups (e.g. Schmelzkopf,  
8 1995; 2002; Staeheli and Mitchell, 2008).

9 In line with this, urban agriculture and alternative food scholars celebrate community  
10 gardens as inclusive examples of food production sites. The uneasy fit of many community  
11 gardens with a binary private versus public approach to property makes researchers put these  
12 projects forward as shared resources or as commons (Eizenberg, 2012). One of the central  
13 property issues community garden scholars grapple with is the relation between shared  
14 community garden spaces on the one hand and the market and governance landscapes in  
15 which they are situated on the other. Community gardens are part of urban landscapes that are  
16 strongly shaped by market dynamics which complicates the protection of these spaces when  
17 they are used under temporary leases (Schmelzkopf, 2002; Staeheli and Mitchell, 2008;  
18 Eizenberg, 2012). Eizenberg (2012) analyses solutions to this dilemma and finds that through  
19 trusts and non-profit organisations it is possible for commons to exist in a neoliberal city that  
20 is largely governed on the basis of market dynamics. He contends that the commons, 'is a  
21 mechanism for redistribution through which underprivileged residents compensate  
22 themselves for uneven urban development' (Eizenberg, 2012, page 779).

23 Scholars recognise that community gardens might work towards individual gain when  
24 they work to increase property value (Staeheli and Mitchell, 2008; Quastel, 2009; Eizenberg,  
25 2012). Quastel (2009, page 719) approaches gentrification and community gardens from a

1 political ecology perspective and describes the ‘obscene’ situation in which the urban poor  
2 are rendered homeless to provide well-off green urban residents with a leisure space in which  
3 they can enact their ‘individualized consumer response to environmental problems’.  
4 Quastel’s work also shows that aside from social inclusion, empowerment and citizenship,  
5 community gardens might instead be stripped from their transformative potential and shape  
6 exclusive landscapes of property relationships.

7         To generate a deeper understanding of property relationships associated with  
8 community gardens, I wish to build on the insight generated by these studies that have  
9 focussed on institutional management of community gardens. Attention to gardeners’  
10 practices particularly relating to fences and plots has proven a fruitful approach towards  
11 understanding the meanings that are embedded in these community spaces through everyday  
12 enactments. Previous work has done so for example by asking how people understand  
13 ‘community’ based on the compartmentalisation of responsibilities, entitlements and garden  
14 space (Klein, 1993; Kurtz, 2001). Although property is not explicitly mentioned in these  
15 studies, the work does show how property devices such as plots and fences shape a sense of  
16 community (Kurtz, 2001). Plots also illustrate some of the controversies in community  
17 gardens around the policing of borders and social norms, and draw attention to gardens as  
18 spaces of conflict rather than community sanctuaries (Klein, 1993). Kurtz (2001) highlights  
19 how community gardeners enclose their garden, and how groups of gardeners redefine the  
20 meaning of ‘garden’ and ‘community’ whilst erecting physical boundaries and policing social  
21 norms surrounding membership and access.

22         Recent developments in property theory offer an alternative approach in considering  
23 property as produced through practice. Those developments enable me to focus on gardening  
24 practices and gardeners’ experiences in the wider landscape while keeping property in and  
25 outside the garden in sight. An everyday practice approach to understanding property

1 relationships in community gardens makes insightful how community gardens and gardening  
2 practices are connected to other property spaces. The approach reveals the overlapping and  
3 relational meanings that are generated through property practices; it shows how these  
4 relations work out and to whose benefit. Critiques of community gardens that interpret these  
5 projects as either transformative or neoliberal spaces both overlook how these gardens are  
6 connected to their environments through practice. With the paper's focus on practice it aims  
7 to bridge the gap between optimistically hopeful and sceptically critical interpretations of  
8 community gardens.

9         In the remainder of this paper I explore and discuss gardening and property practices  
10 in three community gardens and gardeners' nearby private properties to reveal the ways in  
11 which property shapes relationships in community spaces such as shared gardens. The  
12 analysis works to support the main argument that practices of property are relational and both  
13 inclusionary and exclusionary.

14

#### 15 Researching community garden practices

16 This paper draws on research conducted at three community gardens in Sydney, Australia.  
17 City of Sydney council encourages community gardening in various policy documents. Their  
18 policy acknowledges the importance of 'community ownership' for the long term success of  
19 these projects and facilitates this sense of ownership in letting community groups manage the  
20 gardens themselves (City of Sydney, 2016). Consequently it does not dictate how garden  
21 groups should organise ownership or responsibilities, nor does it consider how 'community  
22 ownership' might entangle or conflict with personal ownership or interest.

23         The three selected gardens have different management models in terms of  
24 organisation into shared areas and individual plots. This particular characteristic directed the  
25 selection of gardens for this study because several participants mentioned that they based

1 their choice to join a particular garden on its model. The different combinations of shared  
2 spaces and plots in the gardens also helped reveal some property practices and related  
3 feelings of community belonging that were specific to a garden's model.

4 The first garden was established as a guerrilla garden to block housing development  
5 and predominantly consists of private plots. I will refer to this garden as Stanley Road  
6 Garden. The garden appears locked but is easily accessible for informed gardeners. People  
7 can join the project through Claire, the protagonist and gatekeeper of the project who  
8 allocates plots.<sup>1</sup> The second garden is a communal garden that was started in 1992 with a  
9 3000 Australian dollar grant from South Sydney Council to propagate native plants and  
10 improve waste management. I will refer to this garden as Park Street Garden. At this garden,  
11 volunteers have the code to a numeric padlock on the gate but are also encouraged to attend  
12 weekly communal gardening hours. The third garden was established in 2013 and consists of  
13 a mix of private plots and communal areas. I will refer to the garden as Highfield Garden. At  
14 this garden the community collects an annual membership fee of 40 dollars per person and  
15 charges 80 dollars rent per plot. The garden was started with a council grant of 15.000  
16 Australian dollars.

17 Fieldwork consisted of participant observation during working bees that are semi-  
18 regularly held at each of these three gardens. Parallel to observatory fieldwork, twenty-five  
19 people were interviewed at these gardens. Fourteen interviewees were owner-occupiers and  
20 seven rented their dwelling. The sample of participants included sixteen people with  
21 university degrees, four with a college diploma and one with a high school diploma. Sixteen  
22 participants identified as Oceanian, four as North-West European and one as North-East  
23 Asian. Four participants did not share demographic information.

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<sup>1</sup> Where gardeners requested not to be identified pseudonyms were used.

1 Fourteen of the interviews included a walk from the gardener's private garden to the  
2 community garden. The walking interview is a suitable method for studying community  
3 gardens because community gardens are connected to the social and physical fabric of the  
4 city (Kurtz, 2001). As a mobile method, the walking interview is a fitting way to explore  
5 these connections, because 'by tracking the natural sequence of places in practical everyday  
6 life, go-alongs enhance our understandings of how individuals connect and integrate the  
7 various regions of their daily lives and identities' (Kusenbach, 2003, page 478).

8 Although the interview schedules and mobile research methods were not developed  
9 with the aim to uncover property relationships and practices, property quickly emerged as a  
10 prominent theme. The research methods were arguably sensitive to bring out this theme for  
11 two reasons. First, walking provides an 'intimate vantage point for reconstructing the  
12 dynamics of interaction in communal and private realms' and sheds light on everyday politics  
13 of neighbourhood belonging (Kusenbach, 2003, page 466, also see Waite et al., 2009).  
14 Second, the neighbourhoods in which the community gardens are located continue to go  
15 through substantial changes in property relationships. The contemporary landscape of  
16 property relationships in Australian cities is shaped by a deep history of dispossession.  
17 Additionally, the urban landscape in which the three community gardens are situated,  
18 Sydney's Inner West, is characterised by strongly increasing residential property values and  
19 changes to the neighbourhoods' demographic profile (Atkinson et al., 2011). Community  
20 gardeners in this study are part of this dynamic either as newcomers to the area or as  
21 observers of the changes to their neighbourhood.

22 The gardens are located in a relatively dense area with neighbourhood density ranging  
23 from 53.47<sup>2</sup> to 101.91 persons per hectare (City of Sydney, 2011). The residents of these  
24 neighbourhoods predominantly live in medium-density housing (6007 dwellings) such as

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<sup>2</sup> This number is substantially higher for the residential area of the neighbourhood as approximately half of the neighbourhood is used for public infrastructure.

1 terraced and semi-detached houses, many of which have a backyard. The second largest  
2 group of dwelling type in the neighbourhoods is high-density apartments (4034 dwellings)  
3 and the amount of detached low-density housing is small (765 dwellings) (City of Sydney,  
4 2011). The density of these neighbourhoods has increased since gentrification processes  
5 started to affect the area in the 1970s, encouraging housing development on fill-in and  
6 formerly industrial sites. Rising property values encourage owners to invest in their  
7 residential properties. Investments such as renovations and extensions were frequently  
8 brought up by interviewees as these affected gardening practices. One participant explains he  
9 joined the community garden in search of more growing space:

10 'And we also have a, quite a large group of friends and I have on my side a big family  
11 and so we built the house so that we could basically open up these doors and if we want  
12 to have thirty people here anytime we can. So it's really, and you know, a space to  
13 entertain as well as to grow things'. (Lucas, 39, Highfield Garden)

14 Another gardener mentions that the investment of a neighbour in building a second storey on  
15 the adjacent property overshadowed his backyard to such an extent that he had to seek garden  
16 space in the community garden.

17 Other participants are conscious observers of how property interests change their  
18 residential area. Participants comment on rising costs of living in the area, the increasing  
19 pressure on available land, the neighbourhood's changing demographic composition and the  
20 role of the community garden in attracting gentrifying homeowners. Even when newcomers  
21 might not be interested in gardening themselves, they understand the community garden as  
22 having a positive effect on the value of their property. This urban landscape shaped a research  
23 project that sheds light on how private and community understandings of property are  
24 connected through everyday routines and practices.

1 I now discuss three property practices: transplanting plants between private and  
2 communal spaces, constructing garden plots and fencing. These practices illustrate how  
3 community spaces are inclusionary as well as exclusionary, and how meanings of home and  
4 community garden spaces are relationally produced.

5

#### 6 Transplanting; moving between home and communal space

7 Community gardens are closely connected to a wider urban environment that is shaped by  
8 property relationships. For example, community gardens are strongly connected to the scale  
9 of the neighbourhood, as in many of these gardens membership is exclusively available to  
10 people who live near the site. Where such rules are not in place, the practicality of everyday  
11 routes and routines makes it more favourable for people to join a garden close to where they  
12 live. The practice of transplanting plants between private backyard and community garden  
13 illustrates how people enact those connections between home and communal space and make  
14 sense of different property spaces. In this section I reflect on the practice of moving plants  
15 between gardens and on the effects of spatial-proximity which facilitates this practice.

16 Residential proximity and the time this allows people to invest into the space result in  
17 feelings of ownership. Living directly across the street from the mixed plot garden, Sophie  
18 expresses a heightened sense of responsibility and ownership based on the short distance  
19 between her private residential home and the community garden:

20 I feel a little bit proprietarial about the garden. [...] I feel a sense, a greater sense of  
21 ownership of the garden than my own plot. Because I am so, across the road and I've  
22 been involved with it. And I walk in and I look sort of at the whole not just, oh, what is  
23 happening in my plot. (Sophie, 43, Highfield Garden)

24 This quote illustrates how community gardens relate to private spaces and how those  
25 relations shape gardening practices and feelings of ownership. It also shows that this sense of

1 ownership is not straightforwardly exclusionary or private. Sophie expresses a sense of  
2 responsibility over the wider community space, not just her own plot, based on the proximity  
3 of her home.

4           Additionally, gardeners connect home gardens and community gardens through  
5 everyday gardening practices and routines. Movement between home and community garden  
6 allows them to extend practices from one space into the other. Most participants describe at  
7 least some home gardening practices, and these frequently entangle with community  
8 gardening practices. The gardeners who describe their own garden and the community garden  
9 as completely separate often have – either physically or in terms of sun hours – very limited  
10 space to garden at home. Different meanings ascribed to home and community garden space  
11 lead to people growing different kinds of plants in each space. At his home garden, Lucas for  
12 example mentions:

13           ‘It’s so sheltered and shaded we just can’t grow anything here. And that’s why we  
14 wanted to join the plot, so that we can grow some stuff. Yeah so the garden here is  
15 basically just a place where we kind of relax and hang out’. (Lucas, 39, Highfield  
16 Garden)

17 Lucas chooses to grow food at the community garden and flowers at his home garden  
18 because his home garden is too shaded for edible crops to flourish all year round. At the  
19 private plot garden. Claire puts forward a similar reasoning. When I ask her whether she  
20 grows different things in the two spaces, she says:

21           ‘Well yes because there is more space here [in the community garden] and I tend to try  
22 and keep this my space here for edible things [...] because [at home] you might want to  
23 have some screening plants or you know different plants but not that you can  
24 necessarily eat. So here you can grow just to eat’. (Claire, age unknown, Stanley Road  
25 Garden)



1           However, it is more common for people to understand the private and communal  
2 spaces as in some way connected. People often start gardening communally when they realise  
3 they have limited garden space at home and this encourages them to carry private gardening  
4 practices and plants into the shared garden. Ben for example says:

5           ‘So I was always interested in gardening and my neighbours were putting up a two  
6 storey extension which is all my sunlight. So all the synergies were there. These guys  
7 [the gardeners] needed help. I needed to move my plants which I had been nurturing for  
8 22 years into a place where they could survive. [...] And because my garden has been  
9 overshadowed by my neighbour’s next door. I want to basically come here, sit in the sun  
10 in the winter and potter in the garden. What I used to do in my own backyard. So it  
11 saves my backyard.’ (Ben, 55, Park Street Garden)

12 Many gardeners move back and forth between community and home garden, people  
13 transplant plants between these garden spaces and this way the meaning of the community  
14 garden and the gardening practices that take place there are produced in relation to private  
15 backyards. At the communal garden, Ben for example says:

16           ‘I’m thinking of moving soon and some of the plants I’ve got that are doing pretty well  
17 that I won’t be able to take with me because the place I’m moving is probably smaller I  
18 would probably try to give them a new home here. And also sometimes if something is  
19 growing well here and you’d kind of want to have one yourself you can try to take it  
20 back and see if you can get it to grow.’ (Ben, 38, Park Street Garden)

21 These practices of sharing, appropriating and transplanting plants produce relations that  
22 transgress the boundaries of private property and community space. Plants are sometimes  
23 moved from the private backyard or balcony into the community garden if they need more  
24 sunlight or space to grow.

1 Another reason for people to transplant between the private home garden and the  
2 community garden is when a plant requires more attention. People move plants home during  
3 precarious stages of the plant's life and prefer to grow fragile seedlings from home, because  
4 this allows continuous monitoring. While people are motivated to be part of a community  
5 project, home growing is easier to incorporate into daily routines. Water and equipment are  
6 more readily available and seeing plants on a daily basis is a handy reminder of their needs.  
7 Stephanie for example takes struggling plants home:

8 'So sometimes what I used to do, is that anything that looks like it's dying I would take  
9 home. Every plant, I'd take home and I'd nurse it at home. [...] because where my  
10 garden at home is, it's at my front door. I walk past it, my hose is right there. I go to  
11 take the bin out, I see it. I go to take the girls out, which I do at least once a day, I see it.  
12 I give it water. I did mix up pesticide, garlic and soapy water. And I had it here to  
13 spray. And then when I took a few things home I found it easier'. (Stephanie, 33,  
14 Stanley Road Garden)

15 People say the same thing about growing seedlings. Sarah at the mixed plot garden says:

16 'you can tend to it pretty much every day if you want to. So it makes it a bit easier to  
17 control it. [...] I certainly don't get to the community garden every day'. (Sarah, 48,  
18 Highfield Garden)

19 The ways in which gardening practices entangle with everyday routines, makes some  
20 people adjust their planting practices altogether. Alice says that she changed the plants in her  
21 plot altogether when she accidentally let everything in it die:

22 'I have been working so my garden died. [...] So then I replanted things that didn't  
23 need to be crazy watered all the time'. (Alice, 23, Stanley Road Garden)

24 And Charles has an understanding of his private and community garden as spaces in which he  
25 can grow things that require different amounts of time and effort:

1 'I just use this space to grow things that take a little bit more space or will grow a little  
2 bit more on their own. The last maybe two years I haven't grown anything down here  
3 [in the community garden] that I didn't think would survive at least a week, preferably  
4 two weeks without any tender love and care'. (Charles, 29, Park Street Garden)

5 This spatial organisation of gardening practices allows people not to go to the garden very  
6 often. This way of orchestrating everyday routines enables people to feel part of a community  
7 project while not having to change their lifestyle. Ironically, these very practices detract from  
8 the sense of community that people get from their involvement. One could even argue that it  
9 allows for community gardens to be masqueraded as community projects while those  
10 supposed 'communities' really do not exist. Stephanie wonders:

11 'I've been there for two, maybe longer now, two years and other than Claire I don't  
12 really see anybody in there. But I do see things happening. So whether these guerrillas  
13 are ninjas really'. (Stephanie, 33, Stanley Road Garden)

14 Sharing plants across private and communal boundaries has recently been identified  
15 by Lang (2014, page 853) as a practice that allows an 'interweaving of the logics of private  
16 property and commons'. Lang's study contributes to a larger endeavour to reveal the  
17 complexities of property beyond a formal private versus public dichotomy. In an attempt to  
18 counterbalance the dominance of the private ownership model, these studies pay attention to  
19 examples of formally private spaces that are turned into common space through everyday  
20 practice and public use. Lang's study is another example of how gardening tends to be  
21 approached as an open and inclusive practice. The practice of transplanting and the  
22 movement of gardeners between home and community gardens show that property is  
23 produced in complex relational ways and that these practices are directed by community  
24 motivations but also by personal routines and lifestyle objectives. Fitting 'community' into a  
25 personal everyday routine relies on private as well as communal space, which encourages

1 people to enact their gardening practices back and forth between private and community  
2 spaces. The search for this balance is further illustrated by the practice ‘plotting’.

3

#### 4 Plotting: understanding property in the context of community

5 In all three gardens, the majority of gardeners value having control over a specific part of the  
6 garden. Even in the garden without plots, there is an informal understanding of which patches  
7 and plants belong to whom. Plots allow gardeners to fit communal gardening into their  
8 everyday lives, without risking intervention from other gardeners. The practice of gardening  
9 on plots illustrates how property helps people orchestrate a community project with a  
10 personal everyday routine. It helps people make sense of what is theirs to take, keep or share,  
11 and how they personally relate to the community project.

12 For many gardeners the advantage of having separate plots that clearly divide and  
13 communicate individual responsibilities is evident. Talking about the history of the garden  
14 and whether people wanted private plots from the start, Sophie at the mixed plot garden  
15 answers:

16 ‘I think no one even questioned that. [...] We were all very happy with that. I have been  
17 involved in a community garden prior to this when I was living in Glebe, [...] which  
18 was just a beautiful space, everything was communal but such a, it’s such a hassle  
19 because you plant something, someone takes it or you know someone else plants it, you  
20 take a bit, you know what I mean? It’s just irritating. So I think the individual plot is  
21 much better. It’s much, much better because people have control over what they want  
22 to grow when they grow and if it’s a stuff up its *their* stuff up, it’s just and people care  
23 for it a lot more I think.’ (Sophie, 43, Highfield Garden)

24 Sophie puts forward an understanding of plants as things that are to be managed and taken by  
25 their owner only. She describes practices of sharing plants as irritating, and prefers the sense

1 of security that comes with having control over a plot where other gardeners will not  
2 interfere. Private plots are understood as the only sensible way to organise a community  
3 project. Even in the communal garden, where private plots have not (yet) taken hold, Ben,  
4 among other gardeners, is convinced that private plots would be better:

5 'Whereas I and Charles for example say pay 50 dollars, have your own little plot. And  
6 others say you don't have individual plots, you have to share everything. So like the  
7 communist system, the efficiency is actually less I believe. Because no one takes care  
8 of the individual plots'. (Ben, 55, Park Street Garden)

9 He explains that the garden does have individual patches of responsibility:

10 'It's like a socialist um, collective garden where you cannot grow things just for  
11 yourself. But at the same breath we're told, well we know that if you're working a  
12 patch, no one else will touch it'. (Ben, 55, Park Street Garden)

13 This kind of understanding between gardeners about the autonomy they enjoy in certain areas  
14 of the garden emerged in all three gardens. Beth at the private plot garden said for example:

15 'I wouldn't want to touch something that is someone else's. Even if it looks like  
16 they've left it forever. My garden, I was growing flax... linseed and it looked probably  
17 like it was a weed. [...] But it wasn't so I'm glad that someone didn't fix it. If you  
18 know what I mean. So I wouldn't want to fix someone else's plot when it's not needing  
19 to be fixed.' (Beth, 28, Stanley Road Garden)

20 Beth illustrates how the plots are an important spatial device for managing personal lives  
21 while being involved in a shared project with people who have other routines. The quote also  
22 illuminates how the plots rely on mutual understanding and sympathy between gardeners who  
23 are trying to manage busy lives. Stephanie says she does not mind when fellow gardeners  
24 spend little time in the garden:

1           ‘No, I guess if we were all in the same plot then yeah, but because we’ve got little  
2           sections, it doesn’t worry me’. (Stephanie, 33, Stanley Road Garden)

3   At all three gardens gardening on plots and the associated separation of responsibilities  
4   allow people to avoid gardening with others. This is particularly evident at the private plot  
5   garden, where the plots create a situation in which the gardeners only know the person who  
6   allocates the plots and none of the other members. The ‘dispersed community’, as one of the  
7   gardeners calls it, makes many express feelings of guilt and disappointment. Gardeners join  
8   the project seeking community connections but end up not finding the time to make those:

9           ‘I don’t know anyone else from the community garden, because I haven’t been able to  
10          go to any of the working bees because I have been working, so my garden died and I  
11          was like aaargh. [...] I realized it’s also my fault for not having been to the working  
12          bees’. (Alice, 23, Stanley Road Garden)

13          People value the possibility to work out their own routine and garden at times that are  
14   convenient for them. The system of plots allows people to come and go as they please  
15   because there is no need to negotiate with others. This means however that there is no  
16   incentive to attend working bees, resulting in the working bees becoming non-existent.

17          On the one hand the plot is an autonomous space that allows people to follow  
18   personal routines, but at the same time the plot is a spatial device that is constitutive of  
19   community. People feel that they acquire membership and belonging when moving onto their  
20   plot. Claire says that there are no barriers to becoming a member of the private plot garden  
21   group:

22          ‘There is no barriers. You just have to ask, and most people who have asked have come  
23          in and been able to take over a little plot, or build their own little plots and build up  
24          their own dirt and put their own seeds in.’ (Claire, age unknown, Stanley Road Garden)

1 The practice of building a plot is here singled out as a practice that creates membership and  
2 belonging to the group.

3 At the mixed plot garden, having a plot is also an important part of being a member.  
4 However, for 40 dollars a year it is also possible to be a general member without a plot.  
5 Payment for membership without the spatial claim on a plot does not seem to produce the  
6 same sense of group belonging. At the 2014 end of year meeting the secretary asks members  
7 to think about ways to encourage general members to be more involved, as some mentioned  
8 to her that they struggled to see their place and purpose in the community project. Zoe, who  
9 just started occupying a plot after two years of general membership explains that she started  
10 to feel a greater sense of belonging after she occupied a plot:

11 'I must say now that I've got my own plot I feel more comfortable coming here. I sort  
12 of wondered if I should be here or not as much as a general member. Which no one  
13 suggested that I shouldn't be, but I feel more, and I'm coming more often now, so I feel  
14 more comfortable, you know, more part of the place.' (Zoe, 47, Highfield Garden)

15 Zoe's statement illustrates the iterative relationships between practice, property and  
16 belonging. Being in the garden and having a spatial claim in the garden generates a sense of  
17 belonging which in turn encourages Zoe to be present in the garden more often.

18 Plots and individual responsibilities appear necessary because they give gardeners a  
19 sense of belonging as well as autonomy. Consequently, managing one's own life and being  
20 part of the community becomes a delicate search for balance that is played out on the plot.  
21 Gardeners are aware that the autonomy that comes with plot ownership might facilitate  
22 withdrawal and that this could be detrimental to community cohesion. At the mixed plot  
23 garden, people have to garden during communal hours for an undefined period to prove that  
24 they have a 'genuine interest' in the community, or as Sophie puts this, they have to:

1            '[have] shown that you are kind of in it actually for also the community bit not just your  
2            own gain'. (Sophie, 43, Highfield Garden)

3            Community gardeners enact a spatial division of plots that helps them constitute a  
4            sense of autonomy as well as group belonging. Although this might seem contradictory,  
5            Davies' feminist critique on property theory (2012) helps us see how the idea of ownership as  
6            vested in a bounded self is illusionary at best. Autonomy, she demonstrates, can only be  
7            reached in relation to others. In setting up plots of autonomy, gardeners find a way to be  
8            alongside as well as with others. This way gardeners balance community yearning with their  
9            personal lifestyles. The practice of plotting, while separating the garden space into isolated  
10           parcels, also contributes to a sense of common ownership as it enables people to be involved  
11           and creates a sense of togetherness. Property practices such as plotting, and resulting  
12           understandings of community, also translate into ways people see the entirety of their  
13           community garden as a space of entitlement that needs to be clearly demarcated and  
14           monitored. I will illustrate this in the next section where I discuss fencing.

15

#### 16    Fencing: protecting community and garden from undeserving others

17            Where gardening on plots helps people manage and understand their own investments and  
18            daily routines in relation to, and as part of, the community project, fencing illustrates how  
19            people make sense of the group in relation to outsiders. The three gardens already had fences  
20            around the site when fieldwork commenced. In singling out fencing as a practice, I refer not  
21            only to the actual construction of those fences but more so to how people talk about the fence  
22            and legitimatise, enjoy or resent that fence. Fence talk sheds light on levels of comfort and  
23            unease with exclusivity, and illustrates how people make sense of 'community' in terms of  
24            both accessibility and enclosure.



1           When asked about their opinions or feelings regarding the fence, most gardeners  
2 mention that no fence would be better but that unfortunately in the present situation the fence  
3 is necessary to keep unwanted others, such as drunks and vandals, out. Some gardeners also  
4 see the fence as a construction that legitimatises the project. At the private plot garden, the  
5 garden that was started without council support, Beth says about the fence that:

6           ‘I feel like the council has given me permission to be here. For the time being’. (Beth,  
7           28, Stanley Road Garden)

8           When asked about the fence and connections between the garden and the neighbourhood,  
9 gardeners at all three projects tell stories about passers-by stopping, looking at the greenery  
10 and asking about the project through the fence. Gardeners interpret this as endorsements and  
11 as neighbours’ intentions to get involved later on. Henry says:

12           ‘I think it’s great for passers-by. They don’t want to necessarily get in here in the first  
13 instance. Unless they’re regulars. And then they think oh I want to be part of it’.  
14           (Henry, 76, Stanley Road Garden)

15           This illustrates that although the fence keeps people out it is also understood as a connection  
16 between the community and outsiders.

17           At the communal garden the fence has a similar double role. There, the fence is used  
18 as a mechanism to respond to conflict in the group. When certain members cause friction, the  
19 access code is changed to exclude them. The code on the padlock is also changed when the  
20 group’s cohesion is floundering. When gardeners who attend the communal hours perceive  
21 that others choose to garden outside of those hours too much the code is changed because  
22 people then have to visit the garden during general hours again when other community  
23 garden members are also there. It coerces people back into a community gardening rhythm.

1           Gardeners at all three projects express moral objections against fences, especially in  
2 the context of projects that aim to be *for* the community. Talking about the fence, Hellen at  
3 the private plot garden says:

4           'I feel that when I'm in here or just like when I walk past, people look in, but it's not a  
5 look-in as though... It's kind of like an us and a them or 'oh she is allowed in that  
6 garden space' or 'what is that garden space?' Or there doesn't seem to be like, it  
7 doesn't seem to achieve what is set out to in that it's a community garden. It feels like  
8 it's an exclusive club of gardeners rather than something for everyone'. (Hellen, 29,  
9 Stanley Road Garden)

10 For outsiders access to PARK STREET GARDEN is limited to the communal gardening  
11 hours and gardeners feel that their efforts and the entitlement that those efforts bring, should  
12 weigh heavier than the project's aim of establishing community connections. Charles says:

13           'I don't think community gardens should be open to anyone to just stroll through at any  
14 time anyway, because it's not a public garden, it's a community garden, there is a  
15 reward for effort that goes on, that should go on here. And I don't think that there  
16 should be an unlimited entitlement to people who are not involved in that to wander  
17 through it. But I don't know whether that has an effect on how many people don't  
18 wander through'. (Charles, 29, Park Street Garden)

19 Here, Charles describes that the effort that gardeners invest in the garden legitimatises their  
20 exclusive access to the space, even when that exclusivity might prevent new people from  
21 starting to invest similar efforts and thus 'earn' their access to the space. At the private plot  
22 garden Henry says something similar when we talk about whether the space functions as a  
23 leisure space:

24           'I wouldn't want it too comfortable in here for seating as people might come in here  
25 and sit down on a seat and after the pubs closed. To come in with a bottle of beer and

1 sit and drink it. I wouldn't like it develop into something like that. So. We don't need  
2 fancy seats. [...] Well relaxing a bit for the gardeners I guess if they want to sit down  
3 and have a coke, or bring a coffee in here or something during the day you know'.

4 (Henry, 76, Stanley Road Garden)

5 Like Charles, Henry voices a perceived difference between a group of hard-working  
6 gardeners, entitled to the garden space on the grounds of the labour they invest and a group of  
7 non-deserving others who should be kept out.

8 Fencing practices such as gardeners talking about the fence, engaging with people  
9 through the fence and changing the codes on locks, illustrates the uneasy and contradictory  
10 functioning of fences in these community gardens. The fences keep people out and this seems  
11 warranted to some of the gardeners, but at the same time connections between gardeners and  
12 passers-by are made through the fence. Fences facilitate the existence of the community  
13 projects and generate a sense of legitimacy. The labour that gardeners invest into the garden  
14 space creates a common interest to protect that space, even where protective fencing might  
15 from a potential barrier to new gardeners who seek to invest their effort.

16

## 17 Discussion and conclusions

18 Much community garden research either advocates for these projects on the ground of their  
19 inclusionary social effect (Beilin and Hunter, 2011; Firth et al., 2011; Glover et al., 2005;  
20 Holland, 2004) or highlight how they facilitate roll-back neoliberalism (e.g. Rosol, 2012).  
21 Scholarly work puts forward interpretations of community gardens as inclusive spaces or  
22 community commons by virtue of their position in an institutional landscape (e.g.  
23 Schmelzkopf, 2002; Eizenberg, 2013). These studies emphasise relations of community  
24 gardens to external property regimes. Drawing from property theory that engages with  
25 practice (Blomley, 2013) and building on work that has emphasised the relationship between

1 gardening practices and property (Blomley, 2004; Lang, 2014), the empirical exploration of  
2 three gardening practices, creates insight into how property relations are produced in  
3 relational and contradictory ways by the gardeners.

4         A focus on practised connections between private and community garden spaces  
5 illustrates how community gardens are the product of practices that create contradicting and  
6 relational property constructs. Rather than isolated pockets of alternative values and  
7 practices, community gardens are constituted by people who are simultaneously engaged in  
8 various property spaces and relationships. Gardeners move back and forth between those  
9 spaces as they garden in community gardens. These relationships and associated practices  
10 translate into gardening practices, such as plotting and fencing through which the community  
11 space is connected to the larger landscape of property relationships. Interactions with the  
12 garden space, transplanting plants between home and community gardens and arranging  
13 plants onto plots, help fit the communal gardens into autonomous personal lifestyles, and  
14 work towards the creation of a community that comprises different practices of property.

15         Because property practices are multiple and relational, community gardens are not  
16 inherently inclusive or exclusive. My research shows that property creates legitimacy and  
17 group belonging, but also shows the potential exclusionary effects of property practices in  
18 community gardens. Garden membership can be limited to people who can afford rent or  
19 have time available to invest in demonstrating their community-mindedness. Overlapping  
20 practices between private and communal garden spaces also challenge the membership of  
21 people who live at a greater distance from the garden. Exclusive access to an individual plot  
22 makes it easier for community gardeners to fit gardening in with other personal lifestyle  
23 choices but also reproduces a tragedy of the commons discourse that favours a reading of  
24 communal ownership as inefficient or wasteful. Communal understandings and practices of

1 property, although present and necessary in these spaces, are discursively less successful as a  
2 consequence of this reproduction.

3         Even where gardeners aim to create an inclusive community space, property practices  
4 unwittingly create both connections and barriers. For example, these gardeners find it  
5 important to have community connections and try to build relationships with other  
6 neighbourhood stakeholders and organisations, but at the same time many endorse fences as  
7 inevitable boundaries between themselves and the neighbourhood community with which  
8 they try to connect. On the one hand, property can work to create an inclusive and cohesive  
9 group, but on the other hand these practices also create defensive and exclusionary attitudes  
10 towards outsiders.

11         The gardening practices I presented here problematize readings of community gardens  
12 as either inherently inclusive or as perpetuating neoliberal hegemony. The focus on practices  
13 in community gardens shows that these projects comprise community-mindedness as well as  
14 practices driven by self-interest. It is not the purpose of this paper to undermine the important  
15 contributions of community garden and public space scholarship. On the contrary, I hope it  
16 demonstrates that community gardens are connected to the larger urban fabric with all its  
17 intricacies spanning from everyday routines, property investments and social relationships.  
18 Contradictory and exclusionary practices are not discussed with the purpose of arguing  
19 against the value of community gardening projects. Instead, I believe that a fuller  
20 understanding of those tensions will lead to insight into how such community-led initiatives  
21 can be made more sustainable and inclusive. Rather than framing property in community  
22 gardens as either exclusively private or as community commons, the work presented here  
23 encourages future critical inquiry into the various contradictory relationships that are  
24 produced through property practices and how those might be motivated by individual and  
25 community interests in simultaneous and complex ways.

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