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Plants and Society:

an ethnographic approach to the changing role of botanical life in London homes

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ABSTRACT

This research concerns the changing ways in which people and plants live together in London. Using a case study of the domestic garden and a multi-sited ethnography of the plants circulating between certain city spaces, this thesis examines the assemblies of agenda, practice and infrastructure that make particular plant relationships possible. In particular, this thesis analyses plant experience in two ways that, through the course of this research, emerged as particularly important. Firstly, it considers the phenomenon of plant 'liveness.' Here it seeks to elucidate whether or not people in London feel plants to be independently struggling things, the extent to which they want to fully control them, and the perceived benefit that comes from relinquishing some control. Secondly, it considers issues of 'temporality.' Here it seeks to elucidate how different paces of plant behaviour are accommodated by people and how plant temporalities are, more generally, experienced and understood. By taking these two elements and locating them within wider evolving activities, this thesis also reconsiders the changing character of city consumption. This is where its principle contribution lies as, by analysing certain contradictions evident within current approaches, it becomes possible to prompt productive reflection on the future form of the human-plant relationship in London domestic life.

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> Each specific form of cultural conceptualisation also introduces sets of rules governing the use and appropriation of nature, evaluations of technical systems, and beliefs about the structure of the cosmos, the hierarchy of beings and the very principles by which living things function. The logic that informs these configurations is dictated both by the characteristics of the ecosystems to which each culture must adapt itself and by the types of practice through which these ecosystems are socialised.
>
> Descola (1992, 110-111)

1.1 Some London lives

We have all had a variety of dealings with living plant life. Sitting on the grass in the summertime, picking fruits when ripe, or getting stung by a nettle are just a few common examples that come up in discussions I have had. Further afield such encounters also include harvesting corn, making shelter in the forest, even hunting from trees. There are innumerable ways in which different plants and people go about living together and this is, perhaps, unsurprising when plant life, by volume, makes up ninety eight per cent of the total weight of the earth's living matter (Stern, 2000) - we may often forget it, but there are more of them than us. Try as we might, it is hard for us, as humans, to escape these enterprising lifeforms as they doggedly make themselves at home around us, arriving unbidden and finding a range of ways to grow and to thrive across the planet.

Yet despite this ubiquity and range of experience, for Schneekloth (2002) in contemporary Western societies we no longer quite know or really understand plants in the ways that we have done historically. For her, plants are gradually becoming our 'alien kin' - always near to hand but increasingly misunderstood, found to be strange or even potentially dangerous. That is to say, then, that whilst many of us have certainly sat on the grass, picked fruits or got stung, these experiences are increasingly infrequent and uneasily received. As societies, we have fewer close plant encounters now than previously and, correspondingly, we are less sure of ourselves and what best to do when they do take place. Vegetation is something passive in contemporary understanding: to be in a 'vegetative' state is to be without mind. Yet the root meaning of this word, 'vegetative', is associated more with activity and enlivened animation (Ayto, 1990), which suggests a closer, more intimate, connection to the active concerns of our organic brethren within past societies. Schneekloth uses this point to lament a contemporary estrangement from such concerns and, as such, can be aligned to wider academic arguments that

posit a contemporary damaging human detachment from the strange world of natural process (from a feminist perspective see, for instance, Plumwood, 1993; for a Marxist approach, see Dickens, 1996).

Speculatively such changes could be linked to our increasingly urbanised human societies as, culturally at least, we tend to think of the city as the antithesis of nature - somewhere where people are rightly in charge and where strange genetic forces, like those embodied by the plant, might not rightly belong. They are at home in the country and not the city is what we have thought (Williams, 1973) even though, as environmental historians have documented, this has always been something of an anthropocentric conceit - the cities we have created for ourselves are inextricably dependent upon any number of natural processes and agencies. City dwellers eat and wear plant life every day and the development of cities has been wholly conditional on the willing support of particular communities of botanical life. Chicago's development in the nineteenth century, for instance, was predicated on certain vegetable supplies and some compliant organic behaviours within its rural hinterland (Cronon, 1991), whilst the culture and landscape of Los Angeles, meanwhile, emerges as much from the effects of sudden fires, the sporadic heave of geological plates and the propensities of woodland, as from any more human-centred history (Davis, 1999). The problem was that both conventional history and wider popular understanding have tended to spatialise nature and its ambassadors as wild and removed – something to do with the forest or with the wilderness (Cronon, 1996) as we, somewhat arrogantly, have conversely tended to imaginatively populate our cities with only people.

Cities, then, are more alive with different types of life than we might have thought and, in this way, we might reconsider the significance of plants in the city and how city life, more generally, is subject to a variety of nonhuman actions (Wolch et al, 1995). In London, for instance, over a third of the total area is 'semi-natural or mown grass, tilled land and deciduous woodland.' (Landsat cited in Ackroyd, 2001, p409). From this perspective, cities like London can be reconsidered as an important home for any number of kinds of organism. The water vole, the stag beetle or the butterfly, for instance, all depend on the informal sanctuaries that people and plants can offer in the city. Derelict sites, meanwhile, might better be described as 'brown jewels' where, unbeknownst to us, many hidden and fascinating nonhuman lifeforms nestle (London Wildlife Trust, 2002). The city, then, is clearly not just a place for people, but rather a place where people and others make themselves at home together. In cities, different people and different plants get by as best they can when faced with the particular urban characteristics of their surroundings.

To eschew more standard organising lenses, we could rank elements like light, shade, noise and heat amongst the more fundamental city categories (Ackroyd, 2001). Here, for instance, with the intensity of human activity concentrated in these places, the city can become what physical geographers call a 'heat island' as the hurried activity of people produces an anthropogenic effect that can be mapped as a dome of warmth rising up over our city spaces. The hurried activities of humans in their man-made environments heat the city up and these milder conditions correspondingly mean that the vegetable lives of London can respond accordingly. Many tropical plants can often set themselves up better here than they could elsewhere - whilst we continue to rush busily around London, the tree fern can, for instance, lazily enjoy the warmth that results from our frenetic activities.

On a grander scale, therefore, there may be some strange symbioses forged between the human and the vegetable worlds of such cities, even though, to follow both Shneekloth's (2003) argument and the criticisms made by environmental history, we might not always be so aware of them. This thesis seeks to reconsider some of these strange symbioses within London on a more intimate scale. As I suggested earlier, whether we think about them much or not, we have a whole range of living plant experiences. With this argument in place, in this enterprise I have taken a particular case as this research centres on the private domestic garden in London.

1.2 WHY EXAMINE THE LONDON GARDEN?

The domestic garden, initially at least, seems a place saturated with relations between people and plants and, therefore, is, firstly, ideal for this enquiry. Traditionally, although not always, these spaces that we have come to expect outside the built dwellings which people inhabit contain at least some elements of biological plant life. In Britain, houses are often still built with gardens as a standard – a garden is an assumed expectation and desire of any homeowner. Older housing stock is also organised with such a space and so domestic gardens make up a huge amount of space when considered nationally in Britain. Eighty four per cent of households in the UK are surrounded by a garden - totalling over 1 million acres, gardens make up three per cent of English land - a greater area than that devoted to nature reserves (MINTEL 1997, cited in Franklin, 2002, 134). Yet despite this relative ubiquity, there are many interesting and divergent ways of dealing with life in gardens. We grow, tend and nurture; yet we also kill, uproot and poison. Some fascinating, and sometimes contradictory, relations are at work, I hypothesised, in these everyday spaces and this makes for an interesting context in which to explore the changing character of our own plant relations.

Secondly, at the point when this research was conceived, much attention was being devoted to the garden – both in monetary and media terms. In Britain, at least, gardening is now big

business with a recent surge in the popularity and expenditure on such places. In 1998 Britons spent 3 billion pounds on their gardens which compares to the 2.3 billion of two years previously (MINTEL, 1999a). At the same time 17.3 million people in Britain count themselves as keen gardeners (MINTEL, 1999a). Moving beyond the statistics, we can certainly suggest that gardening increasingly holds our attention. The explosive advent of television garden makeover programmes is an obvious exemplar. Yet such trends might not necessarily be indicative of developing relations with plants. We can look, for example, to the fact that the media have portrayed wooden decking as a desirable garden design feature. As such, DIY Week (1999) reports a staggering increase in sales of this product and the growth of this specific market to 100 million pounds. This may, then, not necessarily be about developing plant relations, therefore, when hard landscaping is also experiencing such an upsurge. Whatever the relations that are evolving within the garden they are certainly played out on a grand scale in the UK.

As such, perhaps unsurprisingly, I was not the only one to be interested in these developments, which leads to a third motivation for this work. In recent times, considerable attention has been paid the domestic garden by many impassioned media commentators that are quite willing to ascribe meanings to these bigger trends (see for example Lawson, 1999; Vidal 1999). Indeed, throughout this research, sporadic media spats have argued over how best to forge relations with our garden spaces. Such debates have mainly centred on televised makeover shows, where some argue them to be anathema to the pleasure of gardening and others suggest them to be one of the few ways of getting the modern consumer interested in plant care. (Keen, 2000; Barron, 2001; White and Goswami, 2004). These discussions testify to a broader interest and concern, yet the dogmatic views expounded here have been particularly dependent on other representations, rather than an engagement with the more physical practices of life. That is to say that we may watch and read certain things in newspapers and on television about gardens, but how we manage our routines and activities could be a different matter entirely.

Fourthly, such routines and activities feed into some wider issues regarding our relations with other forms of life. As the London Wildlife Trusts again would remind us, the domestic garden in London is a place where many sorts of creature make their home, and these are not only human. As such, the patterns of organisation at work in the city garden may do much to affect what we understand as nature, how we experience it, and even what we get the opportunity to experience in the first place. An example serves to illustrate this. The RSPB, together with the Government (DEFRA, 2004), recently launched a campaign to save the London sparrow. These birds, historically so closely associated with London and the figure of the 'cockney sparrow', are now in decline. Some suggest that one thing to blame is the rise of design aesthetics in

garden spaces (Jha, 2003). The ordered, stylish and controlled garden, apparently increasingly desired by the modern home owner, offers little sanctuary for the hapless sparrow, it seems. Depending on how these conjectured garden trends work out in practice, then, our on-going relations with domestic plants are of concern to many more lives than just our own and may furthermore be instrumental in shaping what we know and experience as 'nature.'

With these arguments in mind, I reviewed other relevant empirical research where numerous commercial surveys have sprung from the increasing media attention given to this matter. Yet these surveys tend to segment the people involved into a range of market research groupings (BBC Worldwide 1999; MINTEL 1999a; MINTEL 1999b). As a result, rather than using more distanced questionnaire instruments that aim at the apparent surety of numerical data, my own starting point is that these accounts could be enriched by a close engagement with the actual people and plants involved. This thesis, then, aims to explore how plants and people go about being together in the gardens of London. I am concerned with how and why we live with plants in these spaces and how, given the degree of speculation and monetary attention involved, these relations may be developing. Humans and plants are clearly and persistently together in many instances and, through exploring these intimacies at work on the ground, this thesis argues that it can say much to all the debates I have outlined here. Yet, before I discuss how this can be done, I want to now briefly contextualise this enterprise within past academic work on this matter.

1.3 ACADEMICS AND LANDSCAPES

It is true to say that there is already much impressive scholarly work on the phenomenon of 'the garden' where it has been examined, to a large extent, through more historical lenses. Indeed, there are whole journals devoted to the subject of garden history, such as the Garden History Society's 'Garden History,' or Taylor and Francis' 'Studies in the History of Gardens and Designed Landscapes.' Much has very usefully been said here, although this body of work does tend to focus on grander gardens and more aesthetic elements of garden presentation and style. There are, therefore, many researchers who possess a depth of knowledge in these matters of historical garden trends and fashions and what can be inferred about cultural values from the aesthetics embodied within them (see for instance, Clifford, 1966 and, in the London context, Longstaff-Gowan, 2001).

Within geography, research has also, traditionally, taken similar approaches. Here the garden has been largely viewed in historical context through a dominant lens of 'landscape.' Cosgrove and Daniels (1988) famously suggested the landscape to be a 'way of seeing' and a representation from which we can abstract revelatory detail about cultural values and processes

at given times. Through such a lens, a group of (again) largely historical studies have looked in the garden and found cultural detail pertaining to the perennial explanatory categories of the social sciences. What geographers have tended to find in the garden has thus been issues of class (Cosgrove and Daniels, 1988), gender (Morris, 1994), and imperialism (Preston, 1999). These geographers have furthermore been heavily influenced by the idea of landscapes as 'text' (Duncan, 1990) and, as such, have had little need to look into actual gardens themselves. Rather, they sought better to examine their depictions. Pugh (1988), for instance, bases his work on a letter about a garden, Morris (1996) looks into a novel about a garden, and Bertram (1999) finds meaning in a garden painting.

A first thing to say about these movements is that, although they reveal much, they have tended to draw research away from the intimate human experience of plants. What was primarily being studied here were 'cultural landscapes' viewed in relation to some more conventional organising themes and with a particular concern for the visual. As such, gardens became the physical manifestation of cultural ideas at certain times, rather than potentially the contexts for evolving plant relationships. In this way, a more archive-based distanced exploration of garden landscapes became prevalent.

As Francis and Hestor (1990) correctly write, the garden can be usefully thought about in many ways - two of which are 'meaning' and 'action.' In terms of the first, cultural geographers and garden historians have done much to expose questions to do with meaning and how certain cultural notions have, through time, found form within grander garden spaces. However, with regard to the second, it seems to me that there is more to be said about practical plant involvements. Here some researchers have now begun to explore the more personal experiences of being within garden spaces (Crouch, 1999; Bhatti and Church, 2000, 2001). This work has excitingly begun to put people more wholeheartedly and physically back in the gardens that are studied. However, I would argue it has yet to find a way that deals fully with the actual plant and material relationships involved. It does still, for instance, still tend to make these landscapes the inert markers of cultural processes, rather than the active work of complicit plants.

It might very well be the case, however, that people (academic or otherwise) more easily approach the living world of organic biota in a cultural and visual way. We can all talk about 'landscapes' with relative ease in everyday discussion. Tellingly there is no corresponding commonplace phrase to encapsulate sensory encounters with the land that are not specifically about looking (Williams, 1973). Many argue that we are primarily used to thinking about natural environments as things upon which we should rightly and proprietarily 'look.' Indeed different explanations for this occularcentric relationship abound. Some take a genetic approach

(Appleton, 1975), where we are predisposed to this as part of a safety mechanism involved in natural selection where it is better to be able to see potential predators from the surety of a distanced vantage. More historically, Cosgrove (1985) argues that in Britain this can be linked to the development of property markets and mapping systems where, through such developments, the land was increasingly looked down upon in terms of proud ownership. From a more feminist perspective (e.g. Rose, 1996), we can equally point to the development of a masculinist scientific 'gaze' where the rational way of understanding the masses of nonhuman biota surrounding us was thought to be through an apparently objective lens of visual classification.

Whatever the combination of these factors, I would argue that the ascendance of this visual encounter with vegetated spaces is not necessarily given. Rather, it is worked at in practice, as a variety of technologies help structure these encounters. The most obvious and well researched example here is the painting, where a range of different styles of painting have been explored to uncover how they structure certain ways of thinking about the nonhuman world (see, for example Cosgrove and Daniels, 1988). They also include posters (Pinney, 1995; Matless, 1998), film (Mitman, 1999) and photography (Wilson, 1991). Such devices may reinforce the idea that it is through a visual encounter that we are rightly supposed to best evaluate these masses of plants, trees and earth that gardens and landscapes can be comprised of. Yet this is not to say that we always necessarily do so.

As Hirsch (1996) argues, landscape experiences are always in flux. Sometimes our encounters with collections of organic matter might indeed be something to do with more detached visual and cultural experiences. Yet, at other times, we might be involved in some quite different dealings. Gow (1996) describes how, in Amazonia, vegetation is such that it is hard to conceive of it as a 'landscape' in the distanced visual way favoured by this existing work. Indeed, the very notion of 'landscape', he interestingly suggests, might be a product of the biome in which 'landscape' ideas developed since in Northern Europe naturally occurring vegetation never reaches the same overwhelming height as in the American Amazon. As such, it is more conducive to a detached experience of looking - our own forests never grow so high that we cannot ever look down upon them and ease them into a landscape representation. Faced with the towering canopies and emergents of the South American forest, however, a different experience is structured by attendant vegetable proclivities. In Western Amazonia 'the land does not recede from a point of observation to a distant horizon, for everywhere vegetation occludes the view' (Gow, 1996, p43). In Amazonia, then, you are very much surrounded by things, 'hemmed in' and constantly faced with the potential for more physical plant encounters. Indeed, it was only with land clearance, he argues, that a more visual landscape experience could be felt by the

indigenous people who had previously lived inside swathes of 'unending forest' (Gow, 1996, p43).

Experiencing the garden as a 'landscape' is something that takes work. In many previous studies on the garden at least, this landscape notion was often assumed from the outset as a result of a mix of particular theoretical orientations and favoured practical methodologies. Yet this is not to criticise these endeavours. The garden may in practice very well be more of an inert visual expression of cultural values and tastes since, as I have suggested and others have documented, a number of factors can help structure it as such. However, my suspicion was that the London garden might not always be such. As Hirsch (1996) and Gow (1996) seemed to suggest, it might also be the product of a volatile negotiation with a variety of different material and living entities and this was to become a central concern of this work. In summary then, past academic work on gardens tends to favour historical methods and ideas of visual experience and design. What are downplayed are more contemporary experiences that might not necessarily always be about looking. This thesis, therefore, seeks to take an alternative stance on garden matters to better understand how we live with and experience plant life. A starting point can now be found in the Amazonian jungle.

1.4 LIVING WITH PLANTS AS PRACTICE

The Huaorani people live between the Zaparo, Shuar and Tukanoan nations of the Upper Maranon region of South America (Rival, 1993; 1996). Here they have developed nomadic and autarkic enclaves and they fiercely refuse contact, trade or exchange with any of their neighbours. Their means of survival is largely hunting and gathering, with occasional bursts of horticultural activity. They principally hunt monkeys and birds from the tree canopy above; on occasion they kill the wild, hog-like, white-lipped peccary when they come across their herds foraging for fallen fruits nuts and seeds on the forest floor. They also intermittently grow manioc groves. As part of this means of organising their subsistence in this way, both men and women have intimate knowledge of the habits, habitats and feeding cycles of most arboreal species that they encounter. Inferring from fruiting cycles, weather conditions, and other signs, they predict animal behaviour and locate animals they cannot visually see. With such developed sensorial abilities – especially hearing and smell – they feel the presence of animals, anticipate their next move and, in this way, theirs is a gradual and practical way of learning and coming to understand things through an immersion in their environment. Men, women and children spend hours slowly exploring the forest along their trails - gradually acquiring affinities and knowledge. They do not 'hunt and gather' as if these were distinct, discreetly organised activities. Rather they 'walk' – combining all of these activities at once whilst observing with evident pleasure and interest the movements of animals, the progress of fruit maturation, or

simply the growth of vegetation. Great delight is taken in the evidence of any new shoot or leaf growth as, for them, the forest is a special 'giving environment' which they celebrate, for instance, through a vast repertoire of songs that embroider on the colours, textures and aspects of new leaves and their beauty.

Laura Rival has lived and studied with the Huaorani (1993; 1996) and one way she has explored their society relates to the specific technologies (Rival, 1998) involved in their practices of finding food. In this she was particularly interested in the reasons why they might use blowpipes in certain circumstances and spears in others and how, rather than simply being concerned with efficiency, these are integrated within wider cultural factors. Blowpipes, for instance, are almost exclusively used in conjunction with the hunting of monkeys. Through the slow gradual approach and precision that this technology necessitates, the Huaorani come to better know and understand the monkey society they seek to plunder. They learn of their movements, their relationships and character, and, consequently, a degree of intimacy and respect for these particular animals is produced. If a monkey, for instance, were to look down at his attacker before the moment of the kill, then the kill no longer takes place as the monkey is deemed to have shown the huntsman his soul and to have asked for clemency. These blowpipes are lovingly crafted and kept in pride of place in the group long hut. Effective usage is a sign of reaching adulthood and displaying the attributes that an adult should rightly have, such as patience, respect and craftsmanship. Another animal that sustains the Huaorani is the white-lipped peccary, although this animal is killed using the spear. Whereas the monkey is 'hunted', the peccary is just 'killed' – these two expressions being intimately linked with the technology involved in their performances. The Huaorani 'blow-hunt' and they 'spear-kill'. The peccary is less worthy of respect, as an apparently less intelligent animal, as it forages for fallen fruits and nuts in packs on the less appealing forest floor. Its meat is deemed to be of less taste and it is only killed out of necessity and at times when the Huaorani happen across them. Although popular elsewhere, the Huaorani have persistently eschewed the use of the bow or the trap, in part because the technologies they employ are wrapped up with a certain approach to the act of hunting, but also due to the ways in which they understand the thing being hunted and their routinised practices of living.

Another significant element of Huaorani life relates to how they live with the plants and trees around them, as these are of differential significance within their society. The most respected and talked about trees are the large emergent canopy trees, for which a fascination is held. This is due to the fact that they mature very slowly, but eventually grow to be the tallest trees of the forest. Although never made explicit, what seems to be most significant about the large emergent canopy trees, Rival argues (1993), is that they reach maturity and start flowering

between forty and sixty years old and can then live for up to two hundred years. That is to say that they reproduce at the greatest age that people can expect to live to and that their life span roughly corresponds to five human generations. They, therefore, provide a rhythmic context to the human life taking place below. Another relatively slowly growing tree is the peach palm, the groves of which are talked about with great excitement and pleasure for they are sources of pride, security and rejoicing, as the concrete sign of continuity. They live longer than humans do and when passing through them, people recall the deceased, usually a grandparent of the oldest members of the house groups who came to collect the fruit. The presence of the people helps the trees too, as the scattered seeds from human intervention contribute to their reproduction. Such slow growing trees can be contrasted with the negative nature of faster growth. Fast growing species include balsa and manioc and fast growth is associated with short life and discontinuity. Manioc is grown in clearings, where it matures within a few weeks as the plot is grown, harvested and then abandoned. This is a feasting food for the relatively dangerous occasions in which enemies are invited to a celebration. Yet they also bring excitement since they represent the chance of potential affines and marriage outside the endogamous group. Such alliances are judged to have benefits but they are also notoriously shortly lived and perilous. Hence fast growth, of the sort obtained by exogamous marriages and manioc genetics comes to be associated with short life, discontinuity and even warfare as temporary friends can turn into predators. Slow growth, by contrast, of the sort obtained through endogamous marriages and the exclusive drinking feasts amongst peach palms is associated with peace, continuity and stability.

What Laura Rival (1996) is interested in here are the 'affordances' (Ingold, 1996) offered by the ways in which the Huaorani and their vegetations work together. The experience of being in the forest is, through this lens, constructed by both the physical material things involved and the human interaction with these things. Their understanding of their place in the forest is an emergent property, immanent to the particular combination of human and nonhuman qualities found in each case. In this area of anthropology, Descola argues that research concerning the natural world should be one that examines the 'single social' (Descola, 1994) and the many forces and entities that work together in practice to shape our understanding of this natural world. For Descola, many elements actively work together in practice to shape a system of simultaneously living, working, and thinking, and it is through their operation that we come to understand botanical life in the ways that we do.

In the Amazon, then, the way in which the Huaorani see their place in the world is dependent, in part, upon the fact that some trees grow more slowly than others and consequently help support different emotions and attitudes. Similarly, the way in which the Huaorani relate themselves to the natural world is in part determined by the practised relations between themselves and the

representatives of that world, which are encoded within specific hunting tools and the manner of their use. Rival's work provides a good introductory illustration of how the approach that Descola advocates could work. Equally, it points to the practices considered in my own work. As will become evident, the garden owners of London are in many ways similar to the Huaorani of the Amazon. Like the Huaorani, their temporal experience of plant life is organised in some interesting ways, where different technologies and techniques can also serve to structure how we live with, understand and experience plants.

However, for the moment, the point of this approach is to take a more agnostic and contextual stance on how different materials, people and plants come together. In the West we may very well have developed a habituated pattern of 'looking' upon the natural world, or perhaps we do not. We might equally find that we are like the Huaorani, if we allowed ourselves to consider it as such. It could be argued that lively nature might be more in evidence in less 'westernised' societies which, we might assume, live more closely and intimately with organic matters. Then again, we may have simply presupposed a greater closeness on their part. This thesis seeks to reconsider how our human garden experiences can emerge through practical practised activity within a 'field of forces' (Ingold, 2000) that include, amongst others, those held genetically by the very plants themselves. Within this approach, two concerns became of particular import and I want to turn now to these.

1.5 TWO GUIDING CONCERNS

In 1973, Kreiger provocatively posed a challenging question. What he wanted to know was what exactly was wrong with plastic trees (Kreiger, 1973). The point of his question was to encourage a closer enumeration of exactly the properties of vegetable matter that we hold dear. The context to his argument was provided by some unusual contemporary local government decisions in America. Alongside some Californian highways, he recounts how plastic trees had been installed to make the vistas more pleasant for the drivers passing by them. This seemed a nice idea, but the problem was that they were subsequently repeatedly vandalised. People, it seemed, for some reason, took against the fact that they were plastic. Kreiger wanted to know why. For many of us, having living rather than fake plants is something that is intuitively better - just a good thing. Yet what Kreiger was interested to know was exactly why plastic substitutes were considered so unacceptable and why their living alternatives were so preferable.

Something important seemed to be about the active agency of trees themselves, he hypothesised. In making this argument he considered the example of Niagara Falls where, if we wanted this as a visual landscape, we might take measures to control the effects of erosion and keep the phenomenon in its visual place. If we were to value process, however, then erosion

should be allowed and the falls could potentially disappear. So the implication is that the kind of nature that we want leads to different associated infrastructures and it might be useful to think about plants in similar terms. What kind of nature do we want from plants and what exactly is it about plants that we like? Interestingly, a similar advocacy of the plastic flower has sometimes been evident in the context of the contemporary London garden. Although now folded, the garden style magazine New Eden, for example, briefly trumpeted the plastic flower as a potential answer for the modern fashion conscious garden owner (New Eden, 2000). So Kreiger's question may be as salient for this research as it was for the Californian planning official. Indeed, this question became the first central concern of this thesis: what exactly are the specific qualities embodied in living plants which lead us to want them around us in our lives?

To turn to the second, as I have argued, a premise upon which this research rests is that there are some interesting contemporary developments surrounding the domestic gardens of London. Whilst I am keen to approach this research so as to look at these issues in such a way as to productively explore human relations with plants, this is not to suggest that the people involved may not be potentially revealed as devoid of such close plant relationships. Such systems of experience as those, which Descola draws attention to, may very well be evolving, and evolving in ways that structure some alternative relations. To return to Schneekloth's (2002) argument, whilst plants are often certainly and irrepressibly there, the ease with which we encounter them is another matter altogether. Knowing, and living productively with plants is a difficult business. It may very well be the case that the people encountering plants in London might be inclined to explore and amass them cognitively as inert visual landscapes. It may very well also be the case that plant relations are not so easily and confidently accommodated as other kinds are. The point, however, is to question how these frameworks of experience are orchestrated in practice and this thesis seeks to explore how active and living plants figure within such evolving constraints.

Although a structuring concern is with plants, then, this is not to say that it is only plants that will concern me. As will become evident, plants are interesting in so far as they are different or similar to other types of materials. Indeed, as Kreiger seemed to suggest, they are better understood through such comparisons. With this in mind, I am interested in questioning how and why plants are selected for the garden and, equally, how and why they might not be. Whilst a majority of gardens contain them in some form, some gardens, after all, have no plants at all. This research concerns people-plant relations certainly, but it is only able to expose these according to their potential salience to the places where I have undertaken research. In this sense it is in keeping with Descola's argument for a 'single social', where my plant concern is folded into a consideration of the range of forces at work within specific contexts. These include a

variety of other materials, certain symbolic ideas and particular practices. This, then, is my second concern: how exactly are these plant relations accommodated within a potentially evolving system of practice?

This thesis, therefore, concerns itself with the evolving relations surrounding the garden, but with a particular focus on plant encounters. I am interested in what exactly it is about the particular character of plants that we may like and how these characteristics are accommodated within a developing system of practice. In this it mixes an approach to the 'cultural biography of things' (Kopytoff, 1986), in this case plants, with a concern for their accommodation within different practices and structures (Descola, 1994).

1.6 AN OUTLINE OF WHAT NOW FOLLOWS

What follows now is the story of this research in more detail. In the next chapter I explore certain sets of theoretical arguments and resources that help structure this work. Here I am concerned with plant agency and the specific ways in which plants can act and make their presence felt to humans. Plants may have difficulty in actively pushing their way through into human consciousness in the textual places of the academic journal, just as in the physical places of London. In chapter two I explore some theoretical resources that enable me to better engage with this organic potential. In particular, I am concerned here with the literature on consumption in so far as it explores how we sell, buy and then live with the material goods that we do. We may increasingly think of ourselves as consumers (on this see Corrigan, 1997; Lee, 1993) and, perhaps, decreasingly as gardeners. With this idea in mind this chapter seeks to question what some existing understandings of consumer experience and organisation could offer a study of plants in London and how I might want to adapt and adopt them accordingly. By working through these resources I eventually come to an argument for researching the two particular questions that have already been introduced.

My more practical activities are then rehearsed in chapter three where I discuss how these arguments informed a research methodology. Here, the guiding principle that I adopt is the 'multi-sited ethnography' where a depth of engagement is coupled with a movement between different sites of consideration. In order to best accommodate plants and plant activities within this heuristic, however, it was necessary to reconsider the actual practical tools to be employed. The result is a mixture of methods including mobile interviewing, observational techniques and the use of photography. Together, I argue, these help shape a travelling plant ethnography where ethnographic methods are adopted and adapted according to how they might best shed light on plant relations and mundane practices within the particular places selected for in-depth study.

Four chapters then explore the empirical material resulting from these efforts. I spent time at four different sites of activity, and each chapter is devoted to one of these. As I progress through these chapters, two key elements of how plants and materials are lived with gradually come to the fore. The first of these relates to control and how physical things are both resolutely controlled by humans in order to achieve specific aims, yet are also conversely sometimes allowed to display an independent liveliness as they seemingly meet an alternative set of human needs. The second of these relates to the speeds at which different things behave and how plants and people operate according to sometimes different, yet sometimes similar, rhythms and how such rhythms can be co-ordinated to different ends.

Finally, in chapter eight, I draw this piece of research to a conclusion and consider where my travels through literature and London have taken me. I speak here to debates in psychology, geography, and consumption studies. For the moment, however, to summarise this work, this thesis develops the existing breadth of work on 'gardens' as particular and fascinating phenomena. By adopting some alternative starting points to those prevalent in past work it reconsiders the role of the relations found within such places. Through a concern for practice it is possible to see how, for the garden owners of London, like the Huaorani of Amazonia, plant experiences and understandings emerge from our evolving patterns of living.

Gardens are commonplace across cities such as London. To some extent their presence is taken for granted. We could even perhaps say that gardens are 'ordinary'. Yet it is exactly the ordinary places that are exciting because what has sedimented down into this taken-for-grantedness, more than anything more spectacular or ephemeral, is revelatory of how certain collectives work and think. Indeed, although ordinary, if we look closely at how garden systems work, there are some amazing things to be seen. Plant places can make for an 'extraordinary' world held within some ordinary lives (Robbins and Sharp, 2003) and the active liveness of plants may be an important element to this. This thesis therefore aims to explore these strange companions and how they do, or do not, affect us. As such this work is akin to Eder's (1996, 147) argument for a 're-enchanted' narrative that helps us to find once again some of the wonder that we could take from the natural world. A commonplace thing, like the plant, can make for some wholly uncommon experiences, I will argue, and, by exploring their intimate 'social lives' (Appadurai, 1986) in London, this thesis charts the changing potential for their display.

-2-

Cultivating consumption studies: having things and doing things in London

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to develop some academic resources for reconsidering human encounters with plants and materials in certain contemporary settings. Plants may be organised into certain places within the pages of the academic journal just as they might be in the designs of the urban garden. In both places, as Law (1994) argues, we try to 'order' the world and find a way through our actual practical activities of making sense of it - daily activities like gardening or like writing an essay. We can try and align things and put them in their place and arrange them into an argument or a landscape. Here I am working with some more textual places within the pages of the academic journal. Once my endeavours are finished I will then be better equipped to move to some physical places in London. My aim, then, is to engage with plants in such a way as to accommodate their liveliness within some academic perspectives. The disciplines that I draw upon include economics, sociology, anthropology, science and technology studies and geography. The focus of attention is on consumption.

As I argued in the previous chapter, rather than necessarily thinking of the garden as an aggregate experience, visual expression, or cultural landscape, I want to get closer to the particular range of materials, entities and lifeforms that inhabit this space. In this sense the literature on consumption makes for a productive alternative point of departure, as I consider how the plant might be an object of consumption in so far as it is sold to people, correspondingly bought and then, finally, lived with. What I aim to do is to construct, out of these readings, some guiding questions and concerns that I will then take to some actual field sites in London. Initially I move through some social science approaches to consumption and explore how they might help me understand how we relate to plants through these processes. Eventually, however, I find these, to a degree, lacking and therefore align some of these accounts with some other resources that begin with the natural sciences. What I seek to do is to reconcile the social significance of the things we buy and consume with the natural agency that may always been inherent within these very things. The key factor that I want to hold onto

throughout these discussions is the simple fact that plants do things – plants behave and respond actively to the conditions in which they find themselves. This is a simple point but one that is crucial to remember if I am best to explore how plants do, or do not, fit within an analysis of contemporary consumption patterns and changing lifestyles.

2.2 SOME CONTEXTUAL ARGUMENT

According to some recent study into the evolving consumption patterns of western economies, in the United Kingdom there has been a steadily increasing expenditure on consumer goods (Jackson and Marks, 1999; Røpke, 1999). Consumer spending associated with recreation, entertainment and household goods has increased by over 300 percent between 1954 and 1994. This was the fastest growing of all the categories considered - faster than travel, food, or communication. People, then, are spending more on their homes and on recreation than they ever were. Yet what Schor (1992; 1998), and others (for example, Hochshild, 1996; Reisch, 2001), find confusing about these developments is the fact that what accompanies this increasing expenditure is a correspondingly decreasing amount of time available for the enjoyment of home spaces or leisure activities. People, or at least the rich, are working too long to engage with them (Gershuny, 2000). Schor suggests there is a strange kind of 'work-spend' cycle at work here where employers set schedules and workers, correspondingly, conform to them. Then, when productivity rises, the convention is that the employers pass the gains along to the workers in the form of higher wages, rather than of reduced workloads and, consequently, people spend more money, yet less time, on their leisure and homes. There is a tension here as the presence of material things seems to be becoming more important in our home and leisure spaces than the presence of our actual selves - a tension between acquiring and having things and doing things personally with them. We have got the money to have things but not the time to do things - we pay a lot for aerobic machines and Nordic cycles to be waiting for us within our private gyms, yet we don't often get the chance to go and use them. The 'intensity of consumption' (Linder, 1970) is high here as we spend increasing amounts monetarily on the activities that we seldom do. Many of the corresponding purchased items become associated with a 'fantasy' of future use (Campbell, 1987) – we have paid for them to be available to us and like to think of ourselves involved with them, even though, in practice, we are not. This is a tension that runs through peoples lives. It is also a tension that runs through academic ways of understanding consumption.

Whilst such broader analyses give us a sense of the scale of particular changes, they cannot, however, offer a full explanation. Suggested economic forces and patterns are, after all, just people deciding for themselves to do different things at different times in different places and it is useful to remember this (O'Neill and Whatmore, 2000). Structural processes are simply the

result of a number of people and things working together to sustain such apparent processes (Latour, 1993, p125), whilst macro level trends are about love and insecurity as much as they are about markets and business cycles (Anderson and Smith, 2001).

Different explanations, then, might come about if we look beneath more general approaches, such as these, and get closer to the actual people and materials involved. Easy concepts like 'leisure' or the blanket term of 'consumer goods' might hide within them any number of different experiences with different associated entities. Nevertheless it is useful to begin thinking about plants in light of these discussions. In monetary terms, at least, the space in which we encounter plants fits with the trends identified by these economists - the garden in London has received a gradually increasing amount of monetary attention (Keynote, 2000). Yet, nonetheless, an increasing number of people claim to be gardeners (Mintel, 1999a), in spite of the fact that the current worker seems to have little time to engage in such activities. These changes might make for interesting developments in contemporary relations between people and plants and, correspondingly, I wanted to find some conceptual resources to engage with them. In order to do this, I began by exploring the insights offered by some different research approaches to how we consume. There are three particular approaches that I have explored which belong respectively to the sociologist, the anthropologist and the geographer. I want to now question these and consider what they might suggest about how we might, or might not, be consuming and consuming plants. Through using the simple fact that plants exert a purposive action on the things surrounding them, in this chapter, it then becomes possible to productively interrogate this 'having-doing' tension that, here, seems central.

2.3 THE SOCIOLOGIST OF CONSUMPTION AND PLANTS

It was in the nineteenth century at the birth of modern industrial secularism that Marx (1887) first suggested a way in which, with the advent of the market, the products exchanged in these markets (or commodities as they became known through this process) could be assigned values incommensurate to the value of the things themselves. Exchange value was becoming separated from use value, as he put it. The value of goods in the market was not the same as their practical value, once taken home. The different strategies of the manufacturers and marketers meant that commodities could become imbued with characteristics which they did not necessarily possess, as the new capitalist class tried to sell the things that their workers produced. This he called the process of 'fetishization', drawing on the anthropological term of the fetish where, in some cultures, an innate object could come to be perceived as the embodiment of a spirit or container of magical power. Since then, this magical allure of the fetish has been particularly resilient within social science theories of brands, marketing and consumption. A number of different scholars from, particularly, sociology and media studies have sought here to engage with these

ideas and apply them to the more recent products of society, through one particularly dominant account of consumption.

Here, Baudrillard (1988) constructed an argument about consumption based upon ideas of social semiotics. He suggested that what has become increasingly important in consumption activity is the 'commodity-sign' rather than the 'commodity' itself, as goods – the things that we buy from and sell to each other - are valued less according to their operation within practical activities and more according to their operation within a self-referential system of signifiers and images. We buy and consume things, he argued, less because of what they could physically do and more because of the meanings associated with certain items – the fetish now became a 'semiotic-fetish' (on this see Lury, 1996). In many ways his argument was similar to that of Bourdieu (1984) who also saw material possessions as operating as part of a symbolic system. Developing from some other earlier accounts (Simmel, 1968; Veblen, 1967), he made some similar points, but within a more capitalistic framework. Material possessions, for him, represented an individual possession of symbolic and 'cultural capital' as a means of displaying your individual good or bad taste.

It is not my intention to go into these ideas in too great a depth here, as they have been well rehearsed elsewhere (for example, Dant, 1999, Lury, 1996; Lee, 1993); what I do want to say, however, is that these arguments have been particularly important to a raft of subsequent social interpretations of consumption. These arguments were popular, in part, because they sat well within the more recent academic concept of 'postmodernism' and the associated argument for an unstable circulation of truth and meaning (Featherstone, 1991). Correspondingly, through these different processes, consumption became portrayed as something increasingly to do with the interplay of images. In this way it could be viewed, conceptually, as part of a changing project of identity formation (Giddens, 1991) and, empirically, about the media texts and discourses that seemed increasingly successful in influencing this project (Fiske, 1992). From this vantage, consumption becomes about images, specifically, and their increasing salience in individual lives (Abercrombie, 1994). For Lury, consumption has become 'stylised' (1996) as the consumption of objects has developed into an 'aestheticised' process within a self-conscious creation of lifestyle (for further examples see for instance Featherstone, 1991; Goldman and Papson, 1996).

In terms of the tension between having things and doing things, this framework clearly orientates us around the former. We may be talking about 'lifestyles' here certainly, but this is in a certain way, since we are concerned here with images and how we imagine ourselves and encourage others to imagine us. This is more about style and less about routine life, as the more

mundane physicality of things is obscured by the attention accorded the signs that might momentarily alight upon them. Furthermore, the interplay of these signs is deemed to be so rapid that their cultural value is constantly changing. Within this framework, things are replaced because they are culturally obsolete, rather than physically broken, as physical agency is given less of a chance to play a part - 'aesthetic obsolescence' takes place before 'material obsolescence' (Lee, 1993), as some Green advocates, for instance, lament (Papanek, 1995). We throw out our sweater, now, because it is no longer working for us in terms of how we want to communicate who we are. This seems to now happen long before we get a hole in it.

Indeed, according to Leiss, Kline and Jhally (1990), the material agency of an object of consumption was only really considered in advertising between 1890 and 1925. It was only in its infancy that advertising sought to discuss the practical effect of people having certain goods in their lives. During this period it seems that advertisers would actually discuss what the washing machine, for instance, might actually do and how it was could help clean clothes. Yet, by 1965 the market had moved on, they argue. The product of consumption was now about market segmentation: the product becomes displayed in context and the meaning of the consumption act becomes about identification with a certain social role and a certain lifestyle. The promotion of the washing machine had now become something to do with interpersonal relations and an idealised home. The kind of washing machine that you owned was about the kind of person that you were, in advertising terms at least, rather than what it allowed you to do. This was about trading social markers, not organising the more practical matters of living.

However, there are problems with this particular account of the way that consumption operates. In constructing a bigger theory of how consumption practice has developed, selected examples are used, as, to be fair, this is always the case when abstract theories are shaped. As such, there are plenty of empirical examples which seem to conform to the theory, but, of course, there are also plenty that do not. Correspondingly, as Warde (2001) suggests, this approach necessarily lends itself to a consideration of the visual. Yet there are plenty of examples where the consumption of certain goods may not primarily be about a concern for status and social prestige as displayed through image, and these might be secondary to any actual physical sensations and interactions. When we buy clingfilm, for example, this is more about the inconspicuous consumption associated with the way it fits snugly around our sandwiches - that it actually does something physically useful for us. This consumption might be less obvious than the stylised examples that previously attracted our attention, but it is nevertheless there.

A second concern is more methodological, as a conclusion about the increased importance of style in the way that goods are consumed is not a surprising one if the object of analysis is the

changing portrayal of the consumer good within the media. The very purpose of advertising representation is to generate additional suggested benefits derived from possession of the object. A superficial stylisation of things might be an advertiser's objective and an emphasis on their significance would unsurprisingly follow if we studied such representations. An exploration of the actual use of the good might, meanwhile, tell a different story.

What might this mean, then, for my own plant concerns? Here there may be empirical resources which contribute to an argument about the increasing importance of ideas of style in the garden and indeed media portrayal of the garden does seem, anecdotally, to be increasingly concerned with ideas of design and presentation. Plants and the materials of the garden might be things to have as aesthetic markers and elements of style, rather than things to engage with more directly. However, the ways in which plants do things themselves is also obscured here. The presence of the plant according to these arguments now becomes incidental. It is something that sits in the background of the social setting which the consumer has bought into, in terms of both monetary expenditure and self-identification. Within this academic ordering of consumption, where images and signs are particularly powerful, we can say, therefore, that the plant might have become a signifier, a cultural marker that might easily be deployed in fashioning the self. It is devoid of any life of its own.

Yet plants clearly do have an active agency. Plants are, indeed, I assumed 'alive' and I wanted to better accommodate this propensity. As Rose, argues, humans 'can enslave matter to take it to market' (Rose, 1995, p67). Yet some matters may be less willing slaves than others. The humanly-derived social message 'inundates the earth, and washes over products like a great flood' (Rose, 1995, p65), but the product is nonetheless resolutely and physically still there. Whilst this discussion can, as I have done here, be traced to an idea of fetishism, this has taken a certain route. We could, as we indeed will, think of other ways in which things can, across cultures, contain magical forces. Such magical propensities can include a wilfulness of life, although, for the moment, within this framework, this is not to the fore. Nonetheless, this is the first type of approach, to which I want to refer this research. However, at this point, I want to look further for ways of recovering plant agency. Another type of empirical endeavour focuses on the particular object as it is consumed, rather than the object as it is presented, and this takes me closer to the actual plant and the experiences that surround it.

2.4 THE ANTHROPOLOGIST OF CONSUMPTION AND PLANTS

Considering the material object of consumption as it is actually experienced within lives, rather than symbolically represented in a momentary consumption act, has been a developing project within anthropology and, in particular, material culture studies. Miller (1987), suggests that an

anthropological understanding of consumption can serve as a productive counterpoint to the more sociological analyses I have discussed. He argues that a Marxist legacy lingers within sociological theories of modern consumption and, within these theories, consumption activity remains associated with a negative reading of 'alienated' culture. Here, Marxists assert that capital dictates that workers increasingly produce goods for distant others. This, in turn, makes for a deterioration of important positive local social bonds, as workers no longer produce goods for people that they know and care for. Mass consumption is bad because it is associated with mass production and the routinisation of work such that the worker no longer takes any pride in what he or she produces, and so becomes alienated. It can be likened to the difference between working in a cake factory for a supermarket or making a cake for your family. You only take pride in the latter because it contributes to reinforcing a social bond, with the former you are an insignificant component to a machinic system of manufacture.

In opposition to this Marxist notion, the branch of anthropology to which Miller belongs offers a notion of 'inalienable' culture, where cultural values and meanings are created through intimate relations with objects of material culture, regardless of where they have originated. These, it seems, are better uncovered through a close engagement with the ways in which certain groups use objects and materials in their actual lives. They also lead to some quite different orderings of the many things that surround us. Previously we dealt in 'metaphor and not substance' (Miller, 2001a, 12), whilst the anthropologist might do otherwise through a close consideration of substance in practice. Radio can now be thought of as a comforting material physical presence in the absence of other people (Tacchi, 1998). The memorabilia we take with us when we move house becomes about memory and personal past experiences with others (Marcoux, 2001). The very act of shopping itself, where we might have imagined image to have been particularly powerful, can now be theorised as a considered act of love and sacrifice which consolidates existing familial relations (Miller, 1998). This is clearly an oppositional reading to the ephemeral pursuit of identity formation within the interplay of commodity signs.

This close anthropological approach, therefore, offers a different means of grasping the plant. Here, through a close and protracted engagement it might be possible to uncover how plants are lived with and how they sit emotionally within different lives. Here parallels are drawn between cultures and places, from within and without our idea of modernity, and ideas are drawn upon according to how they are appropriate to the researcher's practical experience of everyday living. Through this perspective there might be an alternative account of how plants and humans go about being together and, indeed, some interesting plant explorations have been guided by these aims.

Chevalier (1998), for instance, explores ethnographically the function of the garden within the intimate lives of a South-east English suburb and, correspondingly, draws a number of conclusions about their role. The garden here works, she argues, in a symmetrical relationship with the lounge it sits outside. It mirrors the organisation and aesthetic of the lounge that faces onto it, in the execution of the design sensibilities of the resident and, as such, it bridges the spaces occupied inside and outside. It also acts as a bridge between people, through the function it performs as a space of sociability and a space where neighbours can more easily interact and implicitly consolidate an idea of collective community. It is finally also a bridge between generations, as the traditional pursuit of gardening serves to constitute an element of Englishness. There are certainly, therefore, ways of getting close to the plants in the garden within this type of material culture study. This approach, in its close engagement with the personal domestic place of material culture, might allow some potential for the plant to begin to figure and push its way into an account of its consumption within London contexts. Yet it is also, once again, important to consider the ways in which this specific disciplinary project operates. Despite its professed agnosticism, and the fascinating range of insights and alternative accounts that this school has produced, I think that there are ways in which such anthropological studies do tend to structure the reality that presents itself. This can now be exemplified with reference to Chevalier's study.

A first links to the ways these suburban gardens are seen by Chevalier as a bridge between generations. They seem, then, by implication, static timeless entities that serve a specific cultural purpose. This may very well be the case. However, it may equally be the case that this is exactly what we might expect the anthropologist of material culture to say since some denial of the fleeting nature of things is a disciplinary project in anthropological approaches. One purpose of cultural anthropology is to discuss what it means to be a 'human' and, as such, it discusses questions such as how the very idea of a 'self' is constituted. In answering such deep questions, elements of the temporary tend to get washed out of resulting accounts - as Buchli puts it, there is here 'a prevailing preoccupation with the ethnographic and synchronic moment' (1999, 6). When comparative leaps are made between very different societies in different times and spaces, all of a sudden the vagaries of operation within each of these particular societies can fade away. When shopping becomes positioned as akin to ritual or sacrifice (Miller, 1998b) suddenly it seems unlikely that changing media representations might take effect, as shopping 'meaning' becomes timeless - an expression of what it means to be human and to constitute human relations. Reorganising the layout of a store, or advertising a product in a different manner now suddenly seem insignificant, when buying things is essentially about the love that exists within families. Historically speaking, Parsons (cited in Erikson and Nielsen, 2001, p101) once argued for a division between sociology and anthropology, with anthropology concerning

itself with meaning and sociology with power and change. This is, I think, still in evidence here, at least, as anthropologists continue on their quest for deeper meanings.

A second links to the way in which Chevalier describes the garden as a mirror to the lounge. The implication here is that it might be easy to order and organise the plants to act in this way. They become implicitly more static, like the things inside the house, such as the ornament or the rug. It might be that they are controlled in this easy way within Chevalier's suburbs but it may equally be something to do with the academic context in which this study sits. Within material culture research, perhaps unsurprisingly, the material is seen as the embodiment of the cultural. Miller (1995) has argued here that consumption could potentially replace kinship as the central concern of the anthropological discipline. This is because social relations may be increasingly constituted through the operation of commodities within consumption practices, rather than through the more personal interactions within cultural groups. Within such a project, material culture is about cultural operation much more than it is about direct materiality. It is about how things like plants, personal effects, or provisions serve to fulfil a cultural role. It is not about how plants grow or die, how personal effects might break or need cleaning, or about how provisions might go off in the fridge. This kind of materiality is not present as it might be. For the project of material culture, then, objects are resolutely seen as the objectification of human values in cultural forms (Simmel 1968, cited in Miller, 1998a, p9). Miller's approach does speak to what 'matters' to people, but is less about the other 'matters' of physical things and the potential for a more inherent unruly agency.

In a recent paper on how the house could be understood, Miller (2001b) does, however, move towards addressing this type of issue. Here he suggests that there have been two dominant perspectives upon the house in past material culture research, where it has either been considered as an expression of those people living within (see for instance Clarke, 1998) or as a cultural form held within wider social power relations (see for instance Zukin, 1991). Yet what has been less considered is its direct materiality which he explores through the idea of the 'haunted' house. He suggests that the house can take effect upon its owner in some more immediate ways. An attractive historic house can, for instance, remind the owner of his own inability to match the surrounding grandeur. We might live in a Victorian detached dwelling, but when we put mass-produced catalogue furniture within it we can feel somehow that we are letting it down. So the house can have its own agency. Yet this is a certain kind of agency. Miller draws upon Gell's (1998) work on art to ground his account of these hauntings. For Gell, art can directly seduce the viewer and, as such, this is its agency. Yet, the anthropological stance still lingers on. Both the house and the work of art might affect us directly, but this effect is a product of past human activity. This is the effect of the architect or of the artist. This material

agency is still serving as an intermediary between humans. It is just that, rather than being an intermediary between humans living together in the workings of culture, this is an intermediary between humans that are temporally divided through the passage of history. We are not talking about how the house collects dust or how the painting needs varnishing. We yet remain still very much within the human sphere here.

So, what might all this mean for accommodating the plant within material culture studies? There certainly seems to be a range of conceptual resources available here. The plant could now make for an emotional presence in individual lives that is not always necessarily organised through an interplay of signs and signifiers within an increasingly aestheticised wider societal system. The plant could equally be providing a certain cultural function in the garden and not necessarily be subject to the fortunes of wider media promotions and discourse. Material culture studies, therefore, does offer me a further way of understanding consumption which takes me closer to the plant as it is actually lived with. However it has yet to push its way fully though the tight bonds of a close concern for cultural formation. We are not yet concerned for how plants, as living things, can take affect.

Lissant Bolton (2001a) writes about the very category of 'material culture' as she reflects upon her participation in, and analysis of, the female status systems of Vanuatu in Melanesia. Crucial to the progress of women through different ranks is the way in which the making of certain foods and certain cloths together allow this symbolic transformation and conference of rank. Crucially, they work in tandem together, even though, as she writes, in her previous analysis, she had erroneously always tended to focus on the cloth, and not on the food. The reason for this was that, in this previous research, she was thinking of cloth as material culture and food as something else and, as such, she was buying into a notion of 'material culture' that derives from the history of anthropology and its relationship with museums. As she puts it 'it was objects that could survive the rigours of international transportation to become part of museum ethnography collections which were constituted as the category 'material culture' - objects whose size, such as houses, or whose fragility, such as food, defeated transportation were not usually included. Cloth, then, was material culture but food, somehow, was not. Food would perish too quickly - bacteria would soon begin to decompose it and, if it was contemplated or transported for too long, it would soon start to smell. Natural processes of decay and recycling of matter then were too unruly - too unruly and too fast for us to fully get a grip on these food objects and fully call them our own 'material culture'.

In this example, then, she alludes to the way in which this subdiscipline has tended to ignore how material things can independently behave according to processes we might not always

control. In short, some things may be happier to be material culture and to help support this, somewhat arrogant, category than others are and, given my own concern for plant liveness, this was a crucial point. In this sense, as we will see, it becomes possible to think of Gell's analysis of agency otherwise and to further extend Miller's account of the strange haunting life embedded within the things with which we cohabit. For the moment, however, what material culture studies does offer is a further useful layer of understanding of how and why we consume as we do.

2.5 THE GEOGRAPHER OF CONSUMPTION AND PLANTS

The third academic place in which I look for a way of embracing plant liveness is in the pages of human geography books and journals. In this case I am concerned with a particular geographical approach to consumption and a focus upon the specificity of the actual places in which events take place. This is rather than within an alternative geographical focus upon spatial relationships and how relations between places are practised, imagined and presented through consumption activities (see for example Cook and Crang, 1996; Castree, 2001; Hartwick, 1998, 2000; Leslie and Reimar, 1999). This alternative approach suggests some exciting alternative avenues that could be followed by this work, including a concern for how plants are actively manufactured for consumption. Such a resource might suggest other ways of accounting for plant relations, as geographies of consumption have been concerned with the places and contexts through which physical things are encountered. Indeed, such a close concern for context has been increasingly in evidence here and this has been for a number of reasons.

Firstly, within geography, the empirical location of concern has increasingly and productively strayed from the initially obvious site of consumption and the example of the shopping centre. Geographies of consumption have progressed beyond the notion of the mall as a dazzling 'cathedral of consumption' (Goss, 1993, 1999) which beguiles us into excessive purchase. Like the anthropologist, geographers have begun to engage with the argument that objects of consumption are involved in cycles of use and re-use that are interestingly worked through a variety of different places. Moving beyond ideas of the 'image' and the 'spectacular', previously prevalent in the sociological account I have already discussed, has allowed the more inconspicuous spaces of consumption (Crewe, 2000) to be reconsidered within geographical analysis - places like the car boot sale (Crewe and Gregson, 1998), the home (Leslie and Reimer, 1999), the computer desk (Kitchin, 1998), the street (Rycroft, 2002) or the charity shop (Gregson, Crewe and Brooks 2002a).

Secondly, the methodological tool of engagement has increasingly moved ethnographically closer to the ways that places are actually lived and experienced by people. Recognising that different people take part in a number of activities and that they comprise a complex mixture of subject positions has led to an argument about the importance of engaging with how these subject positions are constituted through activities such as consumption. This then makes for an argument for an ethnographic approach to specific place experiences, as geographies of consumption have followed on from what Jackson and Thrift (1995) heralded as the 'ethnographic moment' within this subfield. Through such means, geographers have now begun to see how everyday spaces are 'in many ways other worldly and transgressive' (Crewe, 2000, 278) and through taking trips into the 'other worlds' of the seemingly familiar, geographers continue to undertake some exciting explorations (for some examples see Bailey, 2000; Malbon, 1999; Gregson, and Crewe, 1997, 2003; Crewe and Gregson, 1998).

One example of this more recent geographical understanding of consumption is that of Malbon (1999) who develops an argument about how to conceptually understand clubbing. In this he argues that theories about the 'moment of purchase' are clearly inadequate in explaining activities such as these - what have been marginalised in geographical consumption work are the 'experiential' and 'imaginative' aspects that inform certain places of 'sociality.' For Malbon, clubbing is about the ways in which people can collectively produce a certain experience, more than it is about the material objects that can be involved or taken home. He suggests that we might want to think about consumption more generally in this way - as an experiential practice of sociality in certain specific places – and this type of account, with its focus on social relations has become particularly persuasive within geography, as the practice of consuming has been used to say much, specifically, about the 'emotional intensity of human relationships' (Crewe, 2001, 635).

Indeed, it could be usefully taken as exemplifying the geographical stance towards consumption in a similar way to the way in which I used Chevalier's paper and, as such, I want to interrogate it further. Within this understanding of consumption, the main focus of concern is with people and people that seem, largely, without things; when the places of consumption are considered as places of sociality, what become foregrounded are the interactions between people. What slips away are their interactions with other material entities. In advancing his argument Malbon asks us to imagine a shopping centre without people (1999. p22) as a means of highlighting the fact that a large part of the quintessential experience of shopping is collective. His point is that it is, in large part, about sociality and collective practice. This may indeed be true, but it seems to me to be also very much about materiality – shopping carts, baskets, aisle management and the like – and, indeed, equally are Malbon's performances of transgressive enjoyment in nightclubs. We

could conversely imagine a club that had bad lighting or a dodgy sound system and, by so doing, we could highlight how a large part of the clubbing experience is organised through material things. A pleasurable experiential consumption is, therefore, only possible through the correct behaviour of the other things with which we share our consumption spaces - things can constitute experience, just as people do.

Malbon also connects to a certain celebratory idea of performance and dance as a metaphorical approach within geography where Foster (1998) suggests that there is not much room for other people within this exploration of the somatic dimension of being-in-the-world. There may be even less room for material things. Dancing, for instance, requires material resources - a flat surface or a certain type of shoe. These shoes could wear out and so might the dance floor. Nash (2000) argues that the specific practical contexts for these types of performance are things that should not be forgotten in these new explorations of the expressive. The contexts she refers to are structural ones based around such inequalities as race and gender. The contexts I want to think about are more immediately and directly physical. Laurier et al. (2001), in an exception to this approach, draw attention to the mundane, but no less significant, organisation of chairs, tables, papers and devices that allow an appropriate kind of coffee shop sociality to be performed. There is a sociality, certainly, but one which is only enacted with the co-operation of certain material things. These may be evident points and, in truth, places are constituted by combinations of both materialities and socialities. Nevertheless, given the plant concern that has been guiding me, what seems lacking here is a close attention to how materials can be constitutive of the consumption socialities at work within certain places. Yet just as there were some recent tentative engagements with the raw materials of material culture, so can be uncovered some trace of the active presence of things within these geographical writings.

In Gregson's account (2001) of charity shop consumption, for instance, we find people that are compelled to buy an item of clothing because they are sad to think of the garment 'dying.' The active processes immanent within the physical material seem, then, to achieve some recognition in this account of shopping - it is something that might, unbidden, fall apart and die. However, in this analysis, the death is not really that of the object, but is rather to do with the history of the item - it is rather something to do with how it would be sad for its history to fade. This seems like a more optimistic version of Miller's haunting. It has a materiality in so far as it provides a link to its former place in other people's lives.

This is again evident in their work on car boot sales (Crewe and Gregson, 1998), as here the owned item has a charm in terms of the role it has played in the lives of others. People buy items at car boot sales, in part, because of the stories of past use that stall owners can relate: a

bag is bought not because it is attractive and seemingly new, but rather because this apparent newness resulted from the previous owner being so short that it could only ever be dragged along the floor if it were ever used. As in material culture studies, the object is once again a bridge to other people and not something with which a relationship is forged in its own right. Elsewhere and more generally their concerns sit easily alongside those of Malbon. The charity shop item is now an incidental to the 'imaginaries' of its customers (Gregson, 2001), whilst the car boot sale purchase sits on the sidelines of a human 'performance' of bargaining (Crewe and Gregson, 1998). Whilst these may be, as they argue, interesting marginal spaces of consumption, they yet remain spaces of particular socialities. They are marginal in the sense that these social interactions are different from those of the high street, but they are specifically social interactions nonetheless. Tellingly, Gregson and Crewe draw upon Belk's idea (1995, cited in Crewe, 2000, p280) that meanings are things that are 'hooked' and 'unhooked' from different goods at different times. This idea foregrounds how these meanings can be generated through actual practical negotiations. However, the material agency of the good itself seems little different from when it was one of many cultural signifiers. It is a static thing that simply has ideas coupled to and uncoupled from it.

Within these geographical studies, then, there has been a gradual increase in the degree of attention paid to the specificity of the places in which consumption is practised. In particular there is a focus upon the significance of the actual experience of being in these places. However, these experiences are constituted, it seems, through a dynamic relation between people. These are places of 'sociality' and the agency of the objects sharing such places retreats backstage. This may of course be something to do with the types of places that have been engaged with, as much as it is about this academic way of understanding things. These are places where people don't spend so much time and are seldom on their own. People only go to the shop, the street, the bootsale, or the club for a few hours. Shops soon shut and the clothes get silently locked away; the car boot sale finishes and the bargains get carefully packed up; the club closes and its staff magically clean up the bar and dancefloor. In these instances the things waiting for the crowds that come have little time to display any lively materiality - at least to them, as consumers. The obvious space of closer and more protracted engagement with the things around us is within the home. However, a geographical approach to consumption has been less concerned with this particular site (Leslie and Reimer, 1999) which has rather been a preserve of the anthropologists discussed earlier.

So, what, finally, might this geographical approach suggest in terms of my engagement with our consumption of plants? What this approach offers is a close engagement with the way in which our ideas about objects are constituted through the activities of certain people in certain places.

It draws attention to the differential ways in which retail environments may be encountered. Yet what it also seems to suggest is the way in which the power and presence of the plant might be ordered away within these very approaches that focus explicitly upon particular spaces of certain socialities. Crewe (2000, 278) may be right to suggest the fascinating 'other worlds' that can be found within certain seemingly ordinary spaces of consumption, but the fascination of these worlds, in the context that was to concern me seemed likely to be greatly influenced by the agency of the involved objects and materials. Kneale and Dwyer (2004, p299) argue that consumption geographies need to better consider the 'twin concerns of sociality and materiality.' Yet, so far here, things have tended to more fully orientate around the former. Correspondingly, once again, I was to move onwards in my searching for some conceptual resources that paid better attention to how physical things can and do actually behave.

2.6 AN OVERVIEW OF THESE THREE APPROACHES

These, then, are three starting points which I want to use as a platform for my subsequent endeavours. I want to see how ideas of the consumption object from sociology, anthropology and geography apply to the gardens of London, if and when they do so. If I return once more to the economic account I began with it seems that the relations between people and plants in the garden might be in a process of change and that ideas of consumption might help explore such changes. What these three starting points suggested were the ways in which plants might be subject to the effects of powerful representational activities, that they might fulfil particular cultural functions, and that they might be experienced differentially within different places. Yet, what they also suggested was something of the ways in which these disciplines might tie down plants under the weight of their particular disciplinary concerns. They seemed to deny things their material agency and power, when the plant might have more material agency than most things. The plant is something that we buy, sell and live with and, in ways that these accounts deal with well. Yet it is not as docile as many other physical things and I wanted to fully recognise this.

If I was to better explore how plants are consumed, I decided I was to look further for appropriate resources. I wanted a way of letting the plant emerge as something more than a floating signifier, a cultural expression, or an incidental to an experience of place. In many ways I should not have been surprised that the plant was not fully considered through these social scientific approaches to consumption - these were all social scientists after all and, as such, they were more concerned with people, and not plants. This was part of their disciplinary task and tradition. Things are different for the natural scientist, however – material things can wriggle about and be much more lively when we call them 'natural' as we haven't got hold of them so tightly and are less sure whether they rightly belong to us.

2.7 TURNING TO THE NATURAL SCIENTIST

What I have been trying to find is an academic vantage from which I might best recognise the physical constitutive activity of things like plants within consumption practice. Here the social sciences seemed, to some extent, lacking, as their job was to explain things in relation to the social world. Their answers would therefore be social ones and the things surrounding us seemed to only embody certain social functions. These accounts were about people and what people did. Yet there may be other forces at play - the problem was that these social science accounts did not fully grant them a place. Natural sciences have a different agenda, however, and correspondingly the things we share the world with seem much livelier for the natural scientist. Natural scientists make close observations of how things develop and change in certain places. They monitor what certain things like and do not like to do by watching their behaviour under microscopes - bacteria reproduce, but only in the conditions that they independently prefer; different animal populations expand and decline in areas entirely uninhabited by humans; vegetation covers develop over time as different species interact in the march of this development. All of this could now apparently happen without any intervention on the part of people ! In the light of my concern for dynamic botanical life, such ideas seemed exciting. I wanted to engage with how the plant actively did things within garden consumption practices and how it might affect the people around it. Some resources here seemed promising. Indeed, exploring the relations between the natural and the social sciences and finding a place for this kind of agency within a more social account has been a developing project within science and technology studies. This was the place to which I next turned to better reconcile these biological agencies with the human experience of consumption.

My account here starts in the early 1980s and an apparent 'social' turn in science studies. Here the practice of science was to be explored as a cultural and historical activity as researchers no longer allowed science to sit as a separate field of endeavour, somehow standing aloof from the exchanges of social interaction that took place within all of the other areas of human life. In this initial 'strong project' (Bloor, 1976), science was to be 'socially constructed' and the power of the social was all-important. Studies of science drew upon a contemporary linguistic focus within social research. Within this approach it was impossible for any object to exist independently of the signification practices surrounding it. What was actually hidden within a metaphor of scientific discovery was no more than a set of frantic representational manoeuvres, either within society more generally, or within the conversations of the laboratory as explanation now came from either a macro or a micro level appeal to social processes (Iseda, 1998).

Macro level historical studies would explore the effects of broad societal processes on scientific knowledge production. An example would be Shapin and Schaffer's (1989) study of Hobbes and Boyle in the seventeenth century. Their historical study could now conclude that Boyle's scientific work on air pressure was not only about the independent movement of molecules. Rather, it was also about public debate and the changing organisation of society at the time he was working. It was these broader societal factors that made for a climate in which his claims could be publicly accepted, rather than these claims representing any sort of objective truth.

Micro level studies examined the processes of knowledge production within science. A more ethnomethodological concern here (see for example Lynch, 1993) was with the interactional achievements of the scientists themselves and their conversations. Lynch (1991), from this perspective, recognised that, when laboratory researchers describe the appearance of an object or measure it in some way, they do often employ specialised instruments and specific metrical units through an attempt at replicable science. However, he also argued that their activities were not really contained within this disciplined stance. Description and measurement were also part of everyday life and what counted as a sensible measurement varied considerably from one context to another.

Whilst there were clearly a range of resources drawn upon, what remained the case here was that people became the central focus once again. Explicitly or implicitly, this area of research led to a denial of the agency of the natural entities that the scientists were trying to understand. Science was 'constitutive' rather than 'descriptive' of the things that it sought to identify (Knorr-Cetina, 1981; Woolgar, 1988). The natural world was to be treated as though 'it did not affect our perception of it.' (Collins 1983: 88). The object of study was, for them, almost a purely social thing once more. It was now no more than a passive pawn within a language game or the inert representation of a certain cultural formation. The natural world now had a small or non-existent role in this specifically 'social' construction of science.

This initial approach seems to offer little, considering the aims of this research. However, another strand within this field was beginning to allow the agency of things that were not human to force itself amongst the activities of the scientists that were seeking to render them knowable. Callon (1986) moved towards this approach in his description of science's role within a fishing dispute in the French bay of St. Brieuc. Some scientists there had heard of a novel technique of scallop harvesting that had been experimented with in Japan. They thought that they could adapt this technique successfully for St. Brieuc. These scientists were, therefore, he argued, trying to speak on behalf of the scallops. They sought to represent how they would behave according to predictions based on a set of studies that other scientists had made of scallop activity. This they

enshrined into their own scallop harvesting technique. Yet, alas, the scallops did not behave in the way that the scientists suggested. They did not want to attach themselves to the specially designed harvesters and the scientific project collapsed. This was a simple story, perhaps, but what Callon was theoretically doing here was developing a concept of 'symmetrical' reconstruction, where the cause of scientific success or failure was attributed to a diffuse range of agents that were all treated equally in analysis. In this case they included fishermen, scallops, technologies and scientists. Explanation was now not just about people in their social world, it was also about other entities within their supposedly natural world. They were all working together. Or not, as was the case in this instance.

Bruno Latour (1988a) did something similar in an account of the achievements of Louis Pasteur in nineteenth century France. Pasteur, he suggested, had to equally control both bacterial cultures and provincial farmers if he was to position himself as a successful scientist. Bacterial cultures needed an appropriate nutrient medium to grow in the Paris laboratory, just as provincial farmers needed persuasion that Pasteur could help them through some carefully staged public demonstrations. In this account, Pasteur is the central agent managing a precarious set of controlling activities. The progress of his scientific work was, therefore, the product of the activity of many things. His success and notoriety was not a consequence of any given genius of his own, but rather a result of the many different things working together in the process of sustaining the idea of this genius. This success was dependent upon a whole network of forces including the public hygiene movement, the medical profession, colonial interests and, tellingly, for this paper, the actual bacteria and equipment he was handling within his experiments.

What these studies were asking was that if science could no longer be totally explained with reference to the operation of natural laws, why should we conversely assume that it might equally be totally explained with reference to social processes? What Latour asked for was 'one more turn' after the 'social turn' in science studies (Latour, 1992a), so that the world might better be understood as an operation of different kinds of entities working together. Large-scale systems in which scientific and technological artefacts come to be extended across time and space came through an idea of 'enrolling' human and nonhuman elements within a set of 'heterogeneous networks.' Pasteur was enrolling farmers rhetorically, but also enrolling bacteria materially. Things now had a dynamic agency that was allowed a presence within a social science narrative. These scientists were dealing with something lively in their attempts to organise themselves into the position of a provider of general truth. The scallops, the bacteria, and many other entities were now granted a mind of their own. They were sitting alongside the other human actors as actively unruly things.

Work like that of Latour and of Callon came to be developed into a theoretical perspective that argued against structuring ontological positions and any pre-given idea about what was important in making things happen in life. The latter were now treated with scepticism from a position of determined close empiricism where physical things were allowed to do things, regardless of where they might have been previously classified. The researcher simply had to watch to see how and when different entities interacted with each other within networks of relationship and to watch for their effects. The exponents of this approach allowed the entities being studied to move between the static objects containing cultural and social meanings and the dynamic entities possessive of natural properties. Things were engaged with according to the ways in which they behaved, rather than according to a predefined set of ascribed categories and attributes that they were imagined to have possessed - agency was not considered inherent within a particular thing simply because organising lenses previously suggested that was where it lay.

There was a lot more helping constitute the social world from this vantage. Texts, technologies, people, and things were all taken to be significant within the performance of human life (Law, 1994), and these ideas were initially carried forward into a number of new accounts of science and technology. Alcoholic liver disease, for instance, was no longer any kind of scientific condition in a traditional sense (Law and Singleton, 2000). It was rather a notion that was constantly being recreated through the various different activities of any number of different entities. The structuring accounts of medical textbooks sought to inform a specific idea of this disease. The work practices of doctors made for certain accounts of its operation. The bodily operations of suggested sufferers would undermine or consolidate different understandings. They were all constitutive of the precarious performance of this particular disease.

In a review of the relationship between social sciences and science studies, Latour (2000) considers what the social sciences might gain here. What social studies have traditionally done, he argues, is to replace their object of enquiry with an idea of society. Society has been able to stand in as an explanatory principle for all things, so that the particularities of the things in question were lost. What we might rather do, he suggests, is find a way of productively emulating the natural sciences through a new conception of 'objectivity'. This objectivity is no longer to be considered negatively as a flawed attempt to deny human fallibility within natural scientific endeavour. It is rather thought of positively as the closest academic attempt that we have made to get in contact with the physical material presence of active entities. This objectivity is about an idea of making objections, since it is within the laboratory that scientists have given things the greatest opportunity to specifically object to what is said about them. It had been the earlier critiques of science studies scholars that made the things being studied seem

inert. What the social sciences have done, he suggests, is to imitate the natural sciences in a search for legitimacy. Consequently the locus of power became transferred from the thing being studied and the world of nature to the people that were studying and the world of society. However, they might imitate the natural scientist more productively in their conception of agency, since the last thing that a scientist would argue is that the microbes in the petri dish or the enzymes in the tissue sample are completely passive.

From this viewpoint, all objects are now so specific that they cannot be replaced by something else for which they are supposed to be a stand-in. An object is not necessarily about an idea of culture and neither is it necessarily about an idea of nature. It is always a thing in its own right. What was allowed to happen was an 'ontological choreography' (Cussins, 1998) where the status of things was performed according to the specificity of the relations in which they operate. People could be subjects and objects, as could other things, according to the ways in which they interacted practically with each other in certain physical places. One example would be the way in which a car can become an office in the performance of mobile working (Laurier and Philo, 1998). The job of the researcher was to explore these developments. In the expansion of a potential Paris transport network, Latour eventually allows the very train that was to run in this network an active voice within his account of these developments. The train finally asks the reader what exactly is a 'self' and whether it might not be admitted within this category (Latour, 1996), even though we might have been used to thinking of it as simply a train.

Entities, and the categories they were to belong to, were now in a process of flux and should be thought about in terms of 'x-morphism' (see Laurier and Philo, 1999) where the frames of reference for understanding certain things would change according to context and where they were to always be allowed agency. From this vantage, we are always living alongside someone non-human - the problem was just that we didn't want to more fully recognise their presence. These theoretical developments, thus, made for an open and performative conception of an entity's classification: we should wait and see how any physical thing should rightly be understood according to the properties it is allowed to display within the networks of association it is held within.

2.8 DEVELOPING AN APPROACH FOR THIS RESEARCH

With such ideas in place it becomes interesting to consider how the practices of consumption are similar to the practices of science - we might want to think about how actors, of a variety of persuasions, interact in the living room, just as they have been in the nuclear laboratory (Shove, 1999). From this perspective some writers have begun to document how consumption is as much about orchestrating technical interactions as interplaying cultural meanings. As I have

discussed, Grocery shopping might be about the demonstration of an idea of love, as you buy and prepare the food that a family member likes best (Miller, 1998). However, we are now led to consider how this demonstration takes some work: you'd probably need an oven and you'd probably need to know how to use it. You'd have to have the time to wait for it to cook. It might, then, only be possible to perform this act of love if the technological infrastructure and the organisation of people allows you to do so through a transformation of these groceries towards an appetising meal.

The more physical efforts that go into creating such cultural meanings now find form within an academic framing of consumption. Science and technology studies had suggested that a scientific performance of truth was no more than a product of the scientist holding on to all the relevant organisms, people and technologies that allowed this to seem the case. What these consumption studies were now suggesting was that a domestic display of love was equally about a householder holding on to a range of products, technologies and people. Symbolic meanings now required hard work. Cultural ideas like comfort, cleanliness or convenience (Shove, 2003) were now, in part, the outcomes of the interactions of a set of socio-technical networks. An idea of comfort was a product of mass production and industrialisation, but it was also about the development of heating and cooling systems within indoor environments. Cleanliness was equally about infrastructures of plumbing and water systems, as about the different patterns of use and meaning attached to the services they provide. The meaning of the objects of consumption was no longer simply and easily ascribed to them - these meanings had to be enacted. In the same way that science was now constructive rather than descriptive (Knorr-Cetina, 1981b), what consumption objects were good for now depended on how they were used.

From this vantage, physical things had an active presence and were involved dynamically in our practices of consumption. Latour had previously pointed out the role that unconsidered objects like the simple door-closer play in social life (Latour, 1988b). Without this door-closer the conversations, social interactions and movements of the hallway would have a qualitatively different feel. The same was now recognised to be true of the things involved in our processes of consumption. The technological networks that people live within were no longer passively helping us live our lives - they were also actively shaping the way that we went about these lives. These objects had 'scripts' (Akrich, 1992) and a plan of how things were potentially to work between themselves and the humans surrounding them. What these ideas about consumption were taking from the science studies of Latour and Callon was a focus on the interactions between human beings and technology, together with a close attention to how these relationships can either become stabile and routinised in everyday life or, alternatively, fade away and disappear from consideration.

We could now think of things like the kitchen freezer (Shove and Southerton, 2000) as a demanding presence. This is a thing with a 'script' and certain expectations of how the things around it should behave. It makes demands of the infrastructural network around it. Frozen food stores must be relatively nearby. Electricity supply should be constant. There should also be a planned space for it within the kitchen where it has gradually come to make its home. It also makes demands of the people that use it. They have to learn that the freezer likes certain types of foods and not others. Maybe they would have to change their eating patterns accordingly. They also have to be ready to wait for the things that they give to the freezer to defrost again when the freezer hands it back to them. From this vantage we now see the many activities that help shape our gradually changing normalised expectations of the freezer as a taken for granted presence within the home. In 1970, three percent of British households owned at least one freezer. In 1995 this figure had risen to 96 percent. Such rapid changes can now be productively explained as a product of concurrent developments situated within symbolic meanings, practical infrastructures and everyday practices and this offered a useful framework for understanding increasingly resource-intensive lifestyles within an argument for more sustainable living.

Such an approach serves as a first guiding principle for this research. I am interested in questioning what Shove (2003) calls 'the social organisation of normality' and the range of relevant and interpenetrating factors that constitute evolving consumption systems and the 'services' that they provide. These arguments point productively to the gradually co-evolving systems of material infrastructure, human practice, and social meaning that allow people to become a successful part of society and what being part of this society might mean for relations between the human garden owner and the actual garden itself. In this sense, then, I am interested in focusing on the range of accounts of consumption discussed here, according to how they show themselves as relevant within the contexts under study. Developing from Shove's arguments about how more social meanings are physically grounded in particular routines with particular physical entities, I am keen to explore how this informs my particular context of study.

Gabriel and Lang (1995; p8) argue that it is foolish to study consumerism through 'a single prism' when there may be very many different interpenetrating factors involved. Rather than explicitly seeking to focus upon one particular way of theorising why we consume, I am interested in tracking the theories and frameworks that become salient at particular times within evolving people-plant relations in London. As I argued in chapter one, there seemed to potentially be some interesting changes afoot here and I wanted to find a way of considering how they might, or might not, be worked through more practical routines of activity and practice. Rather than seeking to account for the mechanisms that drive our changing patterns of

living then, as Shove does (2003), I am more concerned with documenting where they seem to be leading right now. This became one of the two principal concerns of this thesis. This research was to consider the changing practical routines and networks that help constitute what the private garden is, and is becoming and to consider how different consumption theories adhere to these practices.

2.9 KEEPING FOCUSED ON PLANTS

Yet I was also particularly interested in the characters and livelinesses of plants. Here, the approach that I decided to adopt does take me much closer to a conceptual consideration of the active plants and the materials with which we share the garden. Things actually do things within this approach and can, in certain instances, have an active role in determining how consumption is practised, considered and allocated meaning. However, we could nonetheless argue here that the agencies we have dealt with might still be, in the last instance, human. In this work we find arguments about how design, through the exercise of technology, tells people how to behave. Attention now shifts from the advertiser towards the engineer. It is the engineer who now 'builds' society (Latour, 1988b), which takes us to more general arguments about how design can inform our ways of living (Forty, 1995) - the freezer may make demands, certainly - but these are the indirect demands of the people that designed them for the manufacturer.

Latour's 'objections' could be constructed in other ways. As this approach to consumption stands, the role of physical things can tend to be as an intermediary between sets of people. The fridge freezer, like the second-hand dresses in the charity shop, is once again a bridge to other people. This may be the previous wearer in the 1920s or it may be the industrial designer in the London office. Technology can be framed as a conversation between people and a negotiation between the way that the designer thinks the consumer might behave and the way that the consumer decides what to do. As Suchman (1998) argues, the active role of artefacts in the configuration of networks generally seem to imply other humans standing offstage and using these technologies as delegates. Things like the microbes (Latour, 1988a), the scallops (Callon, 1986), the electrons (Latour, 1987) or, potentially, the plants have been to an extent sidelined. Plants seemed to be pushing their way through into this kind of perspective only to be denied a place within a set of primarily and tellingly 'socio-technical' (Guy and Shove, 2000) consumption studies. Generally speaking, the original science studies scholars who developed this approach were primarily concerned with the role of technological objects. Pumps (Shapin and Schaffer, 1989, DeLaet and Mol, 2000), bridges (Suchman, 2000), trains (Latour, 1996), aircraft (Law, 1988, Hutchins, 1995), syringes (Mol, 2001) and wheelchairs (Winance, 1999) number amongst these newly accommodated dynamic companions. As Callon and Latour (1992, p359) argue, there is 'no thinkable social life' without the participation of non-humans,

but 'especially machines and artefacts' and this technological focus has remained within the reworkings of this perspective within consumption research.

Given my stated plant concern, what seemed a potential addition to these perspectives was an account that did not centre only on people and the way they communicate (directly and indirectly) with each other through objects of consumption. There may be other forces at play such as the dynamism inherent within objects in their own right. The dynamism of the object within consumption studies might not simply be about fulfilling or anticipating our needs. Pearce (1997), for instance, interrogates the idea of the objects that we collect around us as bridges. She recognises that they are bridges between other people and ourselves, but also bridges between other things, places and forces and ourselves. These are other matters like the forces embodied within natural processes and conceptually we might engage more fully with the traffic across these particular bridges. The things we consume could be therefore, like the tomato, 'bio-socio-economic things' (Harvey, et al. 2002) that are both symbolically exchanged and materially marshalled, whilst nevertheless maintaining a degree of inherent agency as part of their wilful genetic legacy. Such agency could be more fully given living space within conceptual frameworks that have focused on the social lives of things, or the biography of humanly created commodities (see Appadurai, 1988; Kopytoff, 1988).

It is in an insistence on these matters that I am also indebted to another agenda developing from similar science and technology studies. This is the argument for a 'hybrid' approach to research that explores the ways in which the nonhuman representatives of the natural world and the human representatives of the social world are tied together through different intimate relations (Whatmore, 2002). Here, largely within geography, with its traditional focus upon human-environment relations, a concern for nonhuman organic agency has led to a whole raft of studies about our close immediate relations with the actual ambassadors of nature. This has most notably been the case with one particular category of things and that of the animal (Wolch and Emel, 1998; Philo and Wilbert, 2000). Recent work here has exposed something of how we organise ourselves together with animals in a variety of settings including zoos (Anderson, 1995), farms (Yarwood and Evans, 2000), pet cemeteries (Howell, 2002), parks (Laurier et al. 2003) and film making (Davies, 2000a), in such a way as to restore some of the constitutive will of these animals. More recently, some exciting work has considered the constitutive power of trees in organising human lives (Jones and Cloke, 2002), but the plant – something smaller than the tree and more reticent than the animal - has yet to be considered.

Such interesting arguments, then, have been forcefully made on a theoretical level and with a particular reference to animals. Yet they remain largely focused upon this category of

nonhuman and have yet to make for sustained empirical work that explores experiences of nonhuman agencies within routinised practice. Aligning this concern with a close reconsideration of consumption studies, in this context, could provide exactly that. Rather than arguing for a realignment of ontological perspectives to rightly place humans and others alongside each other, we might now want to flesh out how the particular specifics of their attributes take effect within such intimacies. Some recent work takes elements of this approach into the consumption arena. Cook (2004) has, for instance, said something of the ways in which the physical and genetic properties of the papaya plant can inform the ways in which it finds its way symbolically and materially into the British diet. Roe (2003), meanwhile, questions the notion of edibility and what it might be about the physical things that present themselves to us that allow us to permit these entities entry to a category of food. However, how our practices around such active things shape a wider organisation of consumption could be further considered.

This then became a further guiding concern of this research. Whilst I am interested in the ways in which different ideas about how and why we consume in the ways that we do inform the practices of making gardens, I am also, within this, concerned for the specific character and purposive will of plants. A concern for plant agency has been something that has been central to this theoretical discussion and plants, I think, potentially have the power to subvert or challenge many of the different social science theories discussed here. It is the extent to which they do so and how they do so that is, then, a further concern that I want to use to guide this research. As I argued in chapter one, plant agency and their will to live could make for some particular and interesting responses on the part of humans. As such, in this research, I decided that I wanted these attributes to be accorded a central role.

2.10 Conclusions

Thrift (2003) recently argued that consumption research has neglected the 'distinct performative capabilities' that inhere within specific commodities (p390). In making this argument his concern is for the intelligence that electronic toys are increasingly hardwired to display and the potentially negative impacts of these capacities on child sociability. A concern for such toys is novel and may make for interesting studies that explore how this robotic life might reconfigure the very nature of what childhood can mean. Nonetheless, with regard to his argument, the reason why consumption research has not focussed on these strange constitutive forces is not because things that display them have not always been around. Such toys as these are novel, but this is not to say that there have not been many different entities that travel through our consumption systems and which have long had the dynamic ability to act upon us. The interactive robotic pet might be a new development, but plants, for instance, have long had

effects upon the people that they encounter. As Pollan (2002) recently and provocatively suggested, plants may, to a degree, have been controlling us as much as we thought we had been controlling them. Take, for example, seed dispersal and the resourceful way in which certain grasses, for instance, silently, without consent, affix their burred seeds to our clothing so that we carry their offspring to potentially more fertile futures. The plants that we buy, sell and consume physically do things and they do things to us. This is a straightforward point, but such a point is useful here. Whilst Thrift's (2003) charge is right, then, there are many places to look for this unruly nonhuman power.

It is in this spirit that this chapter develops some resources for researching the organisation of our contemporary relations with plants in the domestic London garden. Initially here, I worked through three particular areas of consumption research, each suggesting a number of important aspects of how we might potentially be consuming plants within London lives. However, these were social science approaches and, as such, they were staging a particularly human-centred 'performance' of consumption (Law and Singleton, 2000), one which denied something of the unruly agency of entities. This, I supposed, might be central in understanding relations with plants, at least and so I journeyed further afield to consider how a detour through science studies could help better accommodate these concerns.

In so doing I came upon two particular approaches that usefully align the human and nonhuman. Through folding Shove's (2003) interest in the socio-technical construction of normality within consumption practice into a broader concern for how humans and others can cohabit within cities (Whatmore, 2002), I developed two particular aims for this thesis. Firstly, I wanted to question the dynamic within existing relationships, as much material as symbolic, that surround the changing 'normal' expectations of what it might mean to live with a garden in London. Through such means I aimed to say something of how the garden is lived with now and how contemporary structures of encounter seem to be moving. Secondly, within this, I wanted, in particular, to document how plants, as a particular kind of potentially wilful entity, figure within this particular system of organising consumption. Here I am interested in exposing something of why exactly we like to have plants around us in our lives and what the ways in which we handle them suggest about contemporary society.

This then, finally, returns us to the 'having-doing' tension that I began with regarding our changing practices of consumption. People may like to have plants within their home environment. The plant can be something that you *have* - something that is pleasant and attractive to possess within individual home spaces and to look at. However, plants are not always happy just to sit there - they can need maintenance and attention and they do things that

are unpredictable. The plant can also, therefore, be something that you *do* or, at least it might be something that someone does for you, or that a machine helps you to do, as plants can require care if their agreed presence is to continue amicably. This whole chapter has been organised around the simple propensity and argument that plants are alive and that this should be recognised and given conceptual space within my analysis. In some respects, this could be considered as a trivial thing around which to orientate a lengthy piece of academic research. However, I would argue that plant agency and how it is received and dealt with by different individual people holds much potential for speaking to the ways in which we live today. How are plants as living things accommodated within our urban domestic routines and what might be the best way of living rightly with them?

What I have staged in this chapter is an academic performance where some arguments have been marshalled to help me construct some key questions around how we live with plants and gardens. A fundamental concern has been to allow plant agency some conceptual space in which to become manifest. Rather than viewing a garden as a landscape and aggregate experience, as others have done and as I discussed in chapter one, my concern here is for actual consumption practice. I am concerned with how and why we buy and live with the particular things that we put into our gardens. As Laura Rival was with regard to the Huaorani of the Amazon, I am interesting in seeing what happens when we question how people deal with, and understand the involved spaces in a more intimate, practised way.

This has been one performance, then, but there may be more forceful performances staged elsewhere. That is to say that whilst I have been keen to accommodate lively plants within this essay, they might not be so happily accommodated within the spaces of London. To consider the garden as material culture takes some work and some physical things might be happier to sit within this framework than others might (Bolton, 2001). To orchestrate a more visual landscape experience of organic biota also requires effort (Hirsch, 1996) and some infrastructures might support this better than others. The task now becomes one of developing a way of documenting how these formats of experience might or might not be staged in practice. I have now developed a set of theoretical tools to help guide the work that is to follow. My next task is to formulate a method that fits within this stance to explore some more practical performances as they take place around the city.

-3-

A travelling ethnography of people and plants

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, two concerns were constructed to guide this research. I am interested in understanding how being with plants can affect people within London and how these affective capacities are accommodated within the gradually evolving systems of organising domestic spaces. Questions such as these may, however, be explored through any number of activities. Relevant detail could be retrieved from many different places. It is the particular strategy that I developed to address these two concerns that is the subject of this chapter, as there were many choices involved in the staging of this research.

The first structuring idea that I am attracted to is the multi-sited ethnography, which combines an in-depth approach to how contexts work with sensitivity to the dynamics of how they interconnect. Within this, ethnography as a practice, however, needs some examination in order to question how I might best use this approach to explore how we live with plants and materials. In the absence of much methodological advice, I question the specifics of what I might do within a number of interconnected sites to explore how humans and materials work together there. Eventually I decide upon a variety of approaches including walking interviews, plant observations, and garden photography. Together, I argue, these elements usefully form a type of travelling plant ethnography that explores, at various sites, how the biological organic and the human social do, or do not, come productively together.

Michel Serres (1995, cited in Whatmore, 1999, p26) argues that, through an express concern for specifically 'social' life in both research concerns and human consciousness, we have, through the march of history, effectively come to rupture our connection with the material world. Whilst human consciousness is not my particular concern in this chapter, I am in a position to question the research methods I might employ. Rather than within the more familiar practice of speech, the earth, Serres argues, 'speaks in terms of forces, bonds and interactions.' In this light this chapter develops some material methods to help me better understand how people experience forces such as those that are felt through the physical things of the garden.

3.2 ON MULTI-SITED ETHNOGRAPHY

The ethnographic method is the cornerstone of anthropology where researchers have traditionally gone to unfamiliar social settings and lived with the people there to better understand and write about their cultures. Originally connected to western colonial enterprises, an initial aim of this method was to inform a better way of managing or governing other peoples. Whilst, in terms of purpose, things have undoubtedly moved on for ethnography, the methodology is still employed in a variety of settings, as fieldworkers, through these means, continue to write detailed accounts of cultural practice in a variety of geographical contexts (Eriksen and Nielsen, 2001).

With respect to original colonial applications, the choice of this method might have been more pragmatic (given the alien nature of those encountered, other methods, like the questionnaire, might have been, at best, tricky). In more recent times, this choice derives more from its openness to the research encounter, as events gradually unfold before the researcher who then, through reflecting on this process, develops an understanding of those that are involved (Woolcott, 1999, May, 2001, p159, Cook and Crang, 1995, p21). As such, through immersion in many different sites of social action, ethnographers continue to explore in exciting ways how our many different human practices of living and thinking can combine.

Yet the more interconnected human lives across the earth become, the more difficult it is to capture them through conventional research methods such as these. Or at least, this has been an argument which, within anthropology, has made for a recognised need to question the limitations of traditional, place-based ethnographies. Particularly in the context of 'anthropology at home' (Cohen, 1977), researchers have recognised that people do not live in hermetically sealed groups that researchers could invade for periods before subsequently writing accounts of apparently distinct cultures (Knorr-Cetina, 1981a). This may have been appropriate, for example, with the people of New Guinea who may have experienced limited outside contact, but not with the people of New York, where society may be typified by movement and cultural exchange.

It is in the context of arguments such as these that George Marcus (1995, 1998) advocates a 'multi-sited ethnography' better to accommodate simultaneous processes in different connected places. Identities, for example, he argues, are increasingly co-produced by many locales and by multiple agents with various intentions - the place where a person lives, for example, is only one social site, and perhaps not the most important in shaping that person's sense of self. Are we now, for instance better defined by what we do, rather than where we live? Answers here vary, of course, but the point is that his approach offers a methodology that can engage with these

concerns. For Marcus, then, increasingly 'any cultural identity or activity is constructed by multiple agents in varying contexts or places, so that ethnography must be strategically conceived to represent this sort of multiplicity, and to specify both intended and unintended consequences in a network of complex connections between a system of places' (Marcus, 1998:52). Through such means, this approach aims at a sensitive account of how individual cultural sites work, whilst also exploring how they co-evolve through their inter-relationships. Such arguments seem particularly pertinent to my own research project, as human life in London, at least, seems often to move busily through many sites of activity. The places of research, rather than being seen as distinct sites of cultural reproduction are better accommodated as 'gatherings of habitual practices' produced through a range of evolving networks and organisations (Massey and Thrift, 2003).

Within this stance, there may, however, be many ways of constructing a multi-sited ethnographic investigation. Research of this kind might involve follow a particular group of people through some different contexts; it might follow a metaphor as that circulates through society; or it may follow a category of physical thing as it moves between different places (Marcus, 1995). It is the last of these that proved most attractive to me in the way that it allows material things a central role in the research narrative. I am interested in the ways in which plants are lived with and how this might be changing; the argument for multi-sited ethnography is one of changing relations and how such relations are played out around certain material things within society.

Here Marcus suggests we choose a number of specific sites that are connected by the particular object that circulates between them. Then we should engage with these as best we can ethnographically to develop a sense of how they both function individually and connect collectively. I was keen to explore these ideas, taking the plant as my circulating object of concern. That is to say that I was attracted to a multi-sited approach as it seemed to reveal both an in-depth sense of how encounters between human and nonhuman are felt within specific bundles of localised activity, whilst also suggesting an evolving wider context through the layering of such bundles. In this sense it was ideal for dealing with my two specified concerns.

I am drawn here, therefore, to the idea of following the plant ethnographically to see how, within different sites and at different moments, it might be considered. In this way, this work follows in the tradition of ethnographic approaches to particular categories of thing as they move through societies (Kopytoff, 1986, Mintz, 1985). I wanted to adopt this approach, but also to extend it since, as an anthropological method, these approaches have tended to neglect the dynamic physical agency of the things involved. I, however, wanted to also question how this

inherent agency of things can both subvert and bolster the human representations that are in evidence around them. A heuristic had now been selected and, correspondingly, my next task was to decide where I ought practically to go.

3.3 FINDING FOUR SITES OF CONCERN

Plants, like the seeds from which they come, can be characterised by the inventiveness of their dispersal and adaptability (Ridley, 1930). There may be many different places through which these botanical forms travel and live alongside people. In cities, we come across plants in any number of places - making their way in pavement cracks, on windowsills, in park areas, on office desks. As Whatmore and Hinchliffe (2003, p138) argue, as soon as we ignore humans for a moment, then 'the tracks of multifarious other city inhabitants' become strikingly apparent. As I have discussed, I was to constrain myself to the urban context of London, with a particular concern for the garden. Yet, even then, I could have gone to a number of places.

Therefore I was to specify where I wanted to question how plants and people come together. Four sites were eventually selected according to my two stated concerns. I was, firstly, interested to mix both commercial and domestic contexts of activity. Through the commercial sites, I thought I would get a better sense of how plants are dealt with in professional terms which would speak to how patterns of consumption are developing. As such I thought they would better speak to my concern for evolving systems of practice. Through the domestic ones, I thought I would find some richer material on how and why we do, or do not, like to deal with plants in our lives. As such, these might offer a richer sense of how we can live with plants. Secondly, I was also anxious about the amenability of certain places to ethnographic research. Some places are more suitable than others for this kind of work - it is easier and less obtrusive to go and watch what people are doing in the coffee shop (Laurier et al. 2001), for instance, than in the busy office (Pellegram, 1998). Given these concerns, the sites I eventually selected for this research were as follows:

- *The garden design business.* Through the explosive advent of garden makeover programmes, we can see how the garden designer is increasingly holding society's attention. More anecdotally, this group is expanding as an increasing number of people join their ranks and attend their associated conferences. They also play a crucial role in the organisation of the garden as a direct point of negotiation between individual physical gardens and wider discourses of design. I was interested here to explore what these people thought their job exactly was - how they worked with their clients, and how the different physical materials they managed and dealt with were considered throughout this process.

- *The garden centre.* The garden centre is a site that has undergone recent change in its relationship with its clients. These businesses mediate between developing gardening promotions and changing gardening consumers. Here I hoped to get a more general sense of the London garden owner and how their agendas might be engaged with by those people that are selling them the different things they might want to live with in outside domestic space. Given my city focus, here I wanted to spend time within some different garden centres located specifically within London, rather than more out-of-town businesses.

- *The designed private garden.* It is here, within actual private gardens, that wider forces eventually play themselves out as different objects, plants, devices and discourses take shape and jostle against each other within developing relationships. Here I was interested in questioning how a designed garden might evolve once its construction is complete and how the people that own such gardens live with them, both practically and more symbolically. The tensions within our developing patterns of living and working, discussed in chapter two, might be played out forcefully within this site and, if the garden design business is in ascendance, we might infer that so are the type of garden relationships that are in evidence here.

- *The gardened private garden.* Finally, I aimed to develop an account of how on-going relations between people and gardens are managed and considered within some relationships that have been evolving over a number of years. Here I was interested in how the practice of people that self-select themselves as gardeners compare to those with designed gardens and how they relate to changes within the wider systems of garden organisation that surround their own practices. I was interested to track how this group deals with the materials of the garden and how this might be similar to, or different from, the ways in which these concerns are dealt with elsewhere.

At this point I should say something of how I understood the term 'site.' Whilst I have been talking so far about spending time within specific sites, I took this to mean specific categories of site, rather than specific individual sites. That is to say that I conducted my work with a number of different garden centres, a number of different garden designers, and so forth, rather than devoting my time to one individual representative of each of these categories. I wanted to combine some in-depth understanding of how specific sites worked with a sense of how changing systems are, in part, constituted through these sites. As such I felt that it would make little sense to spend time within one individual place since, whilst this would certainly have afforded a close understanding of that particular place, it may be a specific and individual case.

Different researchers take different numbers of respondents according to the purposes of their research. Sample sizes may matter more for the statistical purveyor of questionnaires than for the interpretivistic researcher of subjectivities. For each of my sites, in this research, seven examples were taken and research was conducted together with the people and plants in evidence at each of these. This choice of seven as my sample was something that emerged as much through the research itself as from any external decision about degrees of rigour. That is to say that, in practice, it was only when the number of participants began to reach this level that I began to be confident about making more general conclusions - it was only through spending time with at least seven examples that I began to feel confident about potentially talking about 'what happened in a London garden centre' or 'how a London garden designer organises things.' This was not the 'saturation' point when no new responses suggest that all potential answers have been given (Baxter and Eyles, 1997; 513). Indeed, more work with other examples could have very productively been done. Rather, since I was taking an in-depth approach, this number seemed sufficient to both undertake detailed work and also hopefully to make more general conclusions, given the time constraints of a doctorate. I will talk in more detail later in the thesis about how individual sites were selected and why particular individual examples were taken.

3.4 TAKING THIS APPROACH FORWARD

Once sites have been chosen within the multi-sited approach, Marcus (1995) is less specific about the particular activities that should follow. He suggests we simply follow Solow's (1991) advice and 'grope your way.' Such vagueness is perhaps unsurprising when ethnography is often positioned in opposition to organising structuring principles (Fetterman, 1998; Woolcott, 1999). Here the original mode of research was to spend time living and working within a specific cultural group and, within such an account, discussion of the actual means of gaining access to the ideas and practices that defined that group is difficult. There would have been many different approaches adopted according to how they were appropriate, as the researcher interacted continually with its members. At one moment the traditional ethnographer might have been involved in the building of a boat, at another be undertaking a trip to another island, and at another still be spectator to an intertribal gathering (from Malinowski, 1966). To enumerate all of these strategies and circumstances would have been a lengthy task. The means, then, of actually operationalizing an idea of ethnography can be difficult to grasp when, correspondingly, it can be infrequently discussed.

Ethnography certainly does not contain such a clear framework for activity as more sociological techniques like the interview or the questionnaire. What in essence it seems to suggest is a broad idea of 'being there' where things are experienced and cultures are reproduced (Wolcott, 1999).

But how exactly should I go about being there? One common criticism that can be levelled at this approach is that it has tended to ignore the conditions of its production (Herbert, 2000; Cook and Crang, 1995 p4). As Russell (1995.vii) puts it, 'the mystique is still there.' For my own purposes, I wanted to specify further how this research would progress at this point.

This indeed seemed to me to be a necessary consequence of embracing the multi-sited approach and its implications. As I have already rehearsed, the argument behind this type of stance is that contemporary developments have meant that different lives are worked through interconnected sites of experience. Literally, we can take this to mean that people are busy. They are moving around and working hard, just as the things they encounter are also rapidly circulating between sites. Within this framework, it seemed inappropriate to suggest implicitly an easily negotiated access to any site of concern when people may have limited time or inclination to help a researcher. For me, this seemed doubly so to me given the trends discussed in chapter two. As Sperschneider and Bagger argue (2003), the iterative project of ethnography and the focussed world of professionals can be difficult to reconcile and, therefore, prior consideration of how they might best be aligned becomes of real importance. More practically, the multi-sited strategy also means that less time than otherwise is spent at each of the defined sites and, therefore, generating relevant material effectively from each within the available time becomes of further import.

Within the confines of this research, then, this meant that I felt I should be as clear as possible at the outset about what I wanted to do at each site. This may not be as clearly within the tradition of the anthropological approach to elucidating emergent cultural constructions. Yet, if we are to take seriously the implications of the idea of an increasingly complex and interconnected urban world, then the more traditional open stance should be reconciled with a certain pre-defined structure (Sanjek, 2000). In ethnographic research the extent to which formats should be decided from the outset can vary – research work can both be framed as a technical execution of strategy and as a fluid exploration of context (Hammersley 1999 p576, Cook and Crang, 1995 p4). Whilst some argue it is better to get on with finding things out (Janesick, 1998), rather than agonising in advance over method, I was nonetheless, at this point, to clarify my strategy further.

3.5 Material Methods

What I proposed to do, then, was to adopt a multi-sited ethnographic approach by exploring four sites of interest from which seven examples were taken. Within this, however, I wanted to specify further what I would be doing at each of these sites. According to Jensen (1991, p6) the methods we adopt should reflect the theoretical questions that we hope to answer. My

theoretical questions concerned the changing practical ways in which people lived with and understood plants and other materials. I want to now discuss how I went about reconciling this aim with a multi-sited ethnography. In chapter two we saw how social science can be seen to be exactly that: a form of research concerning itself principally with the social world and with the people within it, and this was to downplay the capacities of the many other entities that we practically encounter. If this is the case, as I have discussed, I ought now to reconsider the research methods associated with this field.

As Dant (1999) suggests, the everyday familiarity of the things around us has meant that social researchers have tended not to record or to respond to them. Although there are several exceptions, social researchers have generally seldom taken drawings or photographs or film recordings. Neither have they collected artefacts. Partly because, unlike the anthropologist, they didn't travel so far afield, for the social researcher actual physical things have often quietly sat in the background, as the conversations of the people around them seemed far more interesting. Such an interest is a result of a disciplinary social concern but was also compounded by a post-structural turn, where a concern for the functions of language resulted in a further preoccupation with human representation. One common belief within this stance was that language was constitutive of social reality, (cf. Derrida, 1980) and it indirectly followed that language was the thing to be studied by the social researcher. In terms of modes of enquiry, this practically meant a preponderance of textual and discourse analyses giving us access to the ways in which people constructed their worlds and represented them to the researcher.

Whilst this approach undoubtedly revealed much about the ways in which we can linguistically shape understanding, it offers less potential for a specific focus on how human ideas and physical agencies might co-evolve. Here Latour, in his programmatic argument for considering our life with objects, takes the example of a 'door-closer' and the automatic device that can generously shuts the door behind us in public spaces. He talks about watching it and considering how it actually works together with people: how it helps us move through corridors and modifies our relationships with the other people also moving along these corridors. Within the context of these sociological approaches he uses this example to suggest that the 'habits and preferred fields' of the sociologist should be modified to accommodate these new 'missing masses' of active things (Latour, 1988b, p310; Latour, 1992b). For Dant, then, we need to 'develop methods of research that adequately represent objects as they interact with people' (Dant, 1999, p9), whilst Whatmore (1999, p35) more forcefully puts it that we 'need to overhaul our repertoire of methods and poetics in ways that admit and register the creative presence of creatures and devices amongst us.' Correspondingly, some fascinating discussions about how we might best 'collaborate' (Law, 1994) with the material physical world within research are

beginning to emerge (on this see Jackson, 2000; Philo, 2000; Kearnes, 2003; Anderson and Tolia-Kelly; 2004). There is much contemporary interest in better regrounding human experience within the physical contexts of life.

Woodward (2001), however, argues that an idea of studying physical 'things', as a particular category, can lead towards an abstracted form of theorising where discussions move unhelpfully from practical research concerns and towards grander philosophical issues. There may be much truth in this as the contemporary geographical interest in materiality, at least, yet this lacks sustained empirical discussion. A problem may lie with this reified category of the 'material' and the bold statements that surround it. Both Whatmore (1999) and Dant (1999) seem to suggest that methods need to be reinvented to accommodate these missing masses within the fabric of research. According to their arguments, we are either to develop new methods or to overhaul existing ones. In comparison to such bullish assertions, Jones and Cloke (2002, p66) more reflectively suppose that, until nonhuman agency is more directly focused upon, reconstruction will 'always be magnetically attracted to the human core.' The appeal of their framing, methodologically, is its suggestion that we might amend our methods, rather than replace them in a more radical fashion. We could push our social science methods a little without necessarily having to flip into a totally new mode of enquiry.

This, at least, was what I tried to do. As a social scientist I aimed to adapt the methods available here better to achieve these ends. In this sense I was to consider methodologically Haraway's idea of 'material semiotics' (Haraway, 1992), as I wanted to consider how best to expose the interpenetration between the material world of physical life and the symbolic world of human cultural representation. As such I was concerned for the ways in which methods were complicit in revealing certain types of account and how they might either obscure or embrace the role of physical matters in human lives. Whilst the chronologies of gaining access and the particulars of how things progressed at each individual site are incorporated into the substantive chapters, I want briefly to discuss the nature of the four particular techniques that were employed and how they dealt with these concerns. These were, in turn, qualitative interviewing, mobile interviewing, observational methods, and the use of photography.

3.6 TALKING ABOUT THINGS - ON QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWING

The qualitative interview aims at exploring issues through an open, and only partially directed, approach to talk. As a stock ethnographic technique (Fetterman, 1998; Cook and Crang, 1995) I was, correspondingly, keen to use this tool. Within this format, the respondent is allowed a degree of freedom in the way they develop the discussion. No longer passive respondents

offering up answers after the stimulus of the interviewer's questions, in qualitative interviewing the interviewer and interviewee explore together the qualities of the matter at hand.

One common way of dividing up the interview method is by framing the interview as either 'topic' or 'resource'. According to Searle (1998) if we organise the interview around a 'topic' we would make the conversation circulate around the subject of interest. Through this approach the respondent's linguistic ways of handling the topic are revealed and the researcher gets a general sense of how the respondent constructs their view. The alternative approach is to consider the interview as a 'resource' and a means of finding out about the practical activities and events of interest to the researcher in a more straightforward way. Here the interviewer uses the respondent as a conduit to uncover the information that she might be interested in. As Smith (2001) puts it, we are either interested in the way people think - 'how we see the world' - or what people do - 'how we make the world.'

The qualitative interview is often broadly placed within the first of these camps so that, for McCracken (1988. 21), qualitative interview methods are used to 'discover how respondents see the world' or as, May (1993, 108) argues, such interviews are 'a resource for understanding how individuals make sense of their social world.' For Geertz they uncover stories that people 'tell themselves about themselves' (Geertz, 1973: 448). Whilst the open nature of the qualitative interview was something that appealed, given the aims of this research, I was concerned that such arguments seemed to take us back to Jones and Cloke's (2002) 'human core' as research subjects unproblematically seemed to construct the world around them. As Potter (1997:158) suggests, proponents of this approach prefer to avoid reference to the 'ethnographic particulars' of material things outside the conversation. Rather, he argues, they see contexts as things that are 'worked up, attended to and made relevant within interaction, rather than derived from external determinants.' The presence of material things here seemed hard to abstract from an approach that privileges the respondent. The tradition of the qualitative interview, then, may be complicit with a washing away of the extraneous forces that were of limited concern to the people that broker the world together within an interview. Yet, within this research, I wanted to use questions from either side of Searle's (1998) division, as they became relevant.

This division between the interview as 'topic' and as 'resource', and aligning the qualitative interview with the 'topic' approach, was problematic when my aim was to explore how linguistic orderings and ethnographic particulars interpenetrated. We may be constructing the world socially and assigning material things into categories, but that isn't to suggest that such material things do not have their own ideas about which categories they find most appealing. Rival (1993, 1998), for instance, argues for the power of things to decide upon how we think

about them. Entities, she argues, can actively transform themselves ontologically within our thought. Indeed this argument is a cornerstone within much of science studies work I have so far drawn upon (on this see Laurier and Philo 2001). Here, as Ingold (1996, 43) puts it, we might rather think of the world as progressing through a process of active 'interagentivitiy', rather than the 'intersubjectivity' of human representation. Here the qualitative interview tends to be framed as intersubjective as a means of highlighting important issues of positionality and language (Cook and Crang, 1995, p36). Yet I wanted to try and develop an 'interagentive' interview that moved between materials and representations as talk went on.

In one sense, a focus upon more symbolic ideas may be a product of the essential nature of this method, as the small details of everyday life might, understandably, be put aside in a reflective situation. Respondents might prefer to consider their lives in terms of bigger themes. In my research I asked people about everyday interactions with plants and this was sometimes difficult, even with keen gardeners. People seemed to have a sense of what a social science researcher might want to know and this tended to be more about deeper meanings, less about mundane interactions. Qualitative interviewing methods were complicit here, as sitting down reflectively with a cup of tea and then asking about practical irrigation routines could seem odd. Indeed the movement between the reflective and the practical could also make for changes in the atmosphere of the interview. When talking with garden designers about how they enjoyed their work, for example, talk was of a more considered type as people would sit back in their chairs and reflect. When talking about how they practically worked with materials, however, they might then sit forward and enumerate strategies in a more business-like way. 'What do you like about your job?' and 'how do you do your job?' are questions with quite different implied modes of discussion, I think.

Yet to explore the interaction between the symbolic and the material it was necessary to move between these two types of interaction within individual conversations. Language as 'doing' and language as 'representing' (Laurier, 1999) sometimes jarred, but this was a necessary difficulty. At times we developed ideas in a more reflective way, but I equally regularly brought things back to the actual practical encounters being organised. It could certainly feel odd following a discussion of personal philosophies with a bald question about pest management but, in order to move away from the human core that Jones and Cloke (2002) discuss, this was sometimes necessary. Crang (2003, 499) talks about a recent shift from researching conversation as representation towards exploring the more prosaic activities of routine and problem solving. This move may productively redress certain balances, but, if we are methodologically to reimmerse people in the world, simultaneously as active doers and reflective thinkers, they might be better reconciled in the kinds of talk that we stage.

3.7 TALKING AROUND THINGS - ON MOBILE DISCUSSION

Lorimer (2003) recently discusses the act of walking as a common component to the geographical fieldwork class. By slowing the pace through the act of walking, he argues that field class students are able to concentrate on 'seemingly (un)remarkable actions, emotions and feelings' (2003, 296). In this sense, walking offers a sensitive approach to the relations between speech and components of our surroundings. If open to the experiences of the walk, feelings and emotions about the walk's environment may very well emerge. Not just of relevance to the field class, such insights were also of visible and audible advantage to me in this task of recovering the active role of things within interview narrative as, when walking, 'heterogeneous details and elements' can much better insert themselves (Game, 1991; 153).

I used different plant environments and the act of walking within them as a springboard for discussion. Such activities did not, as Macnaughten and Urry claim of other outdoor experiences 'drive the body to do extreme things' (2000, p. 1). Movement around gardens was usually made at a stately pace; a visit to the domestic garden or the garden centre, for instance, was a pedestrian affair. This format was harnessed as a methodological resource where a direct encounter provided an array of unfolding prompts to discussion. The superficial aim of simply 'having a walk' allowed for thoughtful silences and reflections on the encountered materials that could have felt uncomfortable if we were simply sitting there. This way I could more easily gather research material that engaged with both the people and the materials surrounding them at each site. In trying to explore people's attachment to plants, such walks triggered conversations and insights, which a sterile indoor interview may well have missed. Anderson (2003) suggests that 'talking whilst walking' was invaluable to his research within sites of environmental direct action, where the act of walking helped trigger memories and experiences connected to that environment. This was equally the case in my own work.

Discussion about where research should be undertaken has been a hot-bed of debate over recent years (see for example Amit 2000; Stoller 1997), with feminists urging us to consider the power relations that place can enact. Different aspects of identity are argued to be revealed or, in part, performed by the things surrounding us. When people are presented with material things connected to their lives, for instance, they can become uneasy about talking about themselves since the presence of such material things can challenge or contest the representations they might want to make about them (Marcoux, 2001). Here I aimed to take these concerns forward as the interview context offered an opportunity to allow plants and materials more power to visibly contest or prompt what was to be said about them.

In the domestic London garden, for example, interviews were conducted both within and outside the house, as a tour of the garden space often elicited quite different attitudes to those evident within the containment of the living room. As I have discussed, inside it seemed that more experienced gardeners had a certain set of expectations of what I might ask them about their gardens. This was to be quite an event for these respondents and, furthermore, they were also kind, helpful people that wanted to give the right sort of answer and offer the most interesting information (on this see May, 1997). Mundane plant interactions seemed to be the last thing that a social researcher might be interested in and, in the house at least, it was difficult to steer conversations toward them. In the garden, however, a different relationship emerged and the nature of their relationship with plants was recast. Once in the garden space, for certain groups, as we will see, a different ethic more clearly emerged, as the interventions they had made there were determinedly present. People would be confronted by plant needs and the residue of past responses to them and, with just a short spatial distance, a different set of relations could emerge.

Here, a walking interview, and a particular form of 'mobile methodology' (Urry, 1999) could take us closer to the ways in which people encountered plants within practice. This could be difficult at times and certainly required the skilful positioning of Dictaphones and alertness to potential crosswinds in less enclosed gardens. Nevertheless this seemed of particular use in the context of a verbal reticence and a sense in which talk of caring for plants and managing them within routine could seem trivial. Cooper (2003) describes how the everyday experience of plant environments, like the garden, can be hard to accommodate within the vocabulary of description – talking about gardens is difficult, but experiencing them is easy. Here I adapted and adopted certain aspects of interview method to make such accommodations easier.

3.8 WATCHING FOR THINGS - ON OBSERVATIONAL APPROACHES

Within anthropology, at least, it is axiomatic that what people say they do and what people actually do are different things. Such arguments underwrite enterprises such as garbology, the classificatory examination of refuse, when what people own and discard can sometimes 'speak more eloquently about the lives they lead that they themselves ever can' (Rathje and Murphy, 1992: 54). It might therefore be a good idea to go about exploring people's interactions with things without the focus on language that the interview necessitates. Mobile interviews focussing on both material practice and symbolic understanding did take me some way towards usefully considering how people and things interact, yet I was also interested in seeing, where possible, how they went about doing things together on their own. If one problem stemmed from a previous focus upon language and the talk a researcher would take part in, then we could usefully reduce the role of language in the first place.

What I mean to say is that we might just want to watch things and see what they do and this takes me back to the ethnographic technique. Whilst anthropology was clearly implicated in the, already discussed, post-structural linguistic concern (see for example, Marcus and Clifford, 1986; Atkinson, 1990), anthropologists maintain a tradition of questioning the function of material things within human lives through the 'participant observation' method. Here the anthropologist watches how people work together in the structuring of a culture. Consequently, if much time is spend watching within such strange places, it might become hard to ignore the practical role of objects in the reproduction of those structures. Particularly if these are alien, non-familiar cultures, such as those which the anthropologist has traditionally studied, and doubly if the anthropologist may have not been able to fluently converse from the outset. For the traditional anthropologist the people encountered will evidently have an arrestingly different array of props to aid their cultural lives. These props might also be doubly intriguing when the researcher, at the outset at least, couldn't converse with them fluently. From this empirical vantage, 'material culture' may have been a significant part of any account and, following this legacy, anthropologists have adapted this observation strategy to the myriad 'object-worlds' (Miller, 1998a, p6) that we move through in both western and non-western contexts. Through this observational strategy, the obvious point that people don't just talk about symbolic things, but also interact with physical things, has been productively explored.

Observational strategies, rather than their more participatory variants (which have a different set of associated issues as Fetterman, 1998, p37 recounts), have correspondingly proved useful with regard to a number of physical things. Spradley (1980), for instance, provides observational accounts of how people live with things like the book, such that reading on the commuter train was something which necessitated a mixture of people doing certain things and the active presence of paper, glue and ink that makes up the book. To echo Latour (1988b), he also examines the door, such that moving through the swing doors of a college campus can reveal the shifting status of polite behaviour between genders enacted through the very presence of that door. A third example from his research would be the coke machine which we might usually overlook but with which we might have some very different and peculiar kinds of relationship. Edensor (1998) more recently observes human movement and behaviour around the Taj Mahal as a means of considering how different cultural groups physically engage with the collection of material things that make up this place. In studies such as these, the active role of certain physical things in dictating social behaviour in both talk and action can be questioned.

Indeed, moving closer to my plant concern, observational methods have also helped us move between the social and the natural worlds. In particular, they have offered a way of exploring

how the human and the animal interact through some 'new practices of witnessing' (Wolch and Emel, 1995) that admit the constitutive role of the animal in the fabric of social life. Here Arluke and Saunders (1996) argue primarily for an observational approach to the settings in which people and animals interact. This, they argue, would help build a detailed and sociologically informed description of 'human-animal exchange.' Alger and Alger (1999), for example, follow this methodological argument in a New York cat shelter. Through these means they documented the complicated relations between different cats and different people there. In this case, the capturing of non-verbal data, one of the particular strengths of an observational approach (Hammersley, 1992), was of particular importance. That is usefully to say the obvious - cats don't talk. Therefore, to get a sense of the constitutive agency of cats, they simply, but productively, watched how they lived and interacted with people.

Observational approaches might, then, offer some common ground in accommodating active material presences (Laurier et al. 2003). Indeed, in some ways cultural anthropologists and behavioural ecologists have been doing similar things - anthropologists watch and make notes about human activity whilst behavioural ecologists watch and make notes about animal activity. Yet, there is little evidence of past studies that have engaged with the dynamic relations between plants and people through a similar process of observation. In the natural sciences behavioural ecologists have observed how certain plants and certain animals come together. Observation can reveal how certain bees are attracted to certain plants at certain times in the day (Williams and Thompson, 1998), whilst it was by watching activities through time that it becomes possible to understand how ants could make nests within the leaves of particular trees (Holldoller and Wilson, 1993). People also come and go around the objects and plants of the garden centre, for instance, and their behaviour there could perhaps be explored in a similar way. Shields (1991) discusses how people perform certain 'place ballets' as they move, respond and behave around certain sets of objects. Natural scientists have uncovered something of the place ballets that insects and birds perform around certain plants. Here social scientists could perhaps follow suit in terms of watching and accounting for the ballets of humans in a type of botanical proxemics (on this see Hall, 1966). Lovering et al. (2002) provide an observational account of how ageing people and designed gardens interact and a similar approach could usefully explore human behaviour in London plant contexts.

One method I adopted where appropriate, then, was an observational approach to human behaviour within certain plant environments. I was interested to see what they do in a more physical sense as well as what they say to each other linguistically. Elements of what can be represented in language and what is only available through action are folded together in interesting ways (see Nash, 2000, p655). Here as Milward and Mostyn (1989) argue, with

reference to urban park behaviour, what people say they want to do in city plant environments can often be distinct from what they actually do in such locations, and I wanted to capture some elements of these behaviours, where possible. Through watching how people behaved and talked in the garden centre, for instance, it was possible to get a richer sense of how plants and materials were dealt with there. Through extended periods of watching it became possible to build a typology of different behaviours around certain categories of product and how plants could be encountered in a different way to other materials. This method was also of use in the garden design consultation where my minimal input allowed a better sense of how the designer, the garden and the client together brokered the future of outside domestic spaces.

Potential ethnographic observers are often asked to first identify a social 'scene' (see Spradley, 1980, May 2001, p157 or Morril and Fine, 1997) - somewhere where 'a place and a people' (Fetterman, 1998: 32) come together. It is, by implication, only in certain places that such a method is appropriate and where the degree of visible activity makes this method worthwhile. Whist the garden itself, for instance, is certainly a place in which people and plants come together in some interesting ways, that is not to say that it is necessarily a productive research activity to spend time within gardens waiting for the occasional times when they do so. Equally in the garden centre, if you go at a time when there are few customers, it would be possible to talk with the staff a little, but not to observe a great deal. Here I would have to wait and hope that the centre would become busier so that I could start generating more information. With this in mind, I conducted observational work only when it was possible and useful to this research.

3.9 PICTURING THINGS - ON PLANT PHOTOGRAPHY

Pink suggests 'a camera has been an almost mandatory element of the 'tool kit' for research for several generations of ethnographers' (2001, p. 49) where there have been three main ways of incorporating photography. Firstly, it has been used as a recording device for potential photographic surveys in such work as Collier and Collier's (1986) systematic photographic survey of the material content and organisation of homes. Such work provides a way of visually comparing specific material aspects of different cultures, but does not indicate how these objects are made meaningful by those individuals in whose lives they figure (Pink 2001, p. 57). Secondly, she discusses photography as a participatory and collaborative tool where informants are asked for photos of themselves. This usually has the effect of producing images the informants are pleased with, but can, nevertheless, offer indirect means of documenting how individuals might want others to perceive them. Finally, she considers researchers using informants' personal photographic collections. As she notes, often during more informal research interactions with people in the home, the researcher is faced with family photos. These are often useful to explore as such images contextualise moments in time, offer springboards for

further discussion, and can add a real dimension to more abstract conversations. Other commentators on the use of photography in research discuss similar methodological techniques (see for example Wagner 1979; Emmison and Smith 2000; Banks 2001; Rose 2001; Plummer, 2001).

Of course, despite such categorisations, the visual image could be used in many ways, as photographs follow innumerable paths through societies. One aim within this work was to explore what the photograph might reveal about a particular relationship between human and nonhuman and, as a result, the ways I used photography differed slightly from those that often feature in popular reviews of visual methods. More generally, within methodological handbooks, such as those of Pink (2001), Rose (2001), and Plummer (2001), attention is focussed on how the visual serves to generate meaning about more traditional sociological concerns, and not to expand these out towards the natural world. Plummer (2001) discusses the photograph as a visual 'document of life.' Yet, within his framing, this is a specifically human social life. Here I aimed to question the photograph's role in relating to the nonhuman world and the ways in which such visual technologies might both bring us closer together, but also stand us apart (on the use of film here see Mitman, 1997; Davies, 2000b).

Firstly, I adapted the 'autophotographic' technique (Ziller, 1990) to explore how certain people thought best to present the plant environments they were associated with. Within relevant sites, I took photographs with the person I had been spending time with there. With garden owners, for example, I asked them how I should best photograph their gardens for my work. This was, firstly, useful in the way in which it forced attention back to the materials that we were being presented with and, secondly, it interestingly pointed to why individual particular things were, in their opinion, to be photographed. What was also useful here was the way in which such an approach revealed something of how comfortable people were with such visual framings of the garden spaces. For some, the activity of photographing was easier than for others and how they approached this activity provided useful information in its own right, together with a visual record of what was significant to them. It could sometimes feel strange to be both trying to record talk on a Dictaphone and also organising images on a digital camera and a fluid and open conversation was also tricky if I was worried about my different bits of equipment. Nevertheless such an activity did, I feel, enrich the accounts I was to produce.

Secondly, my attention was also drawn to how and when the photographic image is marshalled in relations between different involved parties. In this it is not far removed from the science studies work that I have discussed where an attention to the constitutive agency of specific devices has been a central concern. Things like the door closer which shapes social relations,

just as pumps (DeLaet and Mol, 2000), bridges (Suchman, 2000), and wheelchairs (Winance, 1999) do. Through being attentive to the ways in which the photograph was harnessed, its significance could be better uncovered. As the raft of gardening books and magazines expands, I sought to get closer to the visual image in practice, to trace the degree to which it figured in discussion of the garden by those involved with organising them. With reference, for example, to the designer, through attending closely to how specific images were marshalled in client meetings, it was possible to see how this technology was complicit in fostering certain approaches to the materials of the garden. Different designers choose different ways of visually representing the garden and its components and these implicitly contain some interesting assumed understandings of the things held within.

Finally, I was also keen to take my own photographs of the particular things that I was to discuss in the body of this research. This is in a more usual way, following the documentary tradition (Plummer, 2001, p61) where written description of the materials being discussed is enhanced through visual means. Given that I was particularly concerned with the materials at work within these sites, it seemed sensible to record these materials in action. Whilst the material world, as I have argued, can sometimes be hard to capture within language it is certainly determinedly there within actuality and this can be usefully illustrated through using the camera.

3.10 How these methods were employed

These four methods - qualitative interviewing, mobile interviewing, observation and photographic methods - were those that I was to employ and to layer upon each other in providing my account. Whilst not quite a methodological 'triangulation' (Ley, 1988, 1992), with its implicit suggestion of an underlying reality to be revealed, these, together, do serve to provide a denser account of the activities I explored. Through different means of 'enacting' and enlivening these sites (Law and Urry, 2002), I aimed to question how human and nonhuman representatives together shape what a domestic garden in London is, and is becoming. What I did, then, was a sort of travelling ethnography where, as will be discussed, some methods were more appropriate to some sites than to others. In total, over fifty recorded interviews were conducted, together with many hours of observation work. At some sites it was more possible to develop certain approaches, whilst at others I was to rely more fully on the interview method and this was according to the way in which each site functioned. Nonetheless, together these methods allowed me in different ways to better explore my two stated concerns.

As I travelled, a barrow load of interview transcripts, pictures and fieldnotes gradually began to build behind me. These were then explored and coded in an iterative process, using Atlas Ti

software for both the interview and fieldnote material. I do not want to go into detail on the use of this particular package since like Kelle (1997) I feel that the fear of such technologies distorting or corrupting any possibly purer understanding is overplayed (see also here Hinchliffe et al, 1997). Neither do I want to go into detail regarding whether this work was inductive or deductive, grounded theory or theory-testing, since I feel that such binarised positions are disingenuous and deny their actual interpenetration in almost all pieces of research (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1990). What I did was undertake a lengthy period dedicated to generating codes, exploring categories, and thinking intensively about the data. My codes were at times more etic and at other times more emic. Sometimes they dealt with new and interesting ways in which people spoke about and dealt with materials. At others they were more concerned with the extent to which the understandings of consumption developed in chapter two did, or did not, adhere to the physical objects and practices under discussion. Indeed I continued to code and reflect throughout the subsequent writing process, just as I had been in the interviews themselves, since analysis is never really a discreet stage of activity, no matter how forcefully scientistic protocol suggests it should be (Cook and Crang, 1995; Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995).

It was through a lengthy period of working through this material that a sense of how these sites worked, both individually and together, would be uncovered. Here I do not want to make any claims about the representativeness of my sample. These were simply the individuals that were kind enough to help in this research. What I hope I can provide, however, is a sense of the frameworks through which these different people and plants worked together (Mitchell, 1983). I think of the work that I have done as 'interpretivistic'(see Geertz, 1974). That is to say that I recognise the subjectivity of what I am about to present and the fact that another researcher could have explored things differently. This may be the case with all research work, but should, nonetheless, be acknowledged. Ultimately, within this approach the validity of the account depends upon how persuasive it is to the reader (Hammersley, 1992). Some may take issue with certain parts; others could dispute others. Indeed, this is as it should be since validity comes through such gradual processes of review, as much as through prior decisions on the part of the researcher (McDowell, 1992). In this chapter I have reflected on the methods I used to research plants and people in four London places. What follows now, in the subsequent four, is an account of how each of these individual sites worked, according to the ways in which I researched them. My aim, once again, was to consider how each functioned and how material things and symbolic ideas came together in these activities. Through layering these emergent stories, I want to now explore how this thing called 'a garden' is organised in contemporary London, together with exactly how and why we live with plants.

-4-

Looking, building, playing and pacifying: making a designer garden in London

4.1 INTRODUCTIONS

> 'Well, when I was an estate agent it was very, very stressful, in many ways an enjoyable job but the stress came when we became part of a really big corporate group and I met these home owners who were garden designers, and I just thought they had a tremendous calmness about them...so that's what I did, but it was simply to get away from this complete rat race.' (Jenny, Interview one)[1]

In Britain, there's now an organisation called the 'Society of Garden Designers.'[2] This does a number of things, including organising regional meetings where different garden design practitioners come together to discuss what they do, and how to best improve on that. Jenny, one of its members whose motivations for joining their ranks are listed above, told me about one recent such meeting. A lively discussion was taking place about the right clothes to wear when visiting clients. Jenny said that she always wore jeans and a tee shirt as she thought of herself as a physical, practical sort of person. Besides, for her, one reason for changing jobs and becoming a garden designer in the first place was because previously she always had to wear slick, smart, styled clothes. She was unsatisfied with that lifestyle and wanted something more informal and 'calm' for herself and this was, in part, why she decided upon this new vocation since the atmosphere, to her, was somehow more relaxed, less controlled. Meanwhile, back at the meeting, this amazed several of her colleagues. For them, Jenny's clothing choice seemed to suggest the opposite of how they thought they should best present themselves. For them, what was crucial was to look clean and ordered - making sure that they appeared resolutely professional, in charge, perhaps.

As this story suggests, this group who call themselves 'garden designers' currently feel themselves to be in something of a fledgling position. The idea of an allocated 'profession' of garden designers, with a specific code of conduct and organised approach, is something that this

[1] Throughout this PhD I have used pseudonyms to better preserve respondent anonymity.

[2] For which membership expansion rates are running at 6% per annum and for which there are over twenty official members that operate in London. They also run a biannual London- based conference that over 200 people attend.

group is grappling with. Professionalism can be thought of as constituted through the deployment of a diverse set of material things (Doel and Segrott, 2004) and, correspondingly, we can see why Jenny's clothing choices might warrant disdain. Yet this was only sometimes. At other times people were quite happy with this idea and, as such, this situation is suggestive of how different ideas about what their job is, and should be, currently abound.

In this context, at a garden design workshop I attended in Oxford in 2002, there was a collective sense of a needed push towards a professional code of practice. As the main speaker argued, the time was right for garden designers to consolidate their activities, to make themselves a force to be reckoned with. This loose coalescence of people, she felt, had to establish themselves as a group with specific aims and specific ways of working as the 'time was ripe' to make their activities both standardised and accepted:

> 'The world is changing fast. And we must acknowledge that, and keep up with it and in some ways also take it in a few new directions. We are no longer little Englanders and we cannot be'

As this meeting testifies, in the network of activities surrounding the garden, the entity that calls itself the garden designer seems to be feeling a surge of opportunity. It is interesting, therefore, to ask how this group goes about practically using this perceived power? How does it exercise itself over the things that they seek to take charge of (if this is, indeed, an aim) and how do they respond? Such is the subject of this chapter, as I explore the changing conventions and issues associated with this particular community. I joined them in their ranks to explore their strategies and practices and to see how determined they are in taking charge of their newly professionalising field. What was interesting to me was the extent to which such newly-styled businesspeople can, and do, take control of different matters. Both physical matters and client matters and both in equal terms since discursive manoeuvres are, in themselves, of little use if they cannot sustain the necessary supporting infrastructures (Callon, 1986; Latour, 1996).

In this chapter, I first explore how, for a number of reasons, visual and spatial ways of thinking are prevalent amongst this group. Given that they seem to be growing in confidence, it might be the case that they are also becoming more determined in imposing such frameworks upon the gardens they encounter. It is with this in mind that I then explore the associated practical work with entities such as hard materials and, sometimes, softer plants. Whilst this group seems initially interested in exerting a clear controlling role for themselves, it then becomes questionable whether total control in this way is either desirable or even possible, at least for themselves personally. Firstly, however, I should say something more about this particular group and how I got to know them.

4.2 WHAT A GARDEN DESIGNER IS AND HOW TO INFILTRATE THEIR RANKS

A garden designer is someone a person would approach if they had an area of space outside their houses that they wanted guidance about developing towards what we might call a 'garden.' There are other people they could go to for help. They could go to friends, neighbours, other keen gardeners, even do it themselves. However, it is this particular group of people that make their businesses out of doing this. That is to say that they approach it, although as we will see sometimes uneasily, as their profession.

Although there are a number of different ways in which designers work with clients, typically a prospective client is initially visited on one or two occasions, with an aim of establishing what kind of garden relationships they potentially want to foster. They talk and they use different means to efficiently elucidate what a person, who moments earlier was something of a stranger, wants from the potential collection of things that they would live with outside. If the designer then proves successful in winning the client's trust and business, they gradually come to a point when they supply some sort of 'design'. This is either in the form of a drawing or a more formal plan that is finally constructed, as more rarefied discussion eventually finds physical form. Then they leave, hopeful that the client will happily cohabit with a newly acquired set of companions. Some keep in touch with clients afterwards, although not all.

In thinking how best to research a group such as this, I looked to the rich tradition of studying 'work' through ethnographic means to expose the cultural rules at play within 'work' activity. Here recently, for instance, we have seen, through a close consideration of the work involved in a chicken or pizza campaign, how the practices of Norwegian marketeers can embody certain cultural approaches to wider questions of authenticity or tradition (Lien, 1997). Equally the advertising of Trinidadian soft drinks can be, by using such a method, considered less about the maximisation of profit, and more about how this commodity speaks to wider societal values and practices (Miller, 1998c). In the London office, meanwhile, we can now explain, in this manner, something of why we are so perversely attached to paper as a specific material presence within our working lives (Pellegram, 1998). What such studies suggest are the ways in which working practices, rather than necessarily embodying the obvious best means of achieving particular tasks, actually draw on a range of cultural ideas and practical traditions which can fascinatingly be exposed through a close consideration of how they are enacted. It is with this idea in mind that I now seek to account for the approaches taken by this particular group of people called 'garden designers'. Given the concerns I earlier established, I am especially concerned here with how their work is materially managed, together with the place of plants in this process.

A first route of access came whilst I was beginning to familiarise myself with the different ways in which gardens can be organised in London when I met my first designer, Kate, at a garden show in north London.[3] She was offering free sketch designs to different visitors with the hope that they might become clients. With the flashing lights and bass beats of the modern garden show in the background, we discussed my work and she agreed to help out in any way she could. After this initial meeting, I was to spend several days with Kate, exploring different ways of working and dealing with clients. A second route was through the Society of Garden Designers and attending a number of their meetings. Here I met a few other designers that would also kindly go on to help. Of these, Jenny, like Kate, was particularly helpful and I spent time with her on a number of different client engagements. As I got to know these designers better, they gradually became more inclined to suggest other further designers as potentially willing respondents. Two designers finally came through a third route and direct contact through websites.

Each designer was interviewed twice, generally in their studios where they did their design work. Through serial interviewing of this sort, it was possible to have a more open and iterative approach, as I had time between the first and second sessions to think about what they had said and how best to probe things more closely. We talked freely about what they did, their motivations, and how the process worked. At the outset I knew little about the practice of garden design and, here, being in their studios often helped. As I explored the ways in which their activities worked, they would often have traces of these very activities there to hand, to help explain and illustrate their points. Photos of past work, models, and illustrations could all became involved. My strategy of trying to physically keep close to the things under discussion seemed to yield a degree of success at the outset, at least.

The second stage was to watch them in action by 'shadowing' at client meetings, where they would either be taking an initial brief or presenting back designs and plans. After briefly introducing myself, I was generally silent through this process as I just watched and listened. Some argue that, within particular research spaces, the fieldworker gradually slips into a role in keeping with expected conduct (for example O'Reilly, 2000; Crang 1994). As such, the role I was often assumed to occupy was of a student garden designer, as I sat in these meetings taking notes on the negotiations taking place around me and framing questions to ask the designer in the car on the way back. Problems of notetaking and 'reactivity', an important consideration within the ethnographic method (Russell, 1998; Cook and Crang, 1995), were not such great obstacles in this research here. This was, firstly, because clients were busy folk that wanted to get things sorted and, secondly, because I was assumed to be taking notes about how to better

[3] The Daily Telegraph London Garden Show, Alexandra Palace. 11-14th 2002.

organise such a meeting myself in my later career. Even though I would point out to people that I was a researcher from the university, they still often asked at the end of the meetings whether I was going to be a designer and, to some extent, this assumption served me well in terms of not getting in the way. In total, twelve design meetings were attended and discussed, each lasting for at least an hour.

Based upon these activities, it was possible to extract a sense of how this 'garden designer' figure works with people, plants and materials. As I have suggested, at the time of this research the garden designer was in an interesting position - there were both competing ideas and prevailing notions of how they should work and many ideas about what garden relationships should best be fostered. These competing issues and how they resolve themselves are what I now want to explore. Here the cast of garden designers that we will meet have some different backgrounds. Some previously worked in other design or art fields, others orchestrated a complete change from work such as consulting, estate agency or retail, yet others had more of a horticultural pedigree. They comprise a mix of sexes and were from their thirties to their fifties. We'll get to know them gradually better as the chapter goes on. For the purposes of this thesis they are called Jenny, Kate, Jane, Susan, Simon, Tim and Tom. All, however, were self-selecting as designers that work, to greater or lesser extents, in London.

4.3 THE OPENNESS OF AGENDA AND A PEFORMANCE OF EMPATHY

Within the garden design process, a lot is up for grabs. The experience is likely to be a new one for clients that are, to a degree, unsure of what it will entail. For Susan, the initial meeting is very much about 'seeing what they are' (interview one). That is to say that, for her, a visual indication of their personality was particularly significant and this imperative can usefully be situated within a broader sense of needing to find innovative means of elucidating client sensibilities. For Tim the designer has to ask questions that the client 'won't have really thought about' (interview two), whilst Susan is also keen on using certain keywords that act as 'triggers' in bringing forward the clients, perhaps previously unconsidered, desires. There is a sense here among these designers that everyone knows what they want, even if they are unable, or not prepared, to articulate these desires. An aim, correspondingly, is to find appropriate techniques for extracting these. This is the openness of agenda.

Yet this must be balanced against other concerns. At a meeting between Kate and a potential client, the client simply stated her requirement of 'inspirational ideas' (observation session four) - laughing at her vague and difficult description. A free flowing discussion ensued as they moved around the outside spaces and the objects they passed served as prompts to their conversation. At another point in this meeting the client said she was looking for 'something a

bit architectural really'. The conversation continued, they strolled around the space, and they talked of different plants and how her client's life might connect with other potential lives in the garden. Towards the end, summing up the situation, Kate suggested that 'what you really want is something that is more architectural than cottagey gardeney, am I right?'

What Kate was doing here, then, was negotiating the difficult path between a linguistic reticence on the part of the client and establishing, as a designer, an air of empathetic understanding. By repeating this idea of 'the architectural', she implicitly suggests she has developed a good approximation of the client's needs and the client can, correspondingly, relax a little. She suggests she had independently thought of an appropriate term for what the client wanted, when it had, in fact, already been articulated. This is a performance of empathy, which is often a real advantage. Kate is wise to adopt such a determined elicitation approach since elsewhere clients give vague and confused briefs, before later finding themselves objecting strongly to the results. Typically, a person might have meetings with a number of designers before choosing whom to work with. In this scenario it becomes increasingly important to demonstrate quickly and effectively that you have a good sense of their requirements. That is to say that you have built up an empathetic understanding within a matter of minutes. Of course this is difficult and this also means that a perceived sense of their requirements takes on a new significance.

These two things - the openness of agenda and the performance of empathy - therefore, make the frameworks that designers employ particularly important. In the context of an inability or reluctance to express ideas, the frames of reference and the formats that designers employ become particularly important. This is not to say that clients are without opinion, but rather that the assumptions and methods and ways in which the designer structures, what are for clients, quite novel encounters take on a particular salience. In the context of an eager, but reticent, client, the ways in which designers elucidate information, the information they attempt to reveal, and their more general assumed aims for a designed garden can become especially significant in dictating what relationships can then develop once the designer has gone. So before we get to grips with materials and plants are how they are physically handled, here some particular and interesting social relations between those involved are at play. Within these, and to return to some questions I began this thesis with, a particularly important issue concerns 'looking' and visual experience more generally.

4.4 ARRANGING VISUAL AND SPATIAL ORDERS

A common strategy employed by garden designers as a means of elucidating client views involved a visual expression. Some designers ask potential clients to look through garden design books before their initial meeting so that they have something to orientate discussions around.

These could then serve as props to ease the conversational flow. With Kate, (observation session five), for example, I went to meet a Camden resident who had big plans for her outside space. She had her ideas, but like many, was equally looking to Kate to advise her. Firstly, we had a brief stroll around the site. Then we went back inside to pour over the photos held within the design book of choice. Jane, meanwhile, used 'visuals' in a different way. After a first meeting, she tended to leave clients with a board of various pictures or 'inspirational ideas' that she was thinking about using in that design - so that they can think about them and whether they would like a similar 'look' recreated for themselves. In the context of the linguistic reticence on the part of clients that I have discussed, then, it is perhaps not surprising that different sets of visual tools and procedures are employed. They, it is assumed, will hopefully allow the conversation to flow successfully and better reveal client sensibilities. Kate, for instance, always has a sketchpad with her, and plays around with visual ideas in front of clients throughout her meetings. Pictures and representations are, then, in part a technology of reassurance - something to look at when the conversations dry and an important component to a more explicitly social negotiation of matters.

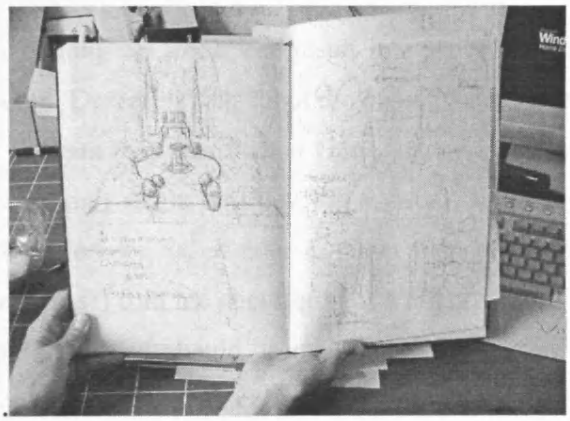

Figure 4.1. Kate's sketch book that she uses to develop visual ideas with clients in meetings.

Such would be one evident benefit of the 'visual' whilst, more generally, photographs and images tend to saturate the profession. That is to say that pictures and a sense of specifically 'picturing' the garden is broadly pervasive. This can be partly explained by the ease of access to books about the subject and how such books are increasingly dominated by visual representations of gardens. This is, in fact, a joke amongst some designers - they feel that they buy lots of these books and then only look at the pictures they contain - they do not read, rather they look. They look for any new pictures of styles to be aware of as designers who are abreast of their field's current developments. This can even prove problematic, since the same pictures tend to reappear over and over again with different commentaries. The perceived market for visual garden books is, correspondingly, increasing. Some designers, therefore, send photos of their work to publishers to productively sate this appetite and promote their business.

Indeed this can work as a self-perpetuating system. There are a lot of visual books around and so designers may increasingly think in such terms. Correspondingly, designers produce immediately and visually striking designs, which feed back into the market for visual materials in books. Through such means, a sense emerges then that a visual form of experience is central to this process of deciding on the garden and clients have become complicit here. If a set of attractive drawings does not complement an architectural blueprint, then a designer who does not provide them now feels the need to explain this, since this was probably expected. Designers talk about being bombarded by both television companies hoping to use their work and by clients that wish to sell on their properties and that ask if the designer could try and get their garden into a magazine (Susan, interview two). The garden, here at least, seems locked within a tightening net of circulating visual representations:

> 'I have a friend who is extremely good, and she says to me – 'I'm never in a magazine!' There's nothing about her work that would make an instant glamour picture, she does extremely good work though ....but it doesn't make it. They are crying out for glamour, and sometimes and I've seen photographs... and they are details of show gardens, but the whole garden has been absolutely horrible...But it had that one detail so it got in the press.' (Susan, interview two)

This tightening net, then, can result in a sense in which a striking visual experience becomes paramount. Designers talk about the focus placed upon artistic ideas and notions of good design in the courses they have taken (Jane, interview two; Jenny, interview two). They also think about how they might best develop a visual 'signature' and a brand that marks out their work. This, by inference, is, of course, rather than precisely meeting the needs of the client. Susan (interview one) told me about how, if a client wanted a specific plant, a rhododendron was her example, then that should be included in the design - it was to be their garden after all and, therefore, ultimately their choice of plants. Yet, if they were to request certain sorts of materials, such as plastic, she simply couldn't help them. That is to say that, whilst aware of client requirements, she yet retained a strong sense of her own artistic integrity and a sense that there were some visual orders she was simply unwilling to create. In this, Susan is typical of the group and there is much talk about needing to establish themselves as designers, with a developed and strong visual sensibility that is, then, to later be embodied in material form.

This agenda of good design also takes shape in particular language. For Tim (interview one), a good design uses 'simple clean lines', whilst talk of 'line', 'form', 'texture', 'vistas' and 'viewpoints' is prevalent more generally. Yet, nonetheless these designers are unsure about how it should infiltrate the discussions they have with clients. On one hand, there is a sense in which clients can be frustrating and, although visual devices such as the photograph, the design book, and the sketchpad are beneficial tools for elucidating client ideas, clients still find it hard to engage with broader senses of visual effect. Or, interestingly, they are not, at least, according to

the designer's agenda for the encounter. Here the client might tend to pick out photographs of individual specimens, rather than broader vistas and particular styles. Jane talked about garden shows and how clients there tended simply to focus on the individual plants:

> 'And you just hear people saying things like "I used to have one of those," "mine never grew that big" and its always sort of related to a *single plant* or something, and they just don't think about the atmosphere and what it will look like overall. And I will say look we are trying to take a general view, but for them they are just shopping and you are just part of that shopping' (Jane, interview two; my italics)

Generally, there is a sense in which the designer feels that she has to pull the client away from the plant or the particular thing and back towards their artistic aims – which are of creating a unity in the 'viewpoint' or 'scene.' As a former businesswoman, Kate had a particular strategy that she employed in this arena. Like Jane, she also found that people tended to naturally orientate discussions around the specific things that might go into the garden, whether plants or materials. This is perhaps unsurprising - we do, after all, buy individual physical things more often than we buy general senses of landscape. Correspondingly, she decided it better to work from abstract senses of how the garden visually presents itself. The upshot was a clever device - a meeting sheet where different design continuums where offered to the client. They had then to rank their own design sensibility on this scale. Were they 'informal' or 'formal', 'bright' or 'subdued', 'modern' or 'traditional'? These were the sorts of areas that were covered and, consequently, an artistic agenda of viewing the garden was actively managed through the use of this sheet. This was a device for organising a more distanced aesthetic encounter that was more about aggregate experience and less about the individual encounters. As Kate puts it 'we need to take them away from "I quite like roses and I need a fence"' (interview two) and such means help them better to do so.

Yet, fearful of intimidating clients, designers are, equally, sometimes reticent about infusing conversations with artistic framings even though, in practice, this sort of language did creep in. This is not surprising since such terms, in part, legitimate their role as a professional with an associated professional terminology. Talk of things like 'line', 'form', 'texture' or 'tone' could discursively perform themselves into the role of the artist whose everyday experience was refracted through such lenses. This can then be, in turn, a reassuring abdication of responsibility for an, already reticent, client. At one design meeting, a client listened excitedly as Jenny suggested some ideas within this particular and unfamiliar lexicon (observation session six):

> 'Well we could make it a bit more interesting and would sort of develop the shapes, because at the moment its a really a very inward sort of looking garden, that is part of its charm, but it could be expanded out and that would develop the shape and look really.'

There was an overall sense in which a visual and design aesthetic was significant to these designers and different specific strategies and technologies were able to best draw garden owners into such frames of thinking. Yet they were reticent about fully considering the gardens that they created as totally like a 'painting' as this would, for instance, downplay a movement through 'space' (Jenny, interview two; Susan, interview two). Susan told me how she is nervous of the impact of the photograph more generally - whilst designers have certainly embraced the role of photography, she remains nervous of the way in which it can insidiously gain too much influence over the designer. This is because, as we will see later in the chapter, there are other pleasures than simply artistic ones to be taken from such spaces.

Nonetheless, it is in this context that a more spatial metaphor complements this more visual stance. Now the situation becomes less of two-dimensional encounter, as with a picture, but more of a movement through the space itself. The garden can now be an 'empty box of space' whose contents should be rightly stylishly arranged. Yet even within this remains a sort of space where looking is still encouraged. For Kate it is all about 'sitting areas and viewpoints really' (interview one). For others it was about arranging the garden so that you get drawn into the garden and, then, move effortlessly through it and look around yourself. The aim of the garden is to offer effortless flows between the activities that are to be performed and so the garden owner is still to a degree the distanced onlooker as the garden designer is legitimated artistically. The designer knows that people will want to use and be in the garden, and this opens up a range of potential sensory encounters with the things held within. Nonetheless through this particular inflection of the spatial, a visual framework lingers on. Physical things are to be looked upon or, at least, compose a passive backdrop to human activities such as eating and talking.

So what is beginning to be revealed is the ways in which the significance of visual composition is to the fore. Yet this is not to say that simply because visual landscapes are both significant to this group and also easily brokered in these dealings, that they are always necessarily easy to sustain (Hirsch, 1996). It can be easy to discuss a photograph in these sorts of compositional terms certainly. For Kate (interview two) visual technologies like the digital camera or the computer design package increasingly help us to be with and experience the garden in a visual way. Indeed this may be the case and a focus, as I have taken, on practice is here suggestive of how landscape experiences are organised through a variety of interesting means. Yet, there is more to be said here. A garden is not a photograph - or at least it would require the organisation of a lot of interested parties to achieve such ends. The brute materiality and presence of things has been a central concern of this research and, through keeping focus upon this concern, it now becomes clear that some parties are more compliantly willing than others to sustain these frameworks. We have seen how garden owners are marshalled into these formats of experience

within some more social interactions, but how are the different challenges made by the physical stuff of the world folded into these performances of garden design?

4.5 MAKING USE OF MATERIALS

Broadly, for the designers that I spent time with here, the garden was something to be *built*. This is the term they used. That is to say that, by implication, once they have developed and finalised their plan, the task then was to fairly quickly recreate these ideas in physical form. This can take weeks, however. Clients become nervous as the garden becomes dug over by contractors and there is no longer the expected patch of green outside their window. What becomes fearfully clear at such times is how precarious this bit of 'landscape' can be - how it can sometimes be a visual experience, but also sometimes a collection of materials to be ripped out, reorganised and manhandled. Eventually, however, the client is presented with a final product as it is unveiled as something finally *built*. To use a metaphor of building then, and to organise a building process over a few weeks, is to implicitly focus upon material elements. We build our houses with bricks and mortar. In the garden, we might now do so with stonework and metals. It is interesting here to note that we are less likely to imagine ourselves building with plants, although, as will also be discussed, this can also be the case.

Developing from the earlier discussion of spatial experience, we can now see this feeds into material concerns. If a sense exists amongst the designers that the garden is to be used as a passive backdrop to other activities then this sense will inform the physical forms that they will build. Discussing with Jane the ways in which she, as a designer, can help them best understand the potential of the garden, she gives the example of a dinner party:

> Russell: I wasn't sure what you meant when you said that in your first meetings with clients, the first thing that you ask about is the sort of obvious things that they probably hadn't really thought about....What would they be then?
>
> Jane: Oh well, you know, like, if you are eating, well, how many people is that? And what size do we need to pave? And that is the sort of thing that they haven't really often thought about and they often don't realise how much space they are going to need for that. (Jane, Interview two)

Implicit within this conversation is an assumption on the part of the designer about the activities to be accommodated and the consequent necessary materials. She is assuming here that dinner parties might be an appropriate use of a client's new space in another empathic performance - this is the first thing that she thinks of and asks about. Consequently, she prides herself on having considered how this assumed priority could best be catered for in terms of physical materials and an architecture of facilitative structure.

In this way it becomes easy for the garden to imaginatively become an assemblage of hard landscaping materials. For Tom (interview one), the design process can become like 'fitting a jigsaw together' where the client specifies what they'd like to do in the garden and then he simply arranges these concerns so it slots into place. Tim takes a crib sheet to aid his discussion with his clients and the first section deals with 'features'. Within this there are columns to remind him specifically about asking whether they want particular pre-formed items - he assumes that these are the important things to consider and he doesn't want to forget them. Things such as terraces, decking, stone, pergolas, arbour, fencing, shed, barbecue. It is a selection of these things, by implication, which he assumes the client will want.

What emerges from these assumed frameworks and techniques is the degree to which certain types of material are accorded importance and there may be a number of reasons for this. A number of designers talked about their role of being one of questioning what might be legitimately placed within a garden - exploring the 'art of the possible' as Kate puts it (interview one). This then meant a certain pressure to be innovative. For some designers this is the great thing. Through trying out different materials and seeing what they do, how they look, the designer keeps him/herself interested. Tim talks about how it can be easy to get carried away with materials (interview two) - you can end up cramming too many things into a garden space as you want to both try different things out and to make something visually striking. As a result, his company decided to limit itself to a maximum of three different materials in any individual garden. It was tempting to use more, but, otherwise, the garden can look too cluttered, too busy. Whilst some, then, love this opportunity, others find it a pressure. Susan had a conversation with a colleague recently:

> 'Well, you know, people come to me and they say well I can't work with concrete. And I say, well don't then! Who says you have got to work with concrete? They say 'well everybody says...' and I just say, come on now, do your own thing, its fine like that!' (Susan, interview two)

The colleague was a 'more traditional' designer - she worked in simple brickwork and planting and these developments were, consequently, a real personal concern to her. Innovative materials, like visual arrangements, can make for better copy as unusual materials, apparently, can excitingly and progressively challenge the very nature of what 'gardens' can be. Correspondingly, elements of alternative hard landscaping are more likely to gain attention as Kate, for instance, here talked of the 'tyranny of materials' and the pressure she feels to keep up to date in her suite of landscaping options (interview one).

Equally, a designer wants to convey some sort of immediate impact in their work. This way they get to have a client that seems satisfied from the outset and the job becomes more rewarding. A good way to do this is to construct an arresting new arrangement of things and the best way to

do this would be to be to use particular striking materials. Then the garden would clearly have been *designed* and the designer would have done a good job. This is why, for Tim, a pergola is a particularly good element to include as a pergola stands up from the ground and 'reframes a space' that could easily look very flat if filled with plants that take a number of years to grow. Since plants take time to mature, we can note here, then, they are, once again, not so amenable. This time its with respect to helping the designers get an immediate kick out of their work - plants need time to grow, when a pergola does not.

> 'They don't know, they haven't got a clue. Well, if they have seen something on the television, they start to converse about concrete floors and they are happy to talk about that and...oh god and everybody is into green decking now and blue trellis and so on.' (Jane, interview one)

As the above quote indicates, however, this is not to suggest that clients, meanwhile, do not share this interest in new materials (or at least, as we will see, that for the moment they don't). This is, firstly, because they will have often taken cues from the media, but equally and interestingly because these ideas are more easily discussed within the very interactions of the consultation. I have already mentioned how designers seek to quickly get a sense of the visual 'style' and 'taste' of the garden owner as quickly as possible whilst in their company - to both produce a successful design but also to perform themselves as successfully empathetic. One way is through absorbing as much as possible from the things they have within their houses and how they live with them there. This could then be excitingly revealed to them in a second consultation.

> 'And as for fencing goes, ... I thought, like, a quiet orange. Well it would be great if we could get a sort of light grey colour, I mean there is a cuprinol colour called silver birch, and that would be great, but we really don't want to have any thing like groundforce blue.[4] And there is also a nice green too, I mean you have got green upstairs, I think, yes you have got a sort of apple green there and so we could try and get something that would mirror that' (Kate, observation session ten)

Whilst this quote deals with questions of colour, this process also taps into is the idea of the garden as 'another room,' as design cues, and, inevitably, also materials, are brought out from inside spaces. It is, partly, through these processes of elicitation that the garden can become treated as indistinct from the house. The client might have potentially enjoyed a qualitatively different sort of interaction in the garden than in the house but, given the importance of performing empathy and quickly embracing client aesthetics, this may be obscured - the garden becomes another room to the house as ideas are taken from the existing rooms in that house.

[4] During this period of research, 'Groundforce' was a national television programme aired on the BBC. It did 'garden makeovers' for unsuspecting members of public.

At another consultation with in south London the conversation wasn't flowing as freely as it might have done. The client, typically, didn't seem to really know what she wanted, especially with regard to plants and so Kate took out her book of different potential garden features.

> The lady seems a lot more relaxed now, she says that the kids will really love a water feature, because their next door neighbour has one and the kids really love that: 'yes I do love the idea of a water feature, but my parents had one and that was in the shape of a tree stump and I thought that was a bit crass.' Ruth responds: 'Well, I mean, ninety per cent are awful and you really have to be careful with water features but they also can be really nice too.' She flicks over a page in her book. 'I mean that one there looks really too kitsch for me...but you could get something taller, and something like that more statuesque one will really draw the eye, well it would at least alter your sight lines, and then people would be drawn towards it.' The lady seems more interested now. 'Yes I do like that one, and it might work well, although that one (points) is a bit odd....' (fieldnotes - observation session one)

From this point the conversation picks up. Whilst, in some respects, Kate seems to be deploying a familiarly artistic, visual framework here, what was also evident was a palpable change in pace when we moved to different ranges of water features and sculptures. The process became something like looking at shopping catalogues and the client was much more comfortable with this format - there seem to be clearer, more discernible associations attached to these differentiated manufactured things that people were happy to manage and deploy within conversation. Lots of issues could be discussed here: different colours; different heights; where they had been seen before; the specific connotations of certain styles. In this context, Tim's crib sheet of potential 'required features', introduced earlier, is now as much a prop for the client, as it is for the designer. It now helps them better express themselves within discussions of materials of discernible difference and within a familiar format. So a material confidence is, then, equally evident, I would suggest, within the very unfolding of talk.

Meanwhile, in another meeting, Kate and her client were rounding things up by discussing the next stages of the process. The client had earlier said she wanted a 'statement' – something striking that said something about her – in the garden, so Kate had suggested mixing in some different materials and putting them on the soil around the different plants.

> well I will send a couple of pages of ideas (...) going through what we talked about and what we might want to actually do. Ill also send you some of the slate and CD chippings to see what you feel about those. (Kate, observation session five)

Kate, then, is thinking about sending on some pieces of the potential garden. These potential bits of the garden are happy to be put in an envelope and then passed falteringly through the postal system until they land on the client's doorstep. A particularly useful characteristic, as she can then feel them, show them to her friends and get a sense of what she thinks about them. This example once again speaks to the particular properties of hard landscaping materials that make

them easier to change, organise and decide upon. These materials are very much under our control. Tom talks about the specific pleasure of the publication 'external works'[5], which he refers to as 'the garden designer's bible'. It's a catalogue really, listing the range of different types of materials that can be productively used in an outside context - useful for both the landscape architect and the garden designer. What is also easy about this book and its contents is that these items should available at any time of the year - they are happy to sit there quietly within the storehouse for you to order them and can then be easily sent just like the CD chippings that Kate will pop in the post.

Figure 4.2. Ranges of chippings to surround plants that Kate can here, using CD equivalents, send in the post to a nervous client.

This specifically fixed nature of particular things allows designers and clients alike to better manage and make sense of them and this can be finally, once again, evidenced in the case of 'colour'. Colour in the garden, we might suppose, is traditionally green but for those design-conscious folk who seek to explore 'the art of the possible' (Kate, interview one), this is not always so. Hard landscaping, for instance, can arrive in any number of different colours. So can concrete. More common, though, is painting. Jenny was doing well empathetically in the following conversation:

Client: 'That's great, that's great. You know exactly what I want here.'
Jenny: '...And what I was also thinking about is the idea that you should have trellis on both sides and that would give you privacy and the thing that you could do there would be to treat it yourself... if you had a really good sort of battleship grey that would be great. Because if you went with green it looks like it might be in suburbia and you are not and you don't want to be. And if its that blue then it would like a bit like groundforce has been in and you don't want that, do you! (observation session nine)

There is something about the properties of these new primers, coloured concretes and external paints, then, that allows an easier enactment of design and taste sensibility. They are fixed and can be manipulated subtly. Paints can be mixed in any number of colours and, then, happily stay there. Through the properties of paint, like the other materials of this section, the garden can

[5] Spon's 'Landscape and external works' is published annually by Spon Press.

better become the canvas for personal visual style imprints. Colour is expressive of personal design sensibilities, which is why in the London housing market neutral decor can offer a blank canvas for subsequent occupants (Young, 2004). In the garden, the increasing role of colour here suggests the garden as a site were people can quickly stamp their mark and indicate their taste, rather than work with the more uniform green of vegetative matter.

Here the sociologist of consumption from chapter two feels fairly confident as material elements here are working to sustain the garden as a site of symbolic communication about identity to the world (Abercrombie, 1994; Goldman and Papson, 1996; Lee, 1993). If the garden is about relaying messages to others in society (and we are all increasingly well schooled in sending and receiving such messages) then certain types of materials to help us do this better. This takes us to different 'themes' for the garden and how materials can support an idea of themes through the fairly clear visual clues that they embody. People understand the visual connotations carried happily by certain hard materials - if you want a bachelor party garden or an Arabic garden, then the most easy way of securing an intelligible transformation would be to use materials that connote appropriately. Hard concrete for one perhaps, warm tiling for the other. As the psychologists Sadalla and Sheets (1993) suggest, different building materials can help convey quite specific social messages, in part because of the range of forms, which they can assume. Whether your house is made from stone, wood or concrete, for instance, can be seen, they argue, to effectively communicate messages about your creativity, style or class. Although some suggest that all materials are now thoroughly saturated with such social symbolic meanings (Leiss, Kline and Jhally, 1990), it seems reasonable that some will be more so than others and I suspect that, despite these shifts, plants can be less concerned for these connotations.

This combination of physical properties and personal tendencies of both designer and client make materials particularly significant here. We need (or want to) deal with things efficiently and this can be in terms then of sending things to each other in the post, in terms of passing fixed things between each other on a journey up the property ladder, in terms of conveying messages about how we want to be thought of, or even in terms of talking to each other in a successfully flowing discussion. We need things to be solidly material culture, it seems here, because we haven't got the time or the inclination for it to be otherwise. Within the small spaces and rich houses of London, all sorts of materials and design ideas are implicated here.

This then returns us to the idea of the garden being built, rather than, potentially, grown. Tim Ingold (2000, 339) argues that things are never really 'built', but rather always 'grow'. It is only through a gradual practice of living with material things, he suggests, that they take on the forms that they do. A basket emerges then through our gradual interactions with it, for instance – it

emerges or grows through a sensory engagement with many different forces through time. For him, it could never really ever have been 'designed'. Yet whilst his is an exciting argument, clearly there remain some things we can interact with that better allow us to think we are 'building' rather than 'growing' and this section has discussed some of these. The garden here has been a product here of human activity, as docile things are marshalled to achieve particular aims.

The garden was often talked about as being made as *functional* as possible - yet this was a certain kind of functionality. That is to say that it implied functionality in terms of the degree to which it meets the needs of the human inhabitants, not the vegetable ones. In the next section, we now begin to explore how some plants can manage to cope successfully within a more determinedly imposed framework of impact and control. If we think of the garden as 'a relational achievement' spun between 'people and animals, plants and soils, documents and devices' (Whatmore and Thorne, 1998, p437), then we see the potential for negotiations within which the plant could sometimes take charge. There may be an 'expressive waywardness' more evidently inherent within these plant materials than other matters (Kearnes, 2003, 149). However, despite the fact that this research sought to explicitly examine this contrary wilfulness, in practice some seemed less so than others as the garden seemed, for the moment at least, to be more about dominance than affection (Tuan, 1984), at least from the plant perspective.

4.6 PUTTING PLANTS IN THEIR PLACE

The developments in garden design culture that I have been outlining put plants in an interesting position. There are many skills to be accommodated within the designer's job - visual organisation, understanding of structural issues, sourcing materials, liasing with contractors to name a few - and it is unsurprising that some will inevitably supplant others in significance. Here, there was a sense in which the role of design and aesthetics is coming to overshadow a concern for plant care and husbandry. Garden designers are increasingly from art backgrounds, not horticultural ones, and, as such, how we go about living with plants can, to an extent, become downplayed in their talk.

Plants are boring. Or, at least, that's what some designers described as one stance taken within their profession. As discussed, there are many materials around that easily bow to the aesthetic will of the designer and if, as Simon suggested (interview one), a main aim is constructing a 'spatial' experience, then certain materials are more willingly organised into such experiences. The nature of the garden design process is such that the designer might never really come to see the selected plants subsequently grow and develop. They often use a contractor, or, if they do

arrange the bedding plan themselves, then they will not be there for any length of time afterwards. In this context, plants would, perhaps understandably, indeed be boring because they have limited capacity in terms of initial impact. The fact that plants do things, that they behave, does not actually feature much in the designer's practical encounter as the designer will be gone before this is fully manifest. However, even then if they did have more of a lingering contact (as some do) there is only a certain range of attributes that plants can display:

> 'Well, I'm going to try and express myself as best as I can, but I don't know, it's a bit green, that's all, it's a bit green, and I don't mean that I really want to have lots of colour, but I just mean... well, what can you do really?' (observation session nine)

Here a client exemplifies one way in which people approach vegetation that was common throughout this research. Schneekloth (1989) in a study of schoolchildren on a nature trail discusses something similar. Because of the alien nature of the things found on these trails, she argues, they perceived them as an undifferentiated and unremarkable mass. In her research, at the end of their nature trail trip, she asked them what they had seen that day - their answer was 'nothing' as they symbolically lumped the range of entities involved into a homogeneous and uninteresting whole. Jones (2003) tracks something similar in a study of children within British botanical gardens where a variety of different methods were needed in order to better elicit what they had learnt there. In effect, in all these examples it was all just 'a bit green really' as nothing successfully distinguished itself from the whole. We might speculate that the symbolic meanings that Sadalla and Sheets (1993) found easily adhering to building materials might not now have such purchase with regard to the limited ways in which plants can visually present themselves - this is certainly no longer the lively discussion that garden paint ranges previously fostered.

Plants also come in the final stages of the design process - once the bigger upheavals and unchanging infrastructures have already been orchestrated. Tom initially produces designs similar to the one below for his clients. The materials that he uses are all labelled: steel, wood, metal, glass. All very exciting and fashionable things that, as I have argued, people feel happy dealing with and discussing. Plants, by contrast, are simply presented under the rubric of 'mixed planting'. The assumption here, at least, is that they are a simple, generic range of things that the client might not be interested in or wanting to think about. The important things are design and human activity and how they can take shape in more obdurate, unusual physical materials, whilst plants are not, of course, so immediately striking. For Kate, it is always harder to get clients interested in the planting elements because the other things are those that arrive first and provide the immediate impact and framework.

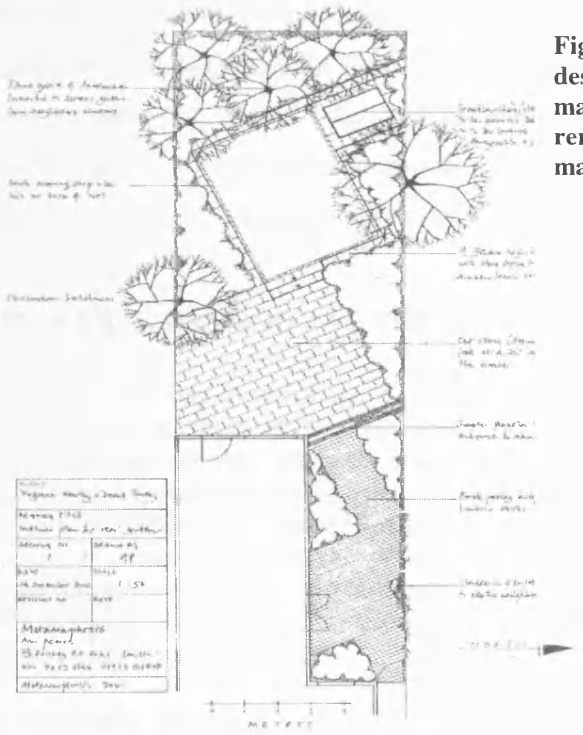

Figure 4.3. An example of a garden design where, in Tom's case, materials are labelled, whilst plants remain undifferentiated clumps of matter.

Susan, in turn, talked about how she should really try and make herself move towards planting in bigger 'swathes of things' since, by putting things in such groups, the plants would be encouraged to become more dramatic than they could otherwise be. Then they could be imposing and create more of a specifically 'structural' effect; they could be arranged then to better be part of a design within the, already discussed, agenda for visual 'spaces'.

Such sets of processes tend to support a certain idea about what plants are best for the garden, if they are to be there at all. Whilst plants, are not as easily marshalled in meetings with clients as the hard materials that they easily latch onto, that is not to say that such aesthetic sensibilities cannot find themselves being played out within actual plant choices. Although plants seem not so good at being impactful, some are clearly better than others. Indeed, such plants they can be doubly popular because as they are often more docile and static. Andrew chooses this kind of plant and, by so doing, he feels that he is meeting his brief in two different ways:

Simon: And I do tropical gardens, and therefore they are low maintenance right? And therefore they are contemporary because of the low maintenance and the way they look with the sharp angles and the architectural planting, and so then it's a brilliant room outside!
Russell: And contemporary means low maintenance, then?
Simon: Its one of the main elements, yes…and you see these people have the disposable income because they work all day and they don't have the time. (Simon, interview one)

Low-maintenance, docile and fixed plants then are, here, more in keeping with modern lifestyles and, equally, more in keeping with modern styles since they are fixed and can be easily arranged according to aesthetic whim. They are synonymous - what is modern is what is low-maintenance and vice versa. By implication to be contemporary is not to have or want any engagement with plants and certain plants fare better within this framework than others.

4.7 THE URBAN BAMBOO AND THE CITY TREE FERN

Client: And do they require much light?
Kate: Well, most of them are broadly tolerant. Ferns are fine anywhere, boxes too are broadly tolerant. And this is the black bamboo, and, do you see, it's very structural with some quite interesting colours? I was thinking about that, because it's quite sort of dramatic and sparse. But I was also thinking about a golden bamboo. It's sort of a nice palette for what you are doing. You are kind of moving the colours of the house outward. So golden bamboo and also moving out one of the nightlights. Sandstone could also produce some of the same sorts of feelings too, you know. (observation ten)

Such is an extract from a conversation between Kate and a young professional couple with a newly acquired house in southwest London. They had done the inside - lots of pine flooring and muted colours. Now they were thinking further afield. Within this conversation, plants serve simply to produce the same 'sorts of feelings' as other materials through echoing indoor home spaces. By implication, then, there is nothing about how the plant works that necessarily makes it any different from the static sandstone and, in this way, there seems nothing particular about the nature of plants that makes the garden a different experience. Here Kate mentions some currently popular plants that serve to meet these sorts of needs, as certain plants match current requirements better than others. In this case, the plant she advocates is the bamboo and, specifically, the coloured bamboo of the gold or black varieties.

Figure 4.4. The golden bamboo, *Phyllostachys aureosulcata,* that may, it seems, serve a similar function to sandstone.

The clump forming evergreen plant we know as the bamboo originates in the woodlands of tropical and subtropical Africa and Asia. With smooth, usually hollow canes, they develop slender branches at each node of these canes, each bearing linear lanced shaped leaves (RHS, 1998). Typically they are associated with China and, indeed, the Chinese have a rich tradition of dealing with bamboos in diverse ways as these straight hollow stems can make for a range of tools, weaponry or shelters (Farrelly, 1984). With the warming temperatures of London, they increasingly also find themselves useful here as now they help with a certain style of planting which, for Kate, works very well with other materials. They can also thrive here and provide something to look at throughout the year with little associated effort. Indeed this hardiness is doubly useful here as it helps them cope better than other plants might with the pollution levels associated with cities like London. Furthermore, not only do they personally deal well with these negative city conditions, but they can also help humans deal with them too. They can act here as an effective screen and distraction from urban noise by making their own softer rushing sound with the movements of air around them. Importantly, given the discussions above, there are different colours too, as the golden bamboo can turn yellow through the effect of sunlight. This yellow, for instance, can make for a 'warming feeling' that can, as we have seen, helpfully echo interior design schemes. All of these factors mean that, for Tom, the time is right for bamboo and its now 'the designer's job' to persuade their clients that this is so (Tom, interview one).

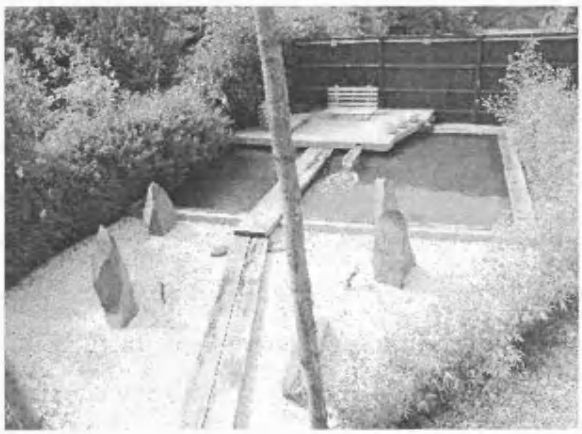

Figure 4.5. *Phyllostachys aureosulcata* in action as a colour foil to some wooden landscaping.

Another plant increasingly finding its way into the designed London garden is the tree fern. One of the oldest types of vegetation, the fern was once dominant across the earth although, gradually, they found themselves best suited to the forested mountains of the tropical and subtropical regions of the Southern Hemisphere. Technically speaking, they are not trees, as tree ferns do not develop a woody trunk. Rather, all ferns have a rhizome, from which fronds sporadically emerge. These rhizomes can vary, be long or short, creep along the ground or move underneath. A tree fern is simply a case of an emergent rhizome being large and strong enough to support itself (RHS, 1998). The *cyathea dealbata* fern, for instance, comes from the dense,

lush forests of New Zealand. Its most prominent distinguishing characteristics are the silver-white fronds.

Figure 4.6. *Cyathea Dealbata* in a previous incarnation as a south pacific forest dweller.

Unsurprisingly, given the length of our encounter with such ferns, we have, as was the case with bamboos, approached them, and their capacities, in many ways. In traditional Vanuatu, they are used in a number of rituals. Here the nature of the way in which the vegetable matter naturally deteriorates is important as objects made from such ferns symbolically and gradually die (Bakels, 1997). In Hawaii, their long fronds have proved useful for thatching. In Fiji furthermore, they have been taken to house gods as they are physically incorporated through burning into the practice of fire walking. In the London garden, however, such properties make for other relationships. These silvery fronds of the *cyathea dealbata* now make it an excellent subject for night lighting. They are also architectural and survive well in the increasingly mild city climate as they give a sense of a fixed, controlled design impact with relatively little associated maintenance. These ferns also give a 'sense of drama' and an 'exotic feeling' for comparatively little cost (Kate, interview one). Both the tree fern and the coloured bamboo seem increasingly popular. For Jane, they make for 'inner city planting' since they are appropriate for city gardens as they don't need much help from us and yet offer a strong visual impact (interview two). Tim echoes this sentiment when he suggests that in cities plants should be as impactful as bold steel and chrome materials, siince this would make for a unified stylistic whole (interview two).

Figure 4.7. A *Cyathea* fern in a current role where it's particular form is displayed through up-lighting.

Although ambivalent about it, the designer tries to create a sense of impact for the client when London clients are perceived to be impatient, and, as affluent people, they are in a position to indulge this impatience.

Russell: So people are expecting bigger sorts of plants then?
Jane: Yes, yes. people don't want sort of great big areas of soil showing. They would rather spend a bit more money, and have it look how they wanted to. (interview two)

People, then, want gardens to look as desired from the outset, whilst, in terms of plant maintenance, clients are invariably thought of as disinclined to get involved. Given the aims of the multi-sited approach I was taking, I asked, for instance, some designers about their own and their client's relations with garden centres. This then often made for some slightly bemused responses - this was obviously something they hadn't thought about so much really. Why would their clients go there if the garden had already been done, already built? The implication would have been, to an extent, that they had not been so successful in their job of fully sorting out the space.

If the first part of this chapter documented the reasons why the garden is approached visually and aesthetically, what the last two sections have now explored are the infrastructures and entities that buttress these approaches physically. As discussed in chapter two, a premise within this research was that entities, and particularly plants, can be contrary - that they might 'object' in a Latourian (2000) sense to what we might want to say about them. Yet, so far, things have been fairly happy to do as they are told. Hard materials have been increasingly selected, together with certain plants that have much in common with such materials. That is to say that although plants, I supposed, were not so ready to be 'material culture', some plants are more willing than others - plants such as the tree fern and the bamboo. So far, then, this anthropological term seems to stand unchallenged as the materials we dealt with in the garden here seemed happily and competently to bear cultural meanings.

These combinations of physical properties and symbolic aims can usefully, here, be thought about through the lens of what Michel Callon (1986) calls an 'obligatory passage point.' Callon's idea refers to a conceptual model he created in a now famous paper on scallop harvesting and the scientific understanding of harvesting technique within a bay in France that I have discussed. What he usefully draws attention to is the way in which a range of things – scallops, fishermen, language - all have to momentarily align in a particular way to legitimise an idea of knowledge. The example he took involved a range of things such as scallops, fishermen and language - which all had to be successfully organised by a set of scientists so that they could claim to know scallops and speak on behalf of their behaviour. In the garden, I think the notion

of 'visual style' serves as a similar channel through which entities must travel in order for garden designers to legitimate themselves as doing design. That is to say that, regardless of the range of considerations at the outset of the process, one particular funnel that these considerations were surely to pass through and help perform a broad sense of required garden 'style.'

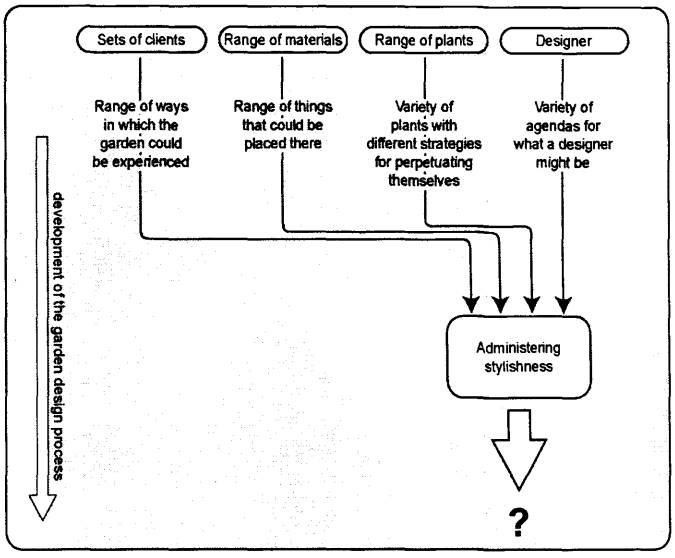

Figure 4.8. Style as obligatory passage point for the designed garden to move through.

Of course once this passage point has been passed, any number of other considerations can return. For now, though, the nature of this movement is clearly significant as a designed garden is performed in practice. In this framework, clients will have to some degree expected it and, in the context of their open agenda, welcomed some input. Materials, as we have seen, tend to be fairly stoical about their fate since they have often been manufactured to be so. Certain plants then finally have also been more compliant, complicit and willing to look after themselves whilst also displaying required forms from the outset. Yet, whilst more docile and architectural plants fit well with current design agendas, I want to now, given the concerns of this research, interrogate further the place of plants. There is a tendency, then, to treat plants as though they might be material culture even though my premise was that they are not quite so. Yet this is not to say that all plants might always be so willing and, as such, in the final two sections of this chapter I want to now consider how plant liveness is dealt with by these designers who, nominally at least, we might expect to be concerned with keeping such matters in check. Here it seems that, in many ways, they would rather be less determined than they have been so far.

4.8 PLANTS PUSHING INTO CONSCIOUSNESS

So, in many ways there are pressures to think of the plants of the garden as fixed things, and, correspondingly, we can tend towards finding those plants that are more willing to bow to this need. Either that, or we can get more mature specimens that help create the idea of an

established garden and, then, simply downplay this idea of plant liveliness when it comes up in discussion. Yet this can be physically and biologically problematic. Tom and Jason (a colleague that joined our second interview) are talking about a recent garden build they knew of:

Tom: So these were like four or five bedroom big houses and the beds were maybe no more than ten metres from the house. And they had planted things like *pinus sylvestus* or *pinus nygree*- big pine trees - and they look great now. They are about ten feet and they soften the house and look really nice, but what is going to happen in about ten or fifteen years?...They are going to start causing problems, you know, their roots are going to start going under the drive and that's wrong.

Jason: I often see that. Where you have got newly planted trees and, in ten to fifteen years, there will all be sort of intermingling with the roofs of houses, or trees that have been planted in another tree's canopy, where is that going to go? Yes, you do see it a lot, I'm afraid. (Tom, interview two)

Figure 4.9. The lively *Pinus sylvestis* whose potential and eagerness to grow can cause problems within formats that focus on immediacy and impact.

Denials of plant activity can clearly be problematic then. Yet they are understandable. As Schneekloth argued (2002) at the outset to this thesis, plants seem, in many ways, alien to us - we are not sure of their behaviour and how we might best go about living successfully alongside them. I was, for instance, at a garden consultation with Kate in south London. They were discussing a particular sort of plant that was thriving there:

Client: And that variegated one, we could make that a bit more bushy...I wonder whether we can do that? I mean can we still do that? I mean that is something that we should be doing now is it – at the end of summer? But is it the end of summer? I mean what is the gardening end of summer?

Kate: It really isn't a fixed time thing, its just something to do with when you have had enough time sitting in the garden looking at it, and you feel like cutting things back! (laughter) (observation session one)

A stream of questions, such as this client's, suggests something of the way in which clients can approach plants in the garden. This is with a degree of trepidation and a desire to arrange a

precise way of managing them - they want to know exactly when they have to do things and exactly what they have to do to achieve results. They want, it seems, to know how to be in control. For Jenny, this is definitely a main motivation in getting a designer involved. Her clients are often artistic sorts of people – they have clear ideas about how to visually manage the spaces that are presented to them. Yet, when it comes to plant management they just 'have a fear' (interview two) and won't, for instance, prune. Unsurprising, in some respects, since they have paid quite a bit for these living things and an idea of wilfully cutting off a part when it is both alive and expensive is understandably potentially difficult. As Tim puts it 'if they think that they don't have to cut anything then basically they are happy.' (Tim, interview one) and this fearfulness is also expressed in other ways. Clients with children are apparently, for instance, often fearful of poisons: what can a plant do to us when it is eaten? The answer is often not very much, but the concern is, nonetheless, prevalent.

Whilst this fear seems to be connected to the alien nature of plants, it is also to do with a sense of a lack of time available for coming to understand and manage them successfully and so follows the perennial request for a 'low maintenance' garden. All of the designers cite this as something that is requested by almost all clients and there are different ways in which they deal with this. A first is by using plants that are more material culture than others - plants like the bamboo and the tree fern, that I have discussed, and more generally plants that are static and usually evergreen. Another is through irrigation – Tim, for instance, happily puts irrigation into 'over eighty percent' of the gardens that he creates (interview two). Jenny, however, is a bit more ambivalent. She would like her clients to go out and water things themselves, for some reasons we will come to – but nowadays its just too risky not to install a system. Whilst not necessarily possessive of an in-built 'configured' relationship (Woolgar, 1991) with people, the turn to irrigation does here seem suggestive of belief in it being needed. The cost is minimal in comparison to the costs of the plants themselves and, it seems, you can never really be sure that the client will take care of the plants. So it is simpler just to put in the irrigation system as a standard.

Yet, this is not to say that the designer doesn't want to foster certain, more explicit interactions with the plants of the garden or, indeed, that they don't get something out of such interactions themselves. They all talked animatedly about plants and are eager to persuade their clients into interesting plant choices. Dealing with plants, seems a real pleasure, even though they can sometimes feel ashamed of liking plants in a currently design-led climate. Here the idea of actually *doing* gardening, however, is often discussed with difficulty. On a client visit with Jenny, we were walking around the actual garden site. The conversation was flowing freely. Jenny is a very personable woman and they were talking animatedly about the different

activities and entities that might successfully make a home there. Then the chatter seemed to die a little. Jenny then said 'do you garden?' in a quieter, more earnest voice and the changed tone here was interesting. It had a certain gravitas. When she asked about what the kids might be doing, the tone of this performance was quite different and much freer flowing. Somehow asking about the activity of gardening was a serious business - for just that moment.

This, I think, is, in part, because Jenny, herself, is a keen gardener and, for her, a real benefit of having a garden was something to do with a way of being closely with plants. She likes to foster these sorts of things with her clients and feels that she is perhaps unusual in this capacity. People getting their gardens designed are, equally, in many ways nervous about expressing their lack of interest or knowledge of horticultural matters. We know from studies elsewhere that material things can circulate through some contrasting moral economies (Kopytoff, 1986). Certainly there are different, sometimes unexpressed, senses of the right way to consume in the shower (Shove, 2003) in the supermarket (Miller, 1998b), or in the kitchen (Roe, 2003). Here there seems a lingering sense of moral difficulty, on the parts of both designer and client, regarding certain ways of acquiring and dealing with garden matters. Clients want a garden that is nice and they want it without the effort. Yet, to some extent, they feel, I think, that they oughtn't to be doing this – that they are paying for something that perhaps they should rightly be doing themselves. Correspondingly, they feel they are missing out on part of what it is supposed to be and so this subject makes for a difficult exchange for both parties.

In this context, there is an interesting way in which designers talk about plant agency with their clients. This is done with a certain sort of humour - such propensities come into conversations with a laugh:

> 'And its nice really. That you are not really that much in control of it. Plants, well, all of a sudden they go and of course, well, the clients want to know why has it died? And its like, well, these things happen, I'm afraid!' (laughter).
>
> Susan, interview two

> 'and I just sort of explain, and say well you know, they are growing, living things and that's just the way it goes really, tough luck!' (laughter)
>
> Jenny, interview two

> 'Well I can't guarantee that every plant will be performing at its best. It's in the right position to do well, but sometimes that's the way it works and plants that have performed excellently, don't do well at all' (laughter)
>
> Kate, observation session one

> 'Yes and at the end of the day, plants are funny old things, and if they are happy, then you should just leave them there really, that's what I'd do. (laughter). And I

> know that your planting went in maybe two year ago now, but there is always this sort of strange periods when things are really the same sort of size. There are things which are slow and others that are there already....and it will broadly sort of more of less get there in the end!' (laughter)
>
> Kate, observation session five

There is a cheerful sense here in which they baldly tell their clients how plants are perverse – that, despite human interventions, they will ultimately do what they will and this slightly nervous, laughing approach seems to me to be for a number of reasons. Firstly, there is the sense in which, as I have discussed, the job of the garden designer is structurally organised so that they are to give their clients a fixed thing, a kind of product. This sort of agency is clearly problematic within this framework as it undermines any exactitude in its delivery – if they are not in charge, then how would they provide an evidently good product? Secondly, there is a sense of recognition of the obvious - plants, by definition, grow and grow on their own. It's what they are supposed to do, we get taught it at school and so, of course, that's the case. Here what is being linked to is the way in which plants are perhaps not now being so often thought about in terms of what their effective capacities and behaviours are. This is a belated recognition of the taken for granted that is somewhat comical - we all know it, but we haven't really been talking about it too much so in the consultation. Thirdly and most interestingly now for me, this also seems something to do with an idea of them behaving as a good thing. That the way in which we cannot always have control of them is something that really ought to be enjoyed.

There are, correspondingly, then ways in which designers can negotiate through these plant agency difficulties towards fostering an enjoyment of specific plants. Susan talked about the 'blue palm' that she had championed:

> 'Some people really do want interesting plants and its really worth working with them on that. Sometimes, I'll put in a blue fan palm in their garden in Chelsea, and I will say 'well there are two that you could have, one is blue and the other is bluer, and the bluer one is the most tender and you have to wrap it in fleece in the winter, but it really is very blue. The other one is tougher, and you wont have to wrap it up, so what do you want to do.' Then, if I've pitched it right, they say 'we want the really blue one!' And that can be good.' (Susan, interview one)

Interestingly, here, Susan uses a set of ideas about stylishness and design and about plants that are not necessarily so 'all a bit green really.' Through so doing she is hoping to potentially both push them towards an interest in developing the garden and also towards making for a more interesting looking garden that would be a credit to her as a designer. She is trying both to foster a particular engagement with specific plants and also demonstrate her garden design brand as one that is typified by striking specimens. Here she is trying to expand the range of plants that might successfully fit through the obligatory passage point of assured visual style to accommodate some more demanding candidates.

Jenny manages these ideas in a different way. She talks about how she always tries to find a way of giving her clients, what she calls an 'area to play with' in the garden (interview two). What she means by this is that she likes to find a small area within her design for which the use has not been specified - the idea is that the clients could try and grow things in this limited space in which to first try gardening. Here the main design is first put in place and, so, they can therefore attempt other things in this designated 'play' area - without jeopardising the aesthetic vision that both she and the client required. So it is 'play', then, because there are no aesthetic concerns to worry about and the agency of the things grown there can be therefore better enjoyed, without the bigger, more important, garden landscape project becoming jeopardised. This was partly why she was nervous of the irrigation too, as she thought it might prevent people getting involved in this kind of pleasurable way.

So despite the vigour at which the garden designer was, earlier in this chapter, organising ideas and materials of the garden through a notion of 'style', now things were a little less vigorously applied. Here there is an ambivalence about plants with regard to whether we should rightfully deny them agency, or whether this should rather be appreciated and not necessarily controlled. Interestingly, within the metaphor of 'play', a space is gradually being found for a different sort of relation with plant life. Gell (1998), here, talks of the idea of 'play' as an opportunity for allowing yourself to accord agency in a way that you might not otherwise do. In play, for instance, he argues, a child imaginatively can bring a doll to life as that then would serve the child's purpose. People might also be allowing themselves to think things differently in this way through garden play. Here, then, in this chapter we have moved from notions of looking upon the garden and building the garden to allow such looking. Now then there is an, albeit limited, space for discussion of the benefits to be had from playing with the garden in a less determined way. I want to explore this a little further finally in the next section to interrogate how a lessened control and an increased play can be seen as beneficial to people.

4.9 LETTING THINGS GO

> Its all sort of to do with this sort of nurturing thing, like growing things from seed...you have to look after it. There is a real sort of sense of satisfaction in it. But it think that we are foolish because really nature has its way (laughter) and it just allows us to dabble in a bit! But I think that there is so much more going on in a garden....and that doesn't really happen inside does it? (Jane, interview two)

What the above quote from Jane suggests is the way in which nonhuman gardening activity can put the person, be they homeowner or garden designer, in their place. It reminds them that they are not totally in charge of things - that there are bigger forces at work in the world that, as just people, they might never fully take control of. Unlike the potential agencies of materials –

rotting deck, cracking stoneware, for instance, are framed as nothing more than an annoying failed allegiance – unruly plant life is considered in a more positive light:

> It helps you get back to the earth a little bit, um, and a bit more human! (Jane, interview two)

Susan also suggests that the garden is something to do with acknowledging your 'own humanity' (Susan, interview two) and this seems to be about letting plants taking control - a belated recognition that humans can't always be in charge of the things that surround them. So the pleasure then here is something to do with the more gradual, unpredictable nature of plant action. Jenny says it 'slows you down', it 'calms you' (Jenny, interview two). Indeed, to return to the introduction to this chapter, that was part of the reason why she is doing her job, rather than the previously one that was more stressful.

Yet this unruly livingness is problematic when a static, dependable, controlled, 'material culture' garden is clearly one that better serves a busy professional. Here Jenny is talking about how she might put bulbs into a client's garden. She likes bulbs - she likes the way they only come at a certain point in the year, as they cheer her in an irrepressible determination to grow. Yet she feels that she might soon be using them less - they would pop up and down too quickly and would never really be noticed by the client, she thought, since the client might well be busy or even away as they do so. Here then is a potential disjuncture between Jenny's bulbs and her client's lives and, within this tension, it seems better to bow to the pattern of the work lives of clients. This then could, for instance, better be with a certain number of stylish and attractive evergreens that wait more patiently for the times that they were called upon to remain so. Jane also felt this shift when, for her, the garden should perhaps rightly be thought about as a celebration of life:

> you know its life really. Which is great. And inside I think that its more about hiding from it. (laughter) (Jane, interview two)

Tom tries different tactics to foster engagement with the garden's slower means of going about living (interview two). He tells them about how things are going to look at certain times - how it will look in a year or so, how it might be good to watch and see things happen. In this he uses his visual portfolio in a different way to how we have seen these used so far. Inside he keeps pictures of past gardens he has designed, together with pictures of how they subsequently developed. The purpose is to show how thing will evolve and to enthuse the client about the pleasures in waiting for gradual change. Susan equally infuses her conversations with such ideas, talking positively about waiting for different periods and potential events in the garden. She believes that, through so doing, they will gradually pick up her language and, hopefully, the

associated experience of enjoyable unpredictability (interview two). Jenny knows that a lot of her clients want evergreen things, but she tries to persuade them against it:

> There is too much evergreen and it looks the same all year round then. Some people want that, but you generally try and explain to people that its more exciting, 'oh there's this out, or there is something else out' and also with other kinds of trees you have far more interest throughout the garden year.' (Jenny, interview two)

In many ways this is now a more difficult relationship to manage. They feel this calming, gradual nature of the garden is one of the main reasons why they like working with gardens themselves. Yet if things don't 'get away fast enough' in terms of being set squarely on a route towards future growth, or if the client doesn't potentially buy into the idea of enjoyable waiting, they feel that they are potentially at risk of losing business. Correspondingly, they might be inclined to reorganise the garden into something more material culture. This is something they might regret, but something that allows them to deliver an impactful design. They would rather slow the people down in this way, but people can be difficult to persuade and there are ranges of different livelinesses that are all happy to be given a chance in the garden. Susan likes the idea of organising a 'co-direction' between her clients and nature - with both parties happily sharing control of the fate of the garden (interview two). However, in practice, organising a successful co-direction can be hard.

Clients are often thought to be happy with whatever plants they are given and, correspondingly, there is less pressure on the designer to select less dependable or familiar choices. Its just something that they *could* do. A 'worn out' garden designer, as Jenny puts it (Jenny, interview two), would give them easy plants and not try and inculcate the sorts of senses this section has dealt with. Nonetheless, there seems an enjoyment associated with ceding some control to plants that these designers feel, even though the potential for fostering such enjoyment in clients is perceived to be waning.

4.10 Conclusions – Designing different garden systems

In this chapter, I have explored the ways in which garden designers in London work. Clearly there are a number of different forms of understanding the garden that can, then, be associated with different material practices. There are, then, different sorts of garden 'systems' of work which can meet the requirements of designers, clients and plants alike. As Shove (2003) suggested there may be any number of factors that promiscuously interpenetrate so that consumption activities can 'make sense' for those involved. Here negotiations and manoeuvres are sometimes more physically material and sometimes more humanly discursive. What this chapter has begun to start documenting is the changing ways in which different entities work together on both planes at once. Garden design encapsulates different agendas associated

variously with visual order, spatial experience, and plant engagement. Here these, sometimes competing, human agendas can, and do, align themselves with different associated sets of practices and physical allies, as garden design formats evolve through time.

Within the development of these alignments what seems to be the case is that garden design systems seem to be moving towards the strengthening of a certain type of alliance of agendas. When Jane was telling me about her garden design training, she said that really it was 'just all a bit frilly' (Jane, interview one). That is to say that it was all about layout, fashion and materials, whereas she was hoping to explore a little more of biology, geology and to take the garden down into the earth and the rhythms of its movements - rather than up into the human aesthetic realm and an easy playfulness with different materials. Her experience seems to echo a broader sense that such concerns are what garden design is increasingly about – in both courses and in actual practice.

I have been interested in the ways in which plants can make their presence felt within evolving consumption networks and a particular concern to emerge in this chapter related to issues of control. An ascendant system seems associated with a garden of material culture, aesthetic appeal, and easy care. Yet these designers can be anxious about providing such cultural arrangements. They, themselves, certainly enjoy the agency of plants, even though this can be particularly hard to accommodate within a current approach to design. To return to what I began this chapter with and issues of professionalisation, designers, therefore, face a dilemma. To position themselves as professional and in control seems a logical next step in terms of advancing their cause. Yet it is conversely a lack of control associated with embracing plant agency that can make for a pleasurable feeling they might want to foster in others. Here I have begun to suggest how we might, in the designer's office at least, feel we should control these materials when we might not always really want to. This is an interesting tension to which I will return, as it becomes differentially configured in subsequent sites.

This point usefully now leads to the next location for this research - the garden centre. My reasoning for choosing the sites that I did was that I was interested in exploring each both in terms of their rules of behaviour and also in terms of how they interconnect within a city context. As I have recounted, so far, there seemed a limited direct relationship between design studios and garden centres. Indeed, despite the grand claims to global interpenetration underpinning the argument for multi-sited approaches (Marcus, 1998), individual contexts can nevertheless, to a degree, deal with issues and objects according to particular autonomous logics (Miller, 1997). To explore activities in the garden centre might, then, provide an interesting

comparison, as I now want to explore a second satellite of developing agendas, agents and activities as it circles the contested city garden.

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Products, processes and the right kind of nature for sale in the London garden centre

5.1 INTRODUCTIONS

> 'Mondays to Fridays we have classical... then Saturday and Sunday its funkier, lighter weight, more sort of Bridget Jones diary[1] really...During the week its serious shoppers, lady this or lady that. And they would drop dead if we played Bridget Jones' diary... but on the weekend it's a younger sort of group that we want to appeal to...And we are going to have a new carpet being put in. We want to take it all into the twenty-first century, and the carpet is going to take a couple of days to do, but its going to be worth it...its going to be beige, rather than green, this time.' (Geoff, interview two)

Strolling through one garden centre with its manager, Geoff, this conversation relates to the ways in which such managers, like the garden designers we have just met, feel some market changes are afoot. Whilst some centres are more eager to respond than others are, there was, nevertheless, a definite sense, amongst this group, of changing customer profiles and agendas. This was a movement towards the sorts of customers that might like Bridget Jones tracks, rather than more classical pieces - a younger customer who, together with these managers, we might speculate, has some alternative plans for their outdoor spaces. As such, the London garden centre seems unsure about its competition, as managers wonder who *exactly* their rivals are now. They are aware of the current significance of garden design. They also increasingly see houseplants and other garden products on the shelves of supermarkets. They are furthermore conscious that, in London, their competitors might be different from the out-of-town garden retailers we might have expected. Finally, they feel they are competing with 'department fashion stores' since customers 'might go here, or they might just go and buy some clothes, or they might just go out' (John, interview two).

They are also increasingly concerned for profit margins. Rising London land values mean they need to generate sufficient revenue – before they find that someone else is. Parking is hard for

[1] Bridget Jones' Diary by Helen Fielding was a highly successful book that was later made into a major film. It sought to depict the anxieties of a young female working in London and how she juggles the

customers, so their journey must be made worthwhile. Therefore, they particularly now feel they must, like the garden designer, capitalise upon the current climate and move 'into the twenty-first century.' How these perceived pressures are worked through different human, material and plant practices is the subject of this chapter. One manager described how he deliberately took this job, rather than continuing as a garden designer. He thought initially that, this way, he could be closer to plants, but now increasingly is sure that 'plants just aren't enough anymore' (Sam, interview two), when the current challenge, it seems, is to be 'more than just a garden centre' (see below). I am interested here to explore the practices associated with what a London garden centre is, and what it is becoming.

Garden retail has received some recent academic attention in economic geography (Lee, 2000; Church, 2001) where the evident specificity of this environment has been explored with certain issues in mind. Church is interested in the production of leisure experiences within garden centre retail where he argues the centre has become less about selling and more about the experience of being there (see here also Bloch et al., 1991, Butler, 1991). This is similar to the 'experiential' consumption of 'sociality' discussed in chapter three where staging the experience of being there is as significant as any resultant purchase. Lee, by contrast, is concerned more with issues of knowledge and how capitalistic behaviour can be subverted within a horticultural 'geography of regard.' Through the mutual respect that knowledgeable horticulturists can share, he argues, a particular culture of productive, but not profit-maximising, relationships is sustained. Yet whilst these studies offer some interesting insight, they have not focussed so explicitly upon the materials and practices involved as they are lived with.

In the garden designer's studio, I began to explore the interdependencies between physical things and human representations. Nevertheless, in practice, to an extent, I focussed on more linguistic manoeuvres which was, I think, a result of the fact that design work figures at the front end of a garden development process when things are dealt with more imaginatively than practically. The garden centre, however, is a context where ranges of material encounters are constantly being organised and may now make a good second point of departure. In this chapter I, firstly, outline the type of research work I did at this site before then moving through some key issues and concerns that correspondingly emerged. As with chapter four, I start with how people encounter the space, then work through some more aesthetic concerns, before gradually coming to, more explicitly focus upon the role of plants within this process. A particular concern that emerges here relates to timing - how plants can live gradually and affect us through these alternative paces of life.

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constraints on her time and its soundtrack includes a range of songs designed to appeal to a similar demographic.

Figure 5.1. attempting to change with a perceived changing market: advertising in the London underground.

5.2 GOING TO THE GARDEN CENTRE

At this site, my initial approach was straightforward: I contacted all the London garden centres that I could find on Internet search engines. Eventually, despite an evident busyness, seven managers agreed to help. This was a diverse group of people that ranged from females in their late twenties to males in their sixties. They are called Geoff, Laura, John, Sam, David Brian and Phillip. Some had more of a retail background, whilst others had more fully an established gardening pedigree. Despite such divergences, as we will see there were several commonalties to how they perceived their role. In terms of their businesses, these sites were equally, in some respects, diverse, as some catered more exclusively to particular local markets whilst others were associated with chains. Nevertheless, here again it was possible to discuss some common ways of working.

Within these centres, my method was again a combination of two approaches. The first was interviewing. In total, I conducted thirteen interviews. I interviewed each garden centre manager twice (with one exception) at their particular garden centres. The first interview took place in an office or a quieter corner. The second began in the office, but, also, included a tour of the centre as I encouraged the manager to show me the products and their formats of display. This seemed a natural progression as these were the things that often we had been talking about over the last half hour and it also presented another opportunity to get physically, as well as linguistically, close to these material things. As I discussed in chapter three, conversations located in certain specific places can more easily connect to the material of these places. Here this method helped me explore how such materials made their presence felt in the kinds of talk they prompted.

This logic also led to a second, more observational, approach. I asked a number of the different centre managers whether they would be happy if I spend some time in their centres and explore what was happening there. My initial suggestion was that I might volunteer as another worker (for examples of this method in geography see Crang, 1995, Gregson, Brooks and Crewe. 2000). Interestingly, however, client negotiations were deemed too important for that and, for the three managers that kindly agreed, I was rather to come there and to see what was happening with less personal involvement. In total, I spent around fourteen days at these different centres during the spring and summer of 2002. These included a mixture of weekdays and weekends. I would turn up at the centre in the mornings, introduce myself to any members of staff I hadn't met before, and then simply wait and watch as things took place. As the day progressed, more and more people would come in and I would try and unobtrusively observe what they were doing and saying. Most of this time, I spent walking around the site.

Superficially, I was looking at different plants and taking personal notes. In actuality, however, I was watching the ways in which people encountered these plants and products and making notes on how they did so and how they talked. When something interesting had happened, or if things were quiet, I would have short conversations with members of staff about these incidents. The majority of time, however, was spent simply watching events, taking notes, and exploring ideas as this method was more observational than participatory (on this see Spradley, 1980). As such, problems of notetaking were, once again, not great obstacles here as I again gradually slipped into a role appropriate to expected conduct within the space. Here the persona that seemed to best fit both my method and my setting was that of the avid gardener finding out about available plant ranges. My field notebook will have seemed like a plant log and this persona served to minimise my effect on events unfolding around me.

Through these two strategies I recovered a sense of the ways that people, plants and products come together in this particular site. Whilst the economic geography studies mentioned earlier do indeed connect with my own work, what they lack is an explicit focus on the physical materials through which such notions are sustained. They are less concerned with what Mansfield (2003) calls the 'material culture of commodity production' since, as Cook (1994) also argues, the 'symbiotic intertwining' of the material production of things and their symbolic representations could be better explored.

Past ethnographic work in retail environments has shed light on a variety of issues such as gender (Blomley, 1996), youth (Seiter, 1992), home-making (Miller 1998a). Yet despite this potential richness, there is comparatively little ethnographic research on the practice of shopping itself (Miller, 1998b). Here I sought to build on existing accounts to explore the

practices at work in the London garden centre and how they are, specifically, sustained through encounters between people and materials. The work of both Lee and of Church suggest something of the many ways in which we can begin to explore how organic life is accommodated with retail practice and I want to develop this concern further here.

Gregson, Crewe and Brooks (2002b) argue that the meanings of shopping should be located in actual practice, since a previously unexamined act of purchase may contain an array of shopping socialities, personal agendas, and practical competencies. What they further argue, in a similar vein to Shove (2003), is that these could better be mapped to document how the practices and meanings attached to certain shopping spaces can evolve through time. This chapter seeks to follow on from this call through a particular concern for the ways in which these very evolving socialities are always only possible through particular formations of physical materiality and where plants, once again, as we will see pose some interesting challenges.

5.3 WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU GET THERE?

Speaking to the managers that I did, it seemed that the London garden centre is, in many ways, different from its suburban counterpart. People that go there are, apparently, purposeful - they are 'from London' and, by implication, busy and determined in their actions. This contradicts some previous geographical work on the garden centre (Church, 2001) where the garden centre, more generally, seemed to offer a particular kind of experiential nature consumption. This is perhaps unsurprising when in the city no claim can quite be made for providing escape to any, purportedly, more natural countryside. There are a lot of green things around surely. Yet these centres are located in marginal city spaces: under railway arches, in former factory buildings, behind a terrace of houses. Tellingly, the notion of the garden centre as a day out, as a place to go perhaps simply for the pleasure of being there, was only mentioned by David (interview one) whose centre was the least metropolitan of all those I studied. He was right at the end of a tube line, where land was more plentiful and the approach to gardening, he felt, was different. The city context, then, is important, imaginatively at least, in making the London garden centre a particular place and the London garden centre goer a particular type of person.

Interestingly, in practice, however, such apparently determined city folk seemed to be less than determined within my garden centre observations. People walk slowly and unsurely. The contrast between the cavalier ways in which staff at garden centres approach plants and the ways in which their customers do is striking. Customers touch things rarely and often reluctantly - they prefer to walk slowly and pace around:

> ...There is a younger guy, in a denim jacket. He is with a group. What I imagine are his mother and his wife. They are discussing the topiary trees and the ferns alongside them. His wife says, 'Have a look at this one! That is the kind of thing I am thinking about.' He has a brief look but becomes more interested in the monkey-puzzle tree with its interesting forms. He seems to want to read what it says on the card about it. But the thing is that there are some other plants that stand between him and the tree, which he can't really get past. So he ends up standing on tiptoes in a very precarious fashion to see if he can see what they are. The thing in the way really aren't in the way though. They aren't that substantial and are wispy and move with the wind in any case. Yet he clasps his hands behind his back and he cranes his neck to not come into contact with them.... (Fieldnotes, observation session eight)

Plants were commonly cautiously dealt with, held aloft or placed down to question their aesthetic appeal. Only short conversations took place between the customers that came in groups - at least around the organic items on sale. Some did talk animatedly around plants, but these tended to be the older customer. Generally, however, people would pace around plants making inconclusive, occasional remarks.

> ...'Well this one is sort of nice, Yes its quite big.' He says little. More sort of ums and ahs. 'But maybe not, oh I don't know. Shall we get this one then maybe?'...She's lost interest or maybe changed her mind...'But then, I suppose that is nice too.' They drift onward to another section. The climbers were insufficient to spark their attention and potential commitment, it seems, and they go off again. (Fieldnotes, observation session seven)

This seems, therefore, quite unlike the determined and focussed city dweller that the managers thought they were to provide for and some light can be shed on this disjuncture by exploring how customers talked with staff, rather than with each other. The managers feel that their customers are dynamic because they probably are. Its just they cannot be too dynamic when on their own amongst trays of plants. They don't quite know how to deal with them and perhaps don't feel confident enough to display a more habitual focus. Conversation, meanwhile, could be much more animated once passed any initial hesitation about talking with staff. They might begin with one simple prepared question for the employee that was quietly walking past or watering stock. The staff member would then, of course, answer and then be greeted with a jumble of different questions, each one relating to some often confused and contradictory concerns. One woman had already decided upon a particular terracotta pot. Now she needed to find a plant to fit it:

> ...'What sort of a plant should go with this one then?' she asked. The answer was, as it was before, and related to where she thought she might put it: if it was to go in the sun, then she should go to one section and, if in the shade, then she should go to the other and see if she can find something that might fit it well.... So she goes to the sunny plants section....After a while, Tom (a member of staff there) comes over to her. He begins: 'So has anything caught your eye, so far?'... 'Well I saw this one, but does that spread a great deal?' 'Not really' he says. So she asks which of them do? He says lots of them (a little anxiously). She seems tricky so he tries a different tack: 'Would she like perennials or not?' She says she doesn't know.... but supposes she is

> 'happy to have them for longer.' Then her attention moves on:... 'Ah now these ones are pretty - are they perennials?' He says that she would probably have to take them in the winter, that they would probably only survive in the right sort of conditions. 'Oh!', she says, disappointedly... 'But what about this one?'... (Fieldnotes, observation session nine)

This customer didn't really know what she wanted for her pot. Correspondingly, after Tom started with one clear question, she soon becomes distracted and offers an alternative set of concerns - all tumbling over each other in a haphazard way. She would get lost on a whim, see another flower that she liked, and stop the gradual selection process that Tom had embarked upon. Different processes seem to be running counter to each other within the dynamic of this talk: on the one hand there is a concern for correct maintenance and, on the other, fickleness about the attractiveness of different plants. This conversation was about different elements of visual attractiveness and practical maintenance - all at once and in rapid succession. Ultimately she went away with some sun-loving lavender for the pot she had more resolutely, decided upon.

Whilst the role of the garden designer was sometimes hard in terms of eliciting senses of aesthetic style, the advice role of the garden centre staff can be more difficult still. This, I think, in part explains why, unlike in other retail ethnographies, I was not to take up a role as a worker here. They have to elicit not only opinions on such matters, but also those associated with the actual physical conditions of the garden. The garden designer, by contrast, will have been there already and know a little of the conditions it presents. Garden centre staff can often be presented with questions such as 'will this be a good plant for my garden?'- the answer, of course, depends upon many factors. Aesthetic ones certainly, but here *also* more practical ones to do with position, soil type, shadiness and others. The question of 'is this good for my garden?' is more of a general request for help: an admission of the fact that the client is in an alien environment and needing help. Richard, for instance, told me how he could often attract crowds of confused customers that need advice. This is certainly unlike supermarket practice, for instance.

Many customers seemed 'deskilled' (Giddens, 1984) in this context, as contemporary lives have been socialised out of a confident embrace of the experiences these centres offer. Customers want to sort things out and are used to achieving such aims efficiently. Here, however, they are in unfamiliar territory and they don't quite know what to do or what to say. As Burgess (1995) and Schneekloth (1989) argue elsewhere city people, especially the young, are not quite sure of what to do with themselves when they find themselves in plant or tree places. Burgess explores the example of woodland experience, but something similar can be said of the garden centre. Although retail spaces, these are also unfamiliar environments and people seem to lack the

necessary 'practical consciousness' (Giddens, 1984) to unthinkingly act in an appropriate 'prereflexive' way (Thrift, 2004). In short, they do not quite know what to do with themselves in plant selling places.

The question of what to do in a London garden centre is, therefore, not always so easily answered. The garden centre provides an unusual context with challenges for customer and manager alike. There are clearly a number of ways of negotiating customer unease and, given the apparent current undecided nature of behaviour, these take on particular salience. Many customers present, then, a set of interesting contradictions. They are determined and confused, ready to enjoy, but also finding themselves puzzled and moving uneasily through the space. For Laura, they often come to the garden centre wanting to buy something, but not knowing what (interview two). Then to avoid frustration at a wasted journey they just make a choice from the range presented to them. Customers might, therefore, we might speculate, be persuaded towards different ways of dealing physically and mentally with their gardens, according to how the manager channels them. It is with this in mind then that I now turn to some different ways in which this encounter is managed. A first is associated with what is now becoming a familiarly visual approach.

5.4 ORGANISING DISPLAY AND DRAMA

> 'You have to say that coming into the shop now with the carpet down, it changes the atmosphere of the shop completely - so less of a greenhouse, more of a shopping environment. Its something that people can *click into.* I think people like shopping in comfort now, they don't like getting wet, getting dirty, they like pleasant music, heating, carpet under their feet... with garden centres in particular'. (David, interview one)

David was proud of his new green carpet and other managers were thinking about carpeting in similar ways. Geoff's centre, as we have seen, was even changing from green carpet to beige - the green colour was too much like a garden centre, whilst the beige was a better aesthetic foil to their furniture ranges (Geoff, interview two). The assumption in both David's talk and in these associated infrastructures, then, is that people want a familiar shopping context to *click into.* As discussed earlier, these businesses increasingly see their competition as high-end retail stores and, if they are to compete, then they might very well adopt similar standards and approaches. Furthermore, given the difficulty in encountering these spaces which I have just discussed, such familiarity might, once again, be helpful. One way of creating the 'shopping environment' was by laying a soft brown carpet.

The garden centre is here, then, to make itself more familiar, with a retail format that people feel confident within and that allows them to better know what to do. Yet, for a number of reasons,

this can be a difficult task. Firstly, these garden centres have, in many cases, developed organically from nurseries and it might be hard to start afresh with clear ideas about pleasing formats within such infrastructures. Carpets are nice, but problematic, for Brian, because they would be put down in his old greenhouse. This greenhouse sometimes leaks and that might rot the carpet. Nevertheless, he thinks he might get one anyway (Brian, interview two). The throughflow of stock is also fast as different plants come to the point when they present themselves to best advantage and this makes it hard to have a rule about how to organise things so that the customers can *click into* it.

Nonetheless, there were several ways of creating such an environment. One is through being specifically resistant to the idea of having the biggest range of plants even though this is tempting for many in the industry (Phillip, interview two). Visual impact is increasingly assumed to better attract the customer than exhaustive plant selections. Geoff's plan this year was to inject a real *sense of drama* into presentation - he was about to go to a trade show in Germany to find products that meet these ends. Others, likewise, aimed to create much more of a sense, specifically, of *theatre* in their presentations, as plants, apparently, need 'enhancing' to transform them into visually composed and striking sets (David, interview two).

One way of achieving theatre, apparently, is through the layout of stock, where a sense of drama results from arranging things into interesting and novel displays. Formerly, plants were often organised into an 'a to z' format according to Latin horticultural classificatory schemas. This is now increasingly superseded by an approach seeking to inject this perceived necessary drama. That is to say that presentations geared towards an easy navigation for the customer with a deal of horticultural knowledge is increasingly seen as redundant. Better now to orchestrate a more striking retail environment, as an engagement with immediate visual display takes precedence over a more intimate understanding of plant character and behaviour.

Such orchestrations can take different forms. One approach is through mixing things together to offer customers idealised 'room sets'.

> 'You also incorporate other things in the display - so containers, statues, ornaments - to create an overall look. It's the inspirational display, like a room, like Ikea do. Then people can *visualise*. Occasionally they like the whole display and we can replicate that in their garden.' (Phillip, interview one)

London gardens are often the size of small rooms, or at least they are perceived to be, and these recreated rooms, therefore, give inspiration and ideas about what should rightfully be in the garden and how it should be arranged. Besides, high-end department stores have them, so why shouldn't the garden centre when this is the market they are to target. Correspondingly, specific

staff come in and do arrangements where, for John the aim is about having some 'interesting things in your living area' (John, interview two). Here these are seen to be specifically *visually* interesting things that you should have arranged in such a way to maximise their interest and visual impact. David says that you 'need to catch peoples eye' and for that to happen 'plants just aren't enough' - plant combinations can go someway towards creating impact, but to truly be successful there should be some incorporated ornamental features, fountains, or furniture.

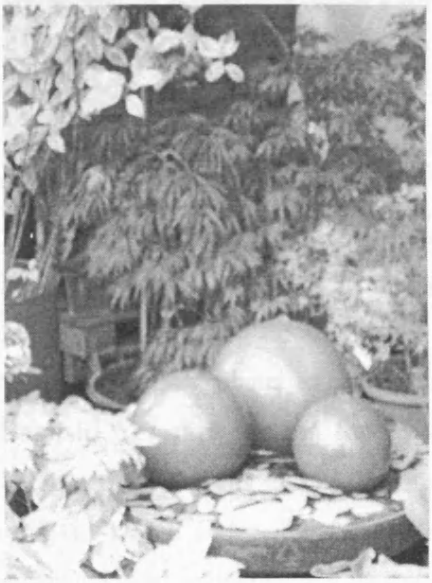

Figure 5.2. A composed product arrangement that, apparently, makes for an easier customer encounter.

For a plant even to be *seen* now it has to be arranged in a particular way, according to Geoff (interview two). It has to be set off by other plants or materials to be noticed by a potentially confused customer passing through. It has to be looking its best to capture their fleeting attention and to increase sales. No one noticed his orange plant, for instance, until it was put just near to the cactus and certain pots.

Suppliers and nurseries are in on this too. Aware of the significance that garden centres attach to display, they now provide plants with any number of bits of signage and features to make the products more immediate. One particular thing increasingly available are plants in different coloured plastic pots, rather than the traditional and standard black or brown. The garden centre managers were sometimes indifferent here – they personally felt it could detract from the actual plants themselves - but such items were nevertheless increasingly there on display. They were personally more interested in the plant capacities, but professionally the affluent target customer was thought to be less so.

Figure 5.3. Coloured pots for the display of young plants – a distraction for the manager but something to 'latch onto' for the customer (Laura, interview two).

Labelling is also implicated. Traditional labelling can be sparse and scientific, giving Latin and common names and maintenance information. All presented in a detached, scientific form with diagrams which better allow plants to travel and find successful homes alongside languages other than English. Yet this sort of format can feel decontextualised for these cautious customers. These representations can remind that these plants might need some active work when, according to David (interview two), what customers are more interested in are the immediate physical visual appearance. Certainly, within this scientistic calculus at least, they take us away from potential plant personalities (Thomas, 1983) and how they might actively enchant us to the world (Eder, 1996).

Figure 5.4. Scientific, traditional, diagrammatic plant labelling that might be complicit in making the London customer fearful.

A number of complementary means can, therefore, be employed. Principle amongst these is hand-made signage, which includes more personal plant recommendations that appeal directly to the customer. Here more aesthetic, selling recommendations better reassure the client. The focus is less now upon the practical detail of plant behaviour and more upon how good they are experientially and how they might make a better impact in the centre. In one garden centre they have also recently further developed this framework of presentation under the rubric of what they were calling 'emotive signs':

> Russell: So how do you go about giving them information about the plants that you have then?
>
> Phillip: we've got bed labels, like a little card above saying the required situations but also, well, you see that one behind you, its what we call an emotive sign, which is not so technical but it gives you a bit of history, something to make it a bit more romantic, more interesting, we call them emotive signs. It's to make that plant sound more interesting, saying 'it's a great plant and this is a bit more about it' and 'it might go well with certain other pink things in the garden' or something, not to say it just needs acid soil, grows to 3.2 metres....that sort of thing. (Phillip, interview one)

So, plants are presented to people within changing material forms where local recommendation, visual anticipation, and cultural history is seen as a necessary addition to, if not yet a replacement for, more decontextualised scientific presentations of plant behaviour and requirement. The plant is presented strikingly and in such a way as, perhaps, to return them to more familiar and less alien formats of understanding and certain senses of 'impact' are paramount here. Things are more now about the 'retail side of things, not the knowledge side of things' (Geoff, interview two) that denote horticulture and plant care - a shift in their significance so that the visual impact of the moment becomes more significant than gradual plant developments through time. Especially in London and especially in the wake of the media attention to the garden where things are made to look visually striking, so that you now have to:

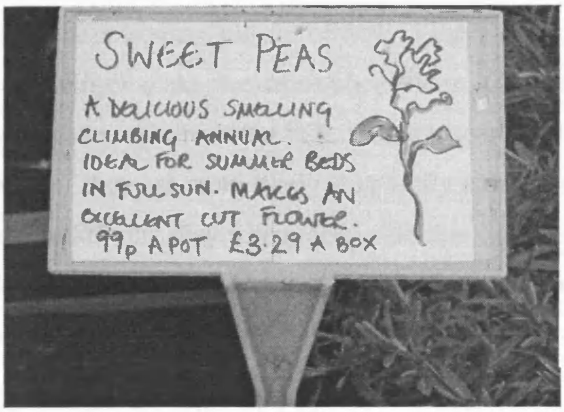

Figure 5.5. A more personal and impactful labelling style.

'Try and keep everything looking fresh and new and ...slick' (Laura, interview two)

To return to issues of visuality, it is useful to remember that although, as I argued, there may be a powerful movement towards approaching plant representatives through a specifically visual format of looking, this is not always the case. As Hirsch argued, we can oscillate between being 'in' the natural environment and being 'out' of it according to a variety of factors (Hirsch, 1996). With this idea in mind, whilst here, as in the last chapter, there was a movement towards looking aesthetically down upon things, this can also be problematic as it tends towards precluding the intimate physical contact associated with, in this instance, acts of selection and purchase. For Geoff, whilst it is clearly better to organise your products into a striking sort of

display, the argument goes that, conversely, if things are presented in too attractively composed designs, customers become reluctant to damage that design by removing component parts. With arrangements such as those in figure three, then, people will simply leave things in place as it has become designed to such an extent that it becomes a scene and no longer a range of items for purchase. This is an interesting dilemma and one that lends some weight to aspects of Church's (2001) argument since it is one in which, currently at least, the trend is to channel people into more of an experience of looking. Yet to return now doggedly to the physical material, there are specific products and presentations that are more suited to this framework than others.

5.5 PRODUCTS, NOT PROCESSES

> ...A young couple is moving around a set of plants, wandering really. They seem aimless - occasionally looking at a label... and then moving away. Nothing more. She says 'its ok, mmm, well maybe I'd quite like a bigger one, but I don't know,' then they go back into quiet, 'ums' and 'ahs.' In the end they put it back... There are building works behind the centre. They talk animatedly about that for a while. It seems like something for them to latch onto - 'wonder what its going to be etc.' Then its back into silence...and a confused roaming around. Then, suddenly, 'ah look at the lovely cactus – they are great aren't they.' 'Yes look at all the different shapes!' 'Shall we get some of those? I like that bit upright one.'(Fieldnotes, observation session six)

The above couple seem unsure of how to behave around plants - they can't easily differentiate between them or make decisions about them. Cactuses, however, by comparison, seem better. Pots and ornaments are better still. In this research, people are more likely to touch things other than plants - they are more likely to casually touch pots, furniture, or ornaments. They also tend to talk in a different way when faced with this type of entity - they seem happier and the pace of their talk and interaction picks up and they are less likely to wander off towards thinking about the building works next door.

> Male: 'I personally think that they look nicer in the wooden ones, but if you want that.'
> Female: 'Well I think that it's more classic, and it would go very well with the brick. Do you think so? Well I think that it's a totally different sort of colour.'
> (What the guy has done whilst talking in this way with his girlfriend is to take a bay tree and put it in one of the terracotta pots. Once his has done this, he starts rummaging around with some of the other pots. He is very quick and determined, and he lifts them up, feels their surface and moves them around like he was building a jigsaw.)
> Female: 'John, do you really hate those barrels?'
> Male: 'Well if you really want one, then we can have one, I suppose. But which colour do you like?'
> Female: 'I really prefer that one to be honest, the green one. I think that it provides a better bit of contrast.'
> (after further lively discussion, they eventually get the pot he suggested – observation session eight)

Pots, then, just seem easier to deal with – as Geoff puts it (interview two) they are more solidly *there* - people have more ready opinions on pots. Indeed, they often tend to come before the plants in terms of customer selections as the aesthetic appeal of the pot comes first and the type of plant that might make its home inside is secondary. This comparative confidence is physically evident - they tap pots, knock them, run their hands across the varnishes, even toss them in the air, but they don't do that with plants. Children do sometimes, but adults rarely. There seems less physical competence here – conscious or otherwise.

Figure 5.6. The increasingly prevalent pot display, as pots now seem more easily dealt with than plants, in both physical and symbolic terms.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, people deal easily with hard materials. Here this seems the case once again, both bodily and physically. It is a similar thing with furniture. For Geoff, furniture is something 'easier for them to understand' (interview one). Like the housing materials the Sadalla and Sheets (1993) described as symbolically more amenable in terms of allowing people to better express themselves and relay social messages about status and personality, so it seems the case is with things such as furniture. Decision-making processes around items such as garden furniture are more easily negotiated. Unlike the previous negotiations around plants, where a tumble of questions can pour out, with materials, such as these, questions are to the point - what other colours are available, what sizes can you get, can things be bought with different proportions? As Leslie and Reimer (2003) argue, the furniture market, more generally, is moving so that we no longer consider products in terms of physical durability, but rather framed within a register of display and 'aesthetic obsolescence' (Lee, 1993). With furniture, they argue, consumers are increasingly schooled in trading the social connotations of certain furniture styles and increasingly unhappy with an idea of spending the rest of their lives sharing space with particular tables or chairs. As such there is money to be made from selling it to them.

Things such as pots, furniture and ornaments indeed seem more resolutely *there*, then, as they make for different ways of behaving around them. Not surprisingly such things are correspondingly increasingly evident in the centre. Suppliers provide expanding ranges. David, for instance, deals with over four different suppliers of wood furniture now - all offering different designs and different materials as the cheaper plastic trails off and is supplanted by aluminium, steel, wood and iron. People, he suggests, are definitely spending more money on their furniture now (David, interview two) and others concur. People seem to want 'big pots, big things and expensive' (Geoff, interview two) which obviously fires a manager interest. Paul described how he now gets his pots from several different places, whilst, when I talked with him, Geoff was about to go to Italy to explore the idea of importing new ranges.

Such materials, then, are increasingly differentiated, in part because they are made up of things that are more easily differentiable: colours and glazes, metals and moulds, woods and primers. Managers seem eager to embrace these trends and stress how they have a lot more containers, statuary, ornaments and water features now and are proud to have such interesting things that might not necessarily be associated with a garden centre (Phillip, interview one). This, given the limited space that is available to these managers at their tightly packed sites, is, by implication, to the detriment of planting ranges:

> Russell: and you were saying that you are getting more furniture and ornaments, those kinds of things, I was wondering what that has meant for the plants, then?
>
> John: Well, I suppose that you are right and we have had to reduce the number of them, but also the good things about pots is that you can put a plant in a pot, so that doesn't take as much space...but yes, I suppose we have, we have had to sort of rob peter to pay Paul. And so we have had to cut down on plants. (John, interview two)

Indeed, reducing the variety of plants on sale might be a good thing as this may make for striking displays since you can then offer banks of the specific chosen plants. Besides, it can be easier for the customer if plant choice is limited. They are likely to be nervous about what is 'a good plant for my garden', both aesthetically and otherwise, and, therefore, so the logic goes, they want to entrust the garden centre brand to select the appropriate striking plants for that year.

Non-living materials are, firstly, more easily shaped, moulded, coloured and arranged. They are, therefore, more easily discussed, easier to have opinions on and, in the absence of customers well skilled in dealing with more truculent entities, such items are easier to mention when a stock staff opener is 'has anything caught your eye?' Laura here talked about how she encouraged her staff to sell up:

> 'With these (hard materials), people do really know the one that they want, and you are not going to be able to palm something else off onto them. With plants, though, you can! You can suggest something similar and they will go for it…but you can't with the modern looking things. Like you would say 'well have this metal chicken instead of the stone Buddha!' – it just doesn't work!' (Laura, interview two)

Figure 5.7. A display incorporating garden statuary, including the metal chicken that Laura finds harder to 'palm off'.

In the context of different types of garden statuary, Laura, then, suggests the difficulty of selling objects not aligned to the design aesthetic of a particular customer. Indirectly she indicates the comparative ease with such aesthetics can be expressed with regard to materials, as firmer opinions are here more resilient. Since this type of entity is more malleable, it is also more subject to fashion. That is to say that they can be shaped into all manner of things and, therefore, if there are all manner of things available, then orchestrating fashions can become much easier.

> '…You see those metal sculptures, we got those in last year. And its amazing how many of those we've sold, they fly out…and all the classical statues we have stopped selling, and its looking a bit bad now because people have really stopped buying traditional classical statues…. What was popular last year were the Buddha's. We will carry on doing them, but I don't think that's going to be as popular this year. The same with those African pieces, they are something else that will, I reckon, last for a couple of seasons and then die down'. (Laura, interview two)

Here, at least, fashions in things seem to change more quickly than the fashions in the plants, and that's 'probably because you have your limitations in your plants.' (David, interview one) Fixed things also better fit the increasingly evident style registers. People are perceived to increasingly do things like, for instance, come in with a certain colour as their desired garden 'theme.' Staff talk about how you could tell which sorts of thing a certain person would go for - this was because the particular materials they chose would fit with their, specifically, *visual* and evident aesthetic.

So, what is easier to deal with, what is more striking and familiar, and consequently increasingly common, are things which are fixed and static. Things which are, again, more part of a material culture, in so far as they are objects that are more clearly pacified to the extent that we can easily, and masterfully, control them and have opinions on them. They are in many ways the

kinds of things that we are more used to experiencing in retail environments and correspondingly we have a better competence around them. For Ingold (2000) we understand the world through the deployment of 'skills' that simultaneously involve both mental and physical competence, as in practice, for him, these two are inseparable. In this sense we can say here that our skill is greater with hard materials than it is with softer plants as, both physically and symbolically, they are more familiar for us to handle.

I asked these garden centre managers, specifically, whether they thought of the things that they sold as products. Personally as we will see, they feel them to be something different. Professionally, however, this notion seems to be tightening grip. It was a framework they simply had to buy into - they were to be ruthless now to capitalise on developing customer profiles.

Russell: Do you think of the plants and the things that you sell, then, as products?
Phillip: Yes we do. Like a tin of baked beans, yes they are products, often people (staff) like their plants and they don't want to throw things away that should be thrown away, they like to tend things, but yes they are products. And you have to be ruthless because you have to maintain the quality and if things aren't up to scratch you have to get rid of them.(Phillip, interview two)

Yet, there were still questions to be raised about this framework:

> 'But you know with all that what's the point, in the end? You might as well just go and buy fake plants and put that in' (Sam, interview one)

Here, then, as in chapter four, we see how a notion of the garden as a material culture assemblage gains ground. We are more confident with things more fully under our control, more fully willing to bear our cultural messages. As Kreiger (1973) and his plastic trees remind us, we should rightly specify the qualities of organic behaviour that we want and find beneficial around us. A key question here with respect to plants, I think, relates to processes and the processes that inhere within the specific characters that are on sale in the garden centre. These characteristics don't make them like the fake plants that Paul, here, has such disdain for. I want to now interrogate these capacities further.

5.6 NATURE GUARANTEED

> ...There is a couple moving around - a short lady with greyish hair and a younger man. She tries taking clematis out of the rack, but failing as they all get caught up together. It's quite funny to see her. Previously she was doing the slow walking, pacing thing, up and down all the aisles in that kind of diffident way. Now that she has actually decided upon taking an action and is actually touching something, her actions become much more quick and jerky as she tries to disentangle it. She gives up in the end. 'Bloody things!' she says to the younger man and they laugh a little. Eventually she leaves empty handed. In conversation with one of the staff later, he said this was very

> common. One of the jobs that he often did in the summer afternoons was to go around disentangling the clematis – to make them into more easy individual units. Rather than a mass of planting.... (Fieldnotes, observation session two)

Clearly, then, there is something about the propensities of plants that troubles the frameworks in which managers, as retailers, might want to place them. Here the clematis is determined to grow and reach towards the sun. It writhes around and into its neighbour plants as they collectively pursue this goal and, in so doing, they knot together into a mass of plants, rather than a rack of products. The carpets – which were earlier emblematic of a certain display imperative - are problematic for David because, whilst they are pretty, the lively nature of plants means that they require watering to stay alive and spilt or leaked water can make such carpets rot. Plant agencies clearly provide physical challenges to discursive ideas about centre arrangements. Such agencies are also problematic for the customer, so managers choose different ways of dealing with this liveness. For David, and others, there is a lot of conflicting information about plants around. People are nervous about a perceived 'mystique' of gardening.

> 'They think, you know its just this sot of mystical thing, you know, there are all these sorts of old wives remedies and you know you have got to do this, you have to do that at this time, and don't plant this until there is a full moon and all this sort of malarkey, and, you know, they get a little bit worried about it.' (David, interview one)

People are apparently fearful of what plants can do. Laura (interview one) described a plant she stocks that is related to the deadly nightshade – the potato plant. Only just related, but if her customers were to know this they would never buy it, she thought. Indeed, if all the plants she stocked were labelled as to the extent to which they were poisonous, she would have an outrage, even though many are toxic in only some very small way. People, she supposed and like some designers suggested in chapter four, are just scared of plants, even though there may be very few cases of children dying because parents inadvertently harboured a killer plant.

Customers are used to retail environments where the things on display are more docile, both in the representations of managers and also, seemingly, in practice. Otherwise they might eventually turn away, like the lady with they grey hair and the tangled clematis. The managers that I spoke with had any number of anecdotes about how such issues came into play. David had received complaints about the fact that some of the plants were wet so customers got water on their shopping bag. These plants had been watered as a means of keeping them alive - fair enough, perhaps, but not for a customer that expects an organised product and whose usual purchases are anything but damp. Others had received complaints about plants with damaged leaves, which, from a certain vantage, make them a faulty product. The point here is that people are sometimes unhappy with the ways that plants can challenge the ways in which they might want to think of them as fixed, dependable objects of purchase.

Faced with this impatience and lack of knowledge, the easiest way of persuading the people that they will get on with these plants in the garden is to introduce people to the most easy going ambassadors (David, interview one). Herbaceous plants, for instance, that die back to the ground in the winter are hard to sell within this framework. These immediately present a challenge to the nervous customer. Out of season all they might seem to be is a bucket of earth (Sam, interview two). Hard here, then, to persuade the customer, firstly, that they might have the skill to coax something out of the bucket and, secondly, that the thing will be worth this effort.

Figure 5.8. This hidden herbaceous *hosta fortunei* that will, in later chapters, turn out to be quite appealing. At this early stage, however, who knows or even cares what it will become?

Other measures ensure that selected plants are likely to survive so that, in time, they might come to steadfastly allay such nervousness. Plants are grown in increasingly large pots such that they are already a little more secure and settled. This way, when they are transplanted into the more unpredictable environment of the actual garden, they are more likely to survive, regardless of the, potentially limited, amount of involved human care. Phillip recounts how plants can now be transplanted at any point, regardless of time (interview two). Previously they would have been grown 'bare rooted' and so you could only plant them in the spring and autumn as, otherwise, the consequent shock of root exposure would kill the plant. Now they are grown in pots, however, and you can put them in whenever you like.

Russell: And if you just have someone that wants to just get it sorted?

Laura: You do exactly that. Um, I mean so much of it is container gardening these days, and you emphasise to them that you have to water it everyday, but so many of them just don't and then it dries out and they come back and they say, look, this one went wrong and its tricky…

Russell: People take their plants back, then, as though then don't work?

Laura: Yeah, its tricky, you know, if they come in and they say, well, we bought a plant off you and it died…They have to bring a plant back in to me and I will see. I won't just issue a refund. And if…if its something that is obviously their own fault, then sometimes we will do something like go halves with them on it, or negotiate with them, um, we do that quite often, actually. (Laura, interview two)

One interesting and increasingly popular means of dealing with customer nervousness, then, is through the plant guarantee. Managers have nervous customers, big high street shops guarantee, and they aim to operate forward-looking businesses that might emulate such shops. In this light, the guarantee makes a lot of sense. Having said that, the guarantee remains an uneasy negotiation since they are offering to guarantee something which, we might suggest, is fundamentally unpredictable. Plants are alive and respond differently to their surroundings and the events of their lives; a guarantee, meanwhile, assumes the plant will do exactly as predicted, that it will perform in the anticipated way and that it wont just 'go wrong.' This is to suggest, then, that all elements are under control – temperature, wind, rain soil, rival plants, pests – and that the plant will build a successful allegiance of conditions around it. Yet, such networks are never that stable. A rainforest policy can be undermined by just a worm (Latour, 1999). A scientific innovation can be rendered ineffective by the will of shellfish (Callon, 1986). A city wide transport system can be stalled by just a faulty coupling mechanism (Latour, 1996). In the garden such confident stability is also rare, even though such guarantees act as a device to temporarily allay associated fears.

In this context, dirt, for instance, is something imagined as problematic and something unbecoming for a modern retail outlet. I was, for instance, talking with Geoff about a past employee. She was older and she had some correspondingly traditional ways of doing things. He was meanwhile pushing for a redevelopment of the garden centre and wanted the space reorganised in a particular modern way. Perhaps unsurprisingly, they had an argument at one point. He told her that she had to clean up the area within which she worked, but she had different ideas retorting that 'it was a garden centre' and 'it was supposed to be a bit dirty.' (Geoff, interview one)

Geoff here echoes a broader sentiment that customers now want an ordered, sanitised and, it seems, dirt-free environment - they like nice music and nice carpet under their feet (David, interview one). Other managers were a bit more circumspect - dirt was going to be there in any case. That is to say that they agreed to some extent with the employee's idea that this sort of thing was inevitable because plants do need some looking after. For Douglas (1984) 'dirt' should be considered as 'matter out of place' in so far as it denotes material that finds itself in a place where it is not socially acceptable for it to be: a hair on your head is fine, but a hair in your soup is disgusting. Here there were different ways of thinking about this placing with regard to soil matter. I discussed the issue of dirt with all of the managers that I spoke with where there were competing modes of ordering (Law, 1994) as current retail frameworks rub up against a more traditional set of ideas about the experiences associated with dealing with plants.

Interestingly, despite here being at the forefront of advocating the ordered and designed retail environment, Geoff was also quite clear that this could never be totally embraced. Dirt was always going to be there to a greater or lesser extent because gardening was 'different':

> 'There are so many fads, bloody fads, you know like Japanese gardening is in, or this gardening is in, and its like.... Good god, gardens are not like buying new curtains! Because they grow! I don't really think that gardening should be fashion, because fashion sort of stays still, but gardens don't...and clients can just forget that plants need care and maintenance to grow!' (Geoff, interview two)

There remains, then, something about plants, and their liveliness, that these managers felt both defensive about and positive towards. Almost all were keen to point out that, despite many of the countervailing initiatives being undertaken, they were definitely and determinedly still 'plant-based' garden centres and all enjoyed the recognition that plants might not always conform to the visual ideas we might want to impose. Working with plants certainly seemed to be a pleasure within their jobs. These were living things with 'as much of will to live as ours' (Sam interview one) and such will was rightly to be enjoyed.

Yet, profitability pressures can override this. It's a pleasure to get to know the plants they have, to learn about them and to watch them develop, whilst the turnover of stock, however, is such now that plants come and go before any of these attributes can be fully revealed. That is to say that the agency of plants is increasingly pushed to the sidelines within a more resolute pursuit of profit. Whilst some of these centres still call themselves 'nurseries' this is more of a historical legacy than a statement of fact, as staff act more as spectators, less as coaches for their rapidly changing plant stocks. This, together with the fear that customers have about these agencies and how this is to be dealt with, makes for a situation in which these capacities are marshalled into a form where they are no longer so evident. To return to Kreiger's (1973) question about enumerating the exact reasons for not wanting plastic plant life, so far here these seem few as the unpredictability associated with animate life just poses difficulties. Here they are to be 'products' as customers are fearful of how liveness might challenge a product framework and such negotiations can be exemplified through the changing fortunes of certain plant characters.

5.7 THE BOX, THE BULBS AND THE SEEDS

The box tree, *buxus*, is a fairly accommodating sort. This is why it can be found in a range of habitats, ranging from rocky hills, to woodland in Europe, Africa, Asia and Central America. Its fully hardy (RHS, 1998) and, crucially here, resistant to ill treatment and the removal of foliage. There is an increasing amount of these varieties available in these garden centres now, certainly in terms of bulk.

Figure 5.9. *Buxus* of similar sorts clipped into various shapes and taking up much space in one small London centre.

David had just received his biggest ever order of large specimen plants, such as the buxus. Other garden centres echo these actions as these varieties seem more accommodatingly willing to be impactful. They are easily pruned and arranged into certain, humanly dictated forms. They have also spent a degree of time getting to the size at which they can do so, as bigger specimens are increasingly popular. David is selling his largest ever specimens now - in pots of up to 200 litres (interview one) - bigger plants that he is unsure that he can even fit and deliver in his transit van. This buxus might make both the garden centre and the garden easier places to experience and deal with since, within such pre-arranged forms, they are easier to talk about and discuss. They are more akin to material culture, like the tree ferns from chapter four that are also popular here, and like the varieties of cactus that people could find themselves more easily discussing. There is a 'solidity about them', that both James and his clients like, perhaps they are a bit more resolutely 'there' (Geoff, interview one). They are clearly differentiated, create impactful shop displays and appear, at least, as if they would be easy to control.

Sam The trend around here for the last fifteen years has been for box, box planting...and also that's pretty much for the whole of London really.

Russell So why are people like that then?

Sam Its formal, it looks good, people don't have to pay too much money and it looks smart - they put across a good organised image. Whatever you do its good all year round, it's a way of getting something that looks designed without having to do much effort...it looks designed, even if a designer hasn't been there. (Sam, interview two)

Particular plants are good, then, because they are impactful, because this impact can be a humanly created one, and because they are easier to care for. Bigger and more static plants like these help people 'create' in their garden (John, interview one). That is to say that because of their relatively stoic temperament they can be more easily used to make the garden a human creative expression.

Bulbs, however, seem less likely to make good their chances in the London garden. Bulbs need to be planted well in advance and are certainly less visually interesting when they are first

presented to the customer. At least this was the case with the customer in the more centrally located London garden centre as, interestingly, it was only the most suburban garden centre that didn't report a decline in the sales of bulbs. This anomalous centre, in fact, was part of a chain that stretched across London. Its manager told me how when individual sites had excess stock, they would pass it between centres until it was sold. Here, one thing that was flowing from the central centres and out towards his own was the bulb. That is to say that there seems here a geography of interest in bulb cultivation within London, where the suburbs are seen to contain people that might better get on with bulbs and their ways of living. For Geoff, bulbs are for a certain group of people really - 'you wouldn't see a city slicker coming in and saying he wanted a load of bulbs' (Geoff, interview two). For him, this is because they would rather something instant and Besides bulbs are the same the country over, and his garden centre, at least, is about stocking the unusual and the striking, not the gradual and the workaday.

Figure 5.10. Bulbs which, though densely packed with potential life, can be an unknown risk for the contemporary customer.

Bulbs are now presented to customers in different ways to allay such impatient concerns. Some garden centres now sell bulbs in specially prepared bags, rather than loose, like vegetables in greengrocers, as a means of helping the customer towards purchase. Potted bulbs are also sold so if you forgot to plant them in the autumn you can still get them in the spring. They are a lot more expensive than if you were to plant a lot yourself at an earlier stage, but their fate is a little more secure once they have reached this point and this seems, for the more contemporary London garden owner, worth paying for. They are also sold in coloured pots, as we have seen, as a means of making them impactful even before they flower. Bulbs, then, are having a more difficult time within these changing climates of plant buying, but there are ways of addressing these problems and making them more attuned to the times at which they are required and the impact they are needed to perform.

A similar story can be told for the seeds sold at these centres. Seeds, like bulbs, are unknown quantities - palpably brimming with as yet unknown agency. However, again, like bulbs, they are increasingly not bought. Or at least the customers do not buy them in the central London

garden centres. Once again it was only David in his suburban centre that suggested that the market for seeds there remains as strong as ever. Seeds are not selling as much as they used to and so seeds, like bulbs, are being repackaged with illustrations. Seeds are sometimes deemed particularly attractive to children, or children and old people. Old people because they have the time, inclination and knowledge to tend these things. Children because they might be doing something at school, or because their parents might want to teach them about how nature works (Laura, interview two). Adults, by implication, are unlikely to care for such matters- or to have time to.

Plant stories, such as these, could be thought about in terms of temporal management. In the case of the bulb in London, people seem willing to pay for a reorganisation of their bulb encounters so that they come into contact with the bulb at a later point in its personal development, when it is less vulnerable and more striking - they don't want to wait too long for the plant to gradually come to flower. Indeed waiting as a specific practice is an interesting phenomenon to explore in this context. In chapter two I discussed how, in this work, I was interesting in thinking about the different relations that people might have with objects in terms of both having them and spending time with them. I want to now begin to explore further these temporal issues at work in this research.

5.8 Just Getting Things Done

According to Schwartz, in contemporary Western societies we don't like to wait (Schwartz 1974, 1975). In making such a case, waiting, he suggests, can be framed, as an exercise of power within relations between two interacting individuals - a client, who requires a service, and a server, who provides this service. As he documents there are myriad ways in which power can be exercised within this partnership, but generally the case is, he argues, that being the one who waits is considered a demeaning state, suggestive of subordination within the relationship. Think of the Airport waiting room, for example, that is rebranded a 'lounge' so as not to remind passengers of their subordinate temporal status. Another instance relates to the very word - 'waiter' - that, in a professional context, connotes someone in a menial position that attends subserviently to the demands of others.

Whilst his is a persuasive argument, this is not to say that cultures of waiting cannot vary between places and through time. The Umeda people in Africa for instance have no notion of disposable time that might or might not be used productively – actions rather are perceived as simply following in succession (Gell, 1992). Russians, equally, have a stronger tradition of tolerant waiting, in part, as a consequence of their past socialist administration and its effect upon national queuing activities (Liberman, 1969). In western contexts, however, the trend

seems to be a move away from such indifference or stoicism, as we increasingly valorise what Adam et al. (1995) call a 'non-stop society' where the 'durational expectations' (Zerubavel, 1981) we construct for the activities we involve ourselves in are, generally, decreasing. We don't like to wait, then, and we increasingly expect things to happen quickly for us.

Southerton et al. (2001) argue this may be because we increasingly need to constantly co-ordinate demand in our lives. Although we may have as much free time as in the past, we do not perceive this to be the case. This they trace to the ways in which the times when we perform specific tasks is no longer as tightly tied to expected patterns of conduct. Rhythms like that of the week certainly still exists as a powerfully unquestioned 'social fact' (Zerubavel, 1981), but the organisation of tasks within this week is increasingly flexible as we develop individualised patterns of working and living and one unexpected, result, they argue, is a feeling of being 'harried' as we try to organise the performance of these tasks in such a way as to 'buy' time elsewhere. Another is an uneasy relation with convenience devices which may offer us more freedom and time, but can equally lead to a confused sense of how best to deal with the periods consequently made available (Shove, 2003). Rather than engaging in the potentially meditative weekly task of doing the washing by hand, for instance, we now have devices that we delegate to that are willing to do so just when we choose. Yet, correspondingly, we don't quite know what other tasks to best involve ourselves in, instead of doing the washing in the way that was previously expected.

Such processes as these might, I think, very productively be examined in the context of contemporary relations with plants. Sociologists, following the legacy of Durkheim, have tended to prefer to bracket off sets of biophysical parameters that we could lump together into a bigger category of 'nature'. They are certainly there but here were of less interest than a more thoroughly 'social' construction of time within particular groups (see. Zerubavel, 1981). Anthropologists, meanwhile, are more alive to the mutual inter-penetration of these factors, However, I have yet to find studies that explore this in the context of the anthropology 'at home' (Cohen, 1977) approach mentioned earlier. Tsouvalis does discuss the temporal management of both trees and workers in an account of modern forestry (2000) and Adam does a similar thing with regard to agricultural farming (1999). However, these temporal relations could be explored in a more intimate and less industrial context since this forms a significant aspect to the organisation of both contemporary plant relations and modern consumption.

Field diary extracts:

> ...Arrived at ten a.m., started off by introducing myself to Noel, who was in charge that day. Just said I was going to hang around a little bit and see what was happening

> there. He was fine with this. Started off by the tills for a little while. There was an old lady that was buying different small seasonal plants. She was asking Noel his advice on the best ways to look after these. She was very apologetic about this. 'I know that I am being a bit late here in doing this, but I have been in hospital you see and so this is the only chance that I have had to come and get some to put in!' All really very apologetic and explaining… (observation session four)

> …It's mid afternoon and its getting quite busy. I am hanging around by the summer bedding plants that 'give your garden some seasonal impact.' There is a couple moving quickly around the place. They have a number of different bedding plants: yellow and purple pansies. They corner one of the staff walking past. They want to know whether they have got enough plants in their trolley to make a basket. Difficult question I would say: depends on the size of the basket, surely. He seemed to think so too: 'Depends on what you basket is like and how you would like it,' he suggests. They gesture the rough size and say that they want to get it done today, you see, because they have got some friends coming around for a dinner tomorrow and they want to have the garden looking right for that... (observation session twelve)

From this vantage, different temporal aspects seem dominant in each observed event. In the first, the woman at the till is apologising because she hasn't successfully arranged her activities around the times of the year when plants might best respond to being planted. In the second, the activities of the plants were really of no concern since the couple had an immanent dinner party and plants were to be slotted into place in order to accommodate that.

There is a tension here, then, around which temporal regimes of behaviour are in charge and whether they should rightly be human or nonhuman ones. More broadly, it seems that the human ones are less and less willing to bow to those of the nonhuman in the way that the older lady regretted that she couldn't. Customers, increasingly, are seen to just want to 'get a garden' (Geoff, interview one), to just 'get it done' (Laura, interview one) in a similar way to those using designers in the last chapter. That is to say that they want things in the garden to require little care and help and that can be organised sooner, rather than later - customers, then, increasingly don't want to wait. Phillip had recently got some sales figures for his centre when I saw him. He was concerned because there were less buying customers than previously (interview one). However, he wasn't especially worried since those customers that did come were spending more money. The corollary here is that people want to get things done. They want to come in and buy all the necessary things for a functioning garden - not to come in several times over the year getting things as they go along with a developing hobby. Trolleys are increasingly evident too, even though they are small places, as such devices fit well within this developing format of speedy organisation.

For Laura, and others, you have your 'traditional' gardeners and you have your 'non-traditional' gardeners and the non-traditional gardener is an expanding market, made up of young busy professionals that want to get things attractive and organised (Laura, interview one). For Geoff,

even the idea of the garden and its traditional associations of gradual plant maintenance and care might be an obstacle when he is trying to woo this particular market and, correspondingly, he wants to make sure that his centre doesn't ever appear too 'gardeney'. Meanwhile, for Philip, London gardens aren't really about 'growing', with its associations of patient waiting, anymore (Phillip, interview two).

Figure 5.11. Trolleys fitting well with a notion of perceived rapid garden development.

> People want plants now that don't grow very fast and they keep to a rough shape and things like that (Sam, interview one)

> 'The young people tend to go for more permanent types of things…shrubs and trees and that type of thing…I think that probably things like bedding plants and herbaceous are probably harder work, I mean, well people like to look at the bedding plants and they will say, 'oh this is lovely, how long will it last?' and you say 'it will last for a season and as soon as the frosts come it will die', and they go 'oh! What will happen then?' 'Well its dead and you will have to take it up and replant something else' and they say, 'oh I cant be bothered with that, give me something that is going to last all the time.' (David, interview two)

These factors are played out in the products that are sold and the reasons for their popularity. Certain plants fit better within these timescales and constraints than others. Plants like the box that provide the necessarily immediate impact to signify expense and taste in the garden but do not require much care and maintenance. They fit when customers 'just want to stick it in and see what it looks like *now*' (Laura, interview two) Bulbs, by contrast, are a very 'garden-centric' product, for Geoff (interview two). That is to say that, in this case, for the garden relationship to work more attention should be paid to the inherent temporalities of the bulb and, as such, he is doubtful of their future success. David has noticed an increase in sales for a new type of garden lawn seed that grows more slowly without requiring much mowing. The decline of the garden A-Z format is also revealing here as the types of lifestyle that support a more gradual appreciation of the nature of plants - fostered by this framework of display - is being replaced by another where people are seen to be too busy, as they want to 'see what it looks like now.'

Unlike the slow growing grass and the different glazed pots, there was little explicit talk with me of the sale of tools, for instance. When I asked, sales seemed to either stay static or to be decreasing. Here Brian framed his market as two different types of gardener:

Brian: And we cater for both types, oh yes.
Russell: So you have the garden equipment and tools for the one guy...
Brian: And the pots and the sand and the gravel for the other one, and if you get an instant garden then you don't even need a fork and a spade, if you have got a garden with a border then you will need spades and forks and hoes and so it's a different sort of ball game.
Russell: And do you sell as much of those tools now?
Brian: Well people are definitely going to wear things out...but whether you are selling as many tools as we did ten years ago, then, well, I really don't know. (Brian, interview two)

5.9 GIVING THINGS TIME

There is a movement, then, towards an approach that matches the specific routines of London clients. Brian breaks this down into two approaches that he calls 'proper' gardening and 'instant' gardening (interview two), and such a dichotomy says something about some normative agendas amongst these managers. Here despite the fact that their businesses are, in practice, moving increasingly towards catering for the 'instant' gardeners, they themselves remain more positive about the 'traditional' approach. They think of themselves as 'serious about their plants' (Simon, interview two). I discussed earlier how they still argue that they are themselves very much plant focussed, despite in practice increasing stocks of other products and, here, such commitments play themselves out temporally.

A widespread perception of someone who was an 'actual gardener' was as someone who realises how the seasons work - someone who is aware of the right time of year to do something in the garden and who is willing to wait and act accordingly. Gardening, for David, is a great way of relaxing which is about being drawn into things and to return to the link that we instinctively had with plants - when we just 'understood' each other (David, interview one). The young customers he sees don't tend to have that now, he thinks, although the elderly do, to an extent, and this is part of a bigger change. Years ago it was 'about watching things grow' and gradual garden process; now we haven't the time (Laura, interview one). Regretfully, for her, people in London seem to have 'lost their patience' with the movements and activities within the garden. Modern society wants things to just 'be ready for it' (Sam, interview two), and not to have to bow to the activities and tendencies of these nonhuman others. Brian traces these developments to the media productions surrounding gardening:

> 'Lots of programmes are made like six months ahead of the broadcast, and they might be filming now but it mightn't be broadcast until next year sometime, and things can have altered in six months...and they are like 'this is what something is going to look

> like' and it must have, originally, been done something like nineteen months previously to make it like that, so you are sort of working back to front...and you get these sort of timing problems now. It's really, sort of... out of kilter.' (Brian, interview one)

Managers try and persuade customers towards waiting and against becoming more 'out of kilter'. Strategically, it might be better in the longer term for business to foster interest in plants as a means of securing repeat business from someone with a hobby (John, interview one). Some centres have mature plants in stock that they don't actually want to sell, or can't actually sell because they have become entangled within the site infrastructure. These plants are helpful here as they suggest to customers what they might eventually own and experience if only they were to wait for them.

> 'Until last year there were a lot more overhead climbers within the wooden frames, all over, but unfortunately the framework has now had its day and was getting dangerous so we had to cut down the huge jasmine climbers and things, so when you were trying to explain to them what something looked like you could show them a climber on site, and that was great, you could actually end up showing them what the honeysuckle would actually end up looking like.... It was a real shame and you could really see the thickness of the trunks' (Laura, interview two)

For Geoff, if a plant is striking and has a 'wow factor' (which not many plants do), then customers might be willing to buy a smaller one and gradually grow it on. Encouraging such patience can be bolstered through the use of books (Sam, interview one) that illustrate how the plant might, through time, develop. Sam shows people these in a similar way to Paul's use of his portfolio in Chapter Four. Then, there are more simple rhetorical strategies of emphasising how it will, eventually, be 'really lovely' to have, if the customer 'just waited.' (Laura, interview one)

A desire to persuade customers into waiting is also played out in presentation devices. Most obviously this is evident in the ways in which plant potential is signified. Seed sales are poor, but the advent of pictures of what they might finally produce on the front of the packed has served to offset this, to some extent, as the uninspired customer can actually now 'see' what the seeds might potentially become. Coloured ribbons can be tied in a bow around the stem of a developing plant where the coloured ribbon would be the same, or hopefully the same colour as the potential bloom – if you were to wait the flower would be a brilliant yellow, just like the yellow of the attached ribbon. Here the green masses in the centre and small packets of tiny brown pearls of potential life are injected with a visual appeal, some potential excitement, as a means of inculcating more patient customer approaches.

> 'They die back down to the pot, and what does it look like? It looks like a pot of soil! And if they are interested in it and the plant then they might still yet buy it, but you know, nine times out of ten they will just look at it and think to themselves well what is it? It's an empty pot!' (Sam, interview two)

This was what Sam argued with respect to the herbaceous plants discussed earlier and, if this is a standard customer approach, then garden centres are now to cater for the associated requirements. They feel they have to be ruthless, as I have discussed, and remind themselves that these are rightfully now *products* they are here to sell. Waiting is something that might be for the older customer, or for the very young that are to learn about nature in school (Geoff, interview one); adults, by contrast, don't have the time, even though this seems to be an important part of the pleasure to be had from being with plants, for these managers at least. Customers are likely to have seen attractive vistas, mature gardens in other houses (David, interview one) and on television shows (Brian, interview two). Correspondingly, they then they want something similar transplanted into their own garden – with a minimal hassle. Managers feel they must respond here, even though there seems a pleasure to be had in waiting that they are conscious of.

There are, of course, some traditional temporal confluences where plants and people still come together in some similar ways. For all the garden centre managers that I spoke with there was a peak in sales at the beginning of the summer. The process would begin in March and keep going for a few months after that, but what were the temporal imperatives involved here? I was interested to know whether this was because the plants then needed more attention as the summer months approached and they began to galvanise themselves. I was also interested to questions whether this might, conversely, be because we would begin to get better weather at this time so that human thoughts would turn towards having attractive environments to be personally outside in. The garden centre owners, however, had few explicit opinions here - this was just what happened. As the days got warmer, both people and plants come towards the idea of more activity in the open air and in response to the sun. It was just a happy, and obvious, seasonal confluence of activity.

However, excepting such confluences, where there is more of a jostling relationship between people and plant temporal agendas, the people were increasingly taking charge. The waiting game is for the old and for the young as, despite the strategies used by the staff and plants at the centre, customers seemed less inclined to wait even though managers thought this a shame. There were two different kinds of nature being valorised here: one about display, another about process and each of these leads to different associated infrastructures. Here, an eagerness not to wait for the plant server (to adapt Schwartz, 1974) makes for certain developments in the practice of garden retail. As Sam argues, despite his attempts, the pot of earth, for instance, with

the potentially dynamic herbaceous plant resting within, is now increasingly ignored (interview two).

Figure 5.12. Dealing with potential plants: the hosta fortune, once again, which now is increasingly passed over by a customer with no time to wait.

5.10 Conclusions: buying and waiting for the London garden

The managers and staff that I spoke to clearly enjoyed working with plants and discussed it as a real reward in their jobs. Being with plants, and being outside looking after them, was a common reason for staying in this industry. Indeed, it is this sort of shared enjoyment in tending to things that can go some way, I would argue, towards explaining how Lee's suboptimal economic 'geography of regard' (2000) can be sustained in the garden industry. That is to say that people might rather share and promote such pleasures than necessarily always attempt to maximise plant profit. Yet, in the context of the London garden centre the space for such regard seems to be decreasing. These garden centres are developing their businesses in such a way as to help provide a visual, impactful and immediate set of garden infrastructures. This is then, in turn, more easily embraced by a contemporary customer who finds plants unfamiliar and strange, but hard materials less so. Consequently the things sold in the garden centre are increasingly placed within a 'product' framework where the less immediate livelinesses of plants are giving less breathing space than they might have been.

In many respects, then, this chapter closely echoes some of the concerns of the previous one and adds a further layer of detail to the exploration of how material culture and immediate impacts are seen to have an increasingly significant role in these sites. In some ways this is surprising, as we might have expected the designer to be more than willing to develop these sorts of concerns. They are designers after all and, correspondingly, the obvious exponents of thinking about the garden in terms of associated aesthetic approaches. Designers also dwell more within a world of images and talk where more physical unruliness provides a less evident challenge. Garden centre managers, by contrast, think of themselves more as gardeners than designers and, correspondingly, the garden centre could be very much about our daily lives with plants as they foster more intimate knowledges and encounters. Yet, seemingly, by contrast, they are moving

towards a more immediate, impactful design approach. Regardless of how they might want to live with plants and gardens personally, professionally the imperative is one of making their gardens more strikingly visual, where plant agencies that seem, for them, enjoyable can be increasingly downplayed.

One reason seems to be that people don't want to wait, as they are better used to an immediate and visual process of buying things. In the last chapter and the garden designer's office these tensions were dealt with in terms of a concern for control and agency. I was beginning here to develop ideas around issues of domination and whether we feel that we might, or might not, rightly want to be in charge of material things. In the garden centre, this has now developed towards a more explicitly time-based account where the question of waiting for the garden has become significant. I have shed light here upon the changing alignments of entities in the garden centre and drawn this out with a particular concern for the co-ordination of activity through time. As Gregson, Crewe and Brooks (2002b) argued there can be competing socialities involved with the act of purchase and shopping in particular retail environments and here we have seen how some such socialities are instantiated through encounters with more material practicalities. Church (2000) suggested something of the 'spectacular' here and here I have enumerated some ways in which this garden spectacular is attempted to be staged.

Although difficult for many contemporary consumers, shopping in a garden centre may not take up so much time of their busy lives. Yet they may develop some more protracted plant relations elsewhere. That is to say that we could follow the plant and its cultural biography once more to a place were relationships develop through some cohabitations over months and years. As this empirical work has progressed, we have moved gradually closer to the physical bits and pieces that make up this thing called 'a garden'. Yet we could go closer still. We have moved from the boards and plans of the designer's studio towards the products and plants of the garden centre. Rather than look at how 'products' are passed through a retail environment or how plants are marshalled in a garden design 'build', we could now question how people, plants and other materials get along within some actual physical gardens.

So far, then, in the first half of this empirical work we have explored how plants and humans come together in two specifically commercial sites. What has emerged here is something of the changing frameworks that plants are locked within, as certain explanations of how we consume and live with plants challenge others. I now want to, firstly, see how these frameworks do, or do not, become successful in some actual gardens. What this empirical work so far has suggested are two interesting ways in which plant agency can be, at times, felt and experienced within these sites. These are to do with control and understanding plant agency, as explored more

particularly in chapter four, and also to do with time and how this agency is felt and understood in a more temporal way, as we have seen in this chapter. What I, secondly, want to do now is interrogate these ideas further through my subsequent sites.

That is to say that in the second two empirical chapters I want to both consider the resilience of the consumption frameworks so far in evidence and also consider in more detail our encounter with plant liveness. The next chapter concerns itself with the designed garden, once again which I use to explore questions of the temporal, whilst the final empirical chapter returns, together with a more experienced gardener, to issues of control together. To link to chapter six, then, we have seen something of how garden design processes work in London, but how do relationships evolve once the designer has finally driven away?

-6-

Rhythms, relationships and some contradictions of living in a designed garden

6.1 INTRODUCTIONS

> 'We won't learn it because we are not keen gardeners; we just do the things that we know, like weeding. In the first few years we tried to learn it, how to do the roses and when to cut, we dared to touch the plants and we learned to do that. But I knew that I will never learn this, and in this country they have the greatest gardeners in the world...so why should I end up knowing it.' (Kirsten, interview one)

Such was a response from Kirsten, a thirty something consultant with a designed garden in northern London. I had asked her whether she was becoming a gardener, now that she had been living with her designed garden for a number of years. Her response was that she resolutely was not, even though it is fair to say that she had, over this period, a variety of different dealings with the things found in this space. What was significant here was the way that she echoed a broader sentiment amongst this group of people who had previously had a 'designer' at work in their gardens – a sentiment associated with the particular idea of being a 'gardener.' A 'gardener' was often, within their talk, a fixed thing, and a fixed thing that they could never really be. Given this stance, it is interesting to think, more generally, of how to define this category of person. Such a category no longer seems associated with any full time occupation, but is rather something to do with degree of interest, a perceived practical skill, or an assumed outdoor identity. To an extent, then, it's a fluid concept. Yet the point here is that this was nevertheless something that these people resolutely were not, despite the fact that, within this group, there were a range of ways of interacting with garden companions. Despite such an evident variety, no format of encounter could really allow them to transform themselves into this thing called a 'gardener', it seemed.

This reticence speaks, firstly, to a broader insecurity and nervousness about what it is to be someone with a designed garden. To have a designed garden is, by implication, to have, to an extent, an interest in such outside spaces and what such an assembly of entities might provide people there - they have, after all, probably spent some thousands of pounds on this enterprise. Yet, to have a garden designed, and not to have developed it yourself, still brings with it a

degree of pejorative connotation. It was as though to get all that you could out of such a space, you really ought to have been involved with developing it in a personal way from the outset, rather than to have involved others. And so, following this logic, this group felt they might never really become 'gardeners', since, at the outset, they have involved outside parties in this relationship and, therefore, rendered the title unobtainable.

Such would be one reading of these responses. Of course, there are always others. Nevertheless, what I will come to argue through this chapter, this very strategy, which might seem potentially inimical to a strong bond with the garden, is also, potentially, indicative of the opposite. That is to say that a reticence about the notion of being a gardener could also, in fact, be a demonstration of a productive and positive relationship with the garden. This, in turn, may relate to one of the particular pleasures involved. That is to say that to not classify yourself in this way is, to some extent, to let yourself off the hook of being defined as such. Then, once that has happened, you could take a more relaxed attitude to the events taking place there and more fully enjoy being a part of their unfolding.

This is an argument that I want to develop through this chapter. For the moment, however, what can also be taken from this reticence is the unstable position of the person with the designed garden. Such a position, therefore, merits attention as I now trace the forces and issues at stake in dealing with what a garden might be within lived practice. In this chapter, then, I move from the business-related spaces where people and plants have more momentary meetings towards the, potentially at least, more intimate encounters developing through time within actual domestic sites. As with the previous chapters, I begin with questions of visuality, style and material arrangement, before gradually moving towards how things can evolve through the practices associated with being with the garden through time. Indeed the question of time is that which I want to consider in most detail here, as this developing research concern comes again to the fore. My aim was to explore how certain sorts of entities and notions travel between certain places and the plant I have been following brings with it an interesting kind of temporal freight and it is this that I will continue to interrogate here. First of all, I should, however, outline how I organised this part of the research.

6.2 MAKING A WAY INTO THE DESIGNED GARDEN

The notion of 'garden design' is, as I have discussed earlier, for a number of reasons, a contentious one. Nevertheless, anecdotally, it seems that having a 'designer' involved with organising the outside space to your new home is increasing. It certainly is an option now that is recognised and considered when the mass of things you first encounter outside your new home rubs uncomfortably against the romantic dreams you might have had for this space. Yet I have

found no survey detailing the make up of this type of person, this thing called a 'designed garden owner,' and no research at all on how they perceive themselves, what they feel about what has happened, and, more generally, how their relationship with their garden works once the design is complete. It is in this context that this part of the research was undertaken. To find examples of this particular person, my approach made use of the work I had already done with the garden designer. I asked a number of them to help put me in touch with some past clients that would be potentially willing to take part and, through such means, I made contact with some different designed gardens and their associated owners[1]. Such folk were, perhaps unsurprisingly, uniformly what would be called 'professionals.' They worked in a variety of white collar fields from consultancy, marketing, estate agency, journalism, finance, and art dealing and they had had their designed gardens, to use the telling phrase from chapter four, *built* between two and six years prior to the time when I met them. They, therefore, had already some degree of experience of managing their lives in conjunction with these outside spaces. They were broadly between thirty and fifty and I spent time with these people in a variety of ways. As such we will now meet those that I have called Kirsten, Jessica, James, Daniel, Sarah, Samantha, Charlotte and Debbie, since at this site I spent time with eight people.

As with my previous sites, my first method involved in-depth interviews as we initially explored how they came to have a garden, what they did in the garden, and how the design process was negotiated and undertaken. The second was more active as a second interview incorporated a period in the garden itself, approaching it in whatever way the owner felt was appropriate. Building once again on the methodological arguments made in chapter three, I thought it would be useful to go and physically see the plants. Sometimes we would be walking around, at others we would engage in brief gardening activities, or at others still we would simply stand, talk and point. Photographs of the garden were also taken at this site. In previous chapters photography served my own illustrative purposes. Here, however, I initially asked the owners to tell me what would be the best, or most appropriate, things to take photos of in the garden, before also later taking photos of some of the things they had specifically discussed with me.

Some of these methods were easier to conduct in practice than others and some made for situations that felt a little difficult for both the respondents and myself, as we found it difficult to know how best to behave outside or what exactly we should do together in these sites. Yet, the difficulty experienced in administering a method is as much an outcome as an obstacle. That is to say that it suggests something about why such activities might prove, in certain circumstances, difficult. They may be indicative of interesting ways in which different ways of

[1] Of course, such a means of recruitment might yield those clients that were more likely to have had a positive experience or, if not, at least be more inclined to say positive things about the designer that had

making sense of living with the garden can rub up against each other in practice. With these ideas in mind, what follows now is an account of what was developed through these particular methods.

6.3 HAVING A GARDEN BUILT

> So the second part of the interview didn't really go so well. Not exactly sure why. It did when I used it with the last group, damn it! We had been talking about things and I said, ok let's go out there and see what's going on, and she was fine with that. So we went out there and then she just sort of stood in the middle waiting. Fair enough really, I thought at the time really. She was waiting for a prompt from me I guess. But, then again, other people have been much more animated from the outset. Anyway, so I started off by asking her about what was happening out here, what was going on. She said: not much as far as she was aware. It's a nice big space though and she quite liked some of the white plants that had been put in by the side of the balcony part. 'I suppose that arrangement down there is quite nice.' And that seemed to be that, as far as she was concerned just then. A little bit embarrassing given the amount of time I had clearly expected to be out there, really. I think I had told her that we would be around twenty minutes. (interview write-up from Jessica, session two)

This is an extract from my research journal after a second visit to Jessica's. She was a journalist who had had her garden 'done' three years ago. On the tape of the actual associated conversation, there is indeed a lot of seemingly forced talk - lots of 'ums' and 'ahs' and, as she actually puts it, 'I'm struggling here, you know.' The garden was something that was just 'there' for her, it seemed. She had wanted to get it done. And so she did. That is to say that it was something she had planned, then executed and that was, to some extent, that. What I mean to say here then is that the process, for her, seemed to be over.

Figure 6.1. Degrees of indifference in the designed garden. 'I suppose that arrangement down there is quite nice'

Such detached discussions were also evident elsewhere, as one of the things I tried to do with this group of respondents was to take photos in their gardens. I was interested here to record visually some of the things that we had been talking about, but I was also interested in what people thought I should best take images of. One thing that became significant here was how,

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recommended them. As such, I was keen to reinforce ideas of confidentiality.

when I mentioned taking a photo *in* the garden, this was generally explicitly taken to mean a photo *of* the garden and an attempt to display the entirety of the arrangement of entities held within to meet some sort of aesthetic or artistic standard. That is to say that, rather than an array of encounters with specific entities, the garden was often, it seems, by this group to be perceived as a whole – at least for the camera. To return to the pervasiveness of visual presentation in plant encounters, as discussed in earlier chapters, we see again their power in terms of habituated encounter. Something like a landscape painting was often what was, seemingly, just most appropriate when the camera came out of the rucksack. So the garden was, once again, something to be visually consumed in a removed way - something represented as a whole and, in this regard, this group was reflecting a broader emerging sense. The garden can be a cultural landscape in lived practice as it has been in academic narrative, after all. The garden as a site of more intimate encounter lacks any noteworthiness now - it has been successfully *done*, as Jessica seemed to indicate, and, therefore, was no longer of so much concern. Such aspects suggest a more detached approach to the garden space and an interesting way of coming to frame this space. This clearly links to the design practices of chapter four, but at this site I can also take things from the other direction, and explore the client's experience of having a designer involved.

Figure 6.2. The garden as entirety and visual landscape – a prevalent idea of how a photo in the garden should take place.

The reasons given for getting the garden designed could vary. They included: just being interested to see what it would look like; wanting a normal garden; making themselves feel at home; because of a bad back; and a sense of obligation about doing something with the outside space. It is with this wide range in mind that the ways in which the process of garden building becomes interesting. As we found earlier in the thesis, garden designers can serve, for a number of reasons, to structure the encounters they have with clients, and I need to return briefly to this now. As discussed notions of style here are to the fore - where a 'style' seems to denote an assembly of objects and entities that serve to best mark the garden as resolutely belonging to its owner in terms of aesthetic sensibility. The question here was what sort of style the owner would like to have for their garden? There may have been any number of agendas that were

most significant at the outset for these clients, as I have just rehearsed. Nevertheless, a discussion of style was here, as it was more forcefully in chapter four, something of an 'obligatory passage point' (Callon, 1986).

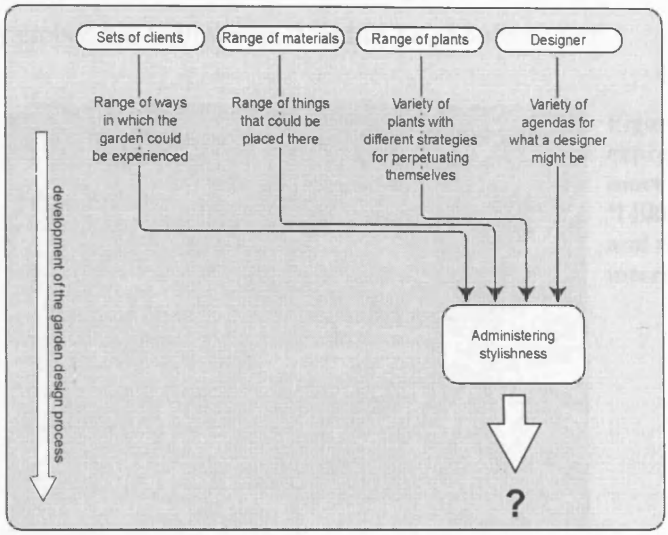

Figure 6.3. Style as obligatory passage point for the designed garden to move through.

Yet, this is not a passage that the clients I spoke with, unlike the scallops of Callon's study, necessarily found difficult to move through. Other entities may have done, and we will turn to these in turn, but this set of humans were more or less expecting it. Certain notions of what was desired in such 'style' terms were often readily expressed, it seems. Kirsten wanted a garden that would 'take her eyes up to the sky' (interview one). Jessica thought that she wanted something that had 'a sense of modern country' (interview two). Daniel's vision was more minimalist with a 'south East Asian feel' (interview one). Such were examples of the variety of style briefs that these designers will have successfully elicited with a relative ease. It was expected that they would and so ideas were already prepared and close to hand. A framework of social meaning expressed through a garden arrangement was, therefore, again in the ascendancy here - clients had certain styles they identified with and they hoped these, then, could be recreated.

Within this, once again, elements of material culture were more easily passed judgement upon - both within the design process and afterward. In an echo to the last chapter and Leslie and Reimer's (2003) work on aestheticisation, Jessica knew that she could talk much more easily about garden furniture than she could about other garden issues – and, in particular, plants. As I have argued elsewhere, many people in London more successfully discuss fixed, differentiated things and so it was also to be the case here. Indeed, a sense of a fixed and finished design aesthetic embodied by elements of material culture was clearly and easily evidenced more generally with this group. When taking photos with these garden owners and encouraging them to suggest what should be recorded (other than the totality of the vista), James was particularly

eager to photograph his shed, since this shed was painted in an interesting blue colour (interview two). Daniel certainly wanted his mirrored effect to feature (interview one). Asking Sarah about her favourite parts of the garden, she said she liked the buxus (interview two) and this seemed to be in so far as it clearly had a fixed shape. She seemed to like the elements of design that were clearly embedded both within it and its neighbouring urn.

Figure 6.4. Ease of expression with respect to more clearly designed items: 'I like the buxus, perhaps, and the urn there.' (Sarah, interview two)

Samantha expressed this propensity most clearly as she discussed the delight she took from one particular item amongst her garden hard materials. We were talking about favourite parts of the garden and this was something that she was confident in running me through:

> 'Well, I asked Jenny (her designer) if she could maybe try and find some kind of brick wall and railing that we re more in sympathy with the date of the house. She showed me a catalogue of what she thought would be right, and it was exactly right! That's what I mean by sensitivity to design. And the gate we have is the most spectacular gate; it has a real heaviness to it! Everybody comments on it, 'what a great gate!' it feels substantial and just has a great look to it, and the one before was just dreadful.' (Samantha, interview one)

Over the course of this research, this gradually became understandable. Firstly, this was in the context of this method where people were reaching for things they could discuss happily when they were sometimes uncomfortably outside together. Secondly, in the context of a more general ease of expression around such material culture items. Elements of craftsmanship, design, and quality of materials were something that Samantha, an art lover herself, could easily enjoy and talk of, as she personifies a broader sense here.

Unlike things like gates, which they had more fixed and clear thoughts about, it is becoming clear that plants are more reluctant to move through such a passage point. A nervousness about plant capacities and an unfamiliarity with plants more generally was again in evidence here. Sarah generally thought of herself as a person who stylistically 'knew what she liked and what she didn't like.' Yet, when it was to come to the issue of plants, things were less straightforward in terms of passing comment:

> 'She (the garden designer) asked me about what kinds of flowers I liked and what ones I didn't like and I really had to think about it! You know, it wasn't just a question and answer sort of situation...and it was days and weeks really for me, you know! I was going around and thinking to myself, now, 'do I like that?....oh, I don't know...it looks alright' but do I actually like it as an individual coloured plant with a shape and things, and, well, god knows!' (Sarah, interview two)

Plants, once again, were a difficulty in terms of managing easy discussions. They were more reluctant to pass the passage point. The people I spoke with knew that they were to be asked for plant opinions and did their best in various ways to do their bit and think of what they wanted. But nonetheless, plants still seemed, at times, to make this difficult.

Designers, as we have seen, have ways of dealing with these reticences. Kate would try and ease plants through this passage point by organising folders that showcased some contrasting plant styles - the point being to make plants easier to discuss in terms of aesthetic preferences. Clients could, then, choose between jaggedly architectural styles, billowy and voluminous masses of plants, or swathes of tilting bamboos. Notably, these books were not arranged according to the different requirements of these plants and the ways in which they might develop other, non-visual, relationships with their potential owners. This was about eliciting views that were specifically about 'style'. Speaking with clients about this kind of device, some remembered how they were of real help.

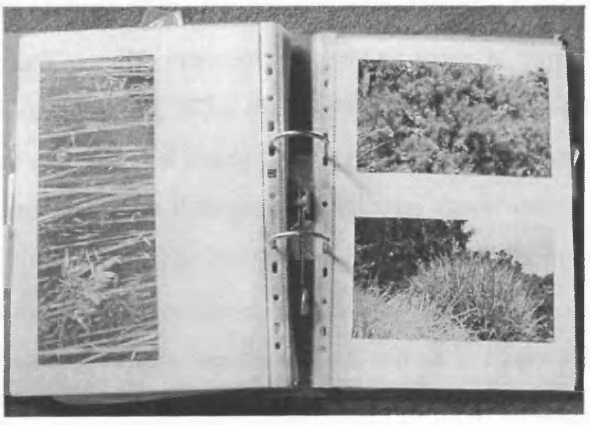

Figure 6.5. Forcing plants through an obligatory passage point of style: the plant form discussion sheets.

These people did, then, desire a product that is to some degree fixed and, therefore, these frameworks are arranged to meet their requirements. However, there is also an element in which they inadvertently find themselves with a product that is, to a degree, fixed because they express themselves better when it comes to the sorts of objects that are more fixed. They also find themselves, perhaps not wholly reluctantly, moving through a process of developing a notion of the style that is to take effect in the garden. This is a movement towards thinking about the garden in social symbolic terms, which is, then, more easily achieved through more malleable

elements of hard landscaping. Plants are, at this stage, faring badly. They, once again, are alien as their attributes are reluctantly squeezed through an approach to style that is easily brokered by those involved.

A familiar story of material culture familiarity and impact is being told here, as a particularly visual form of approaching the garden is reproduced. People are aesthetically consuming here and the sociologist of consumption may feel confident that the idea of products serving as social markers are, once again, being championed elsewhere. However, through adopting the model of the obligatory passage point, I am also interested in what happens to the entities involved once they have passed through the point and people, plants and materials are released from the design process and begin to make their own way through life together. As Callon described, a lot of work was required on the part of the scientist to momentarily align things. However, keeping things in place as time goes by might require a more sustained effort still and this is one that is worth thinking about.

6.4 THE WATER FEATURE AND THE BUSH

What I have documented so far, throughout this empirical material, are the changing frames through which a garden is understood in London. However, these have been the frames associated with this specific practice of *getting* a garden and not, crucially, of the process and activities involved in *living* with one. This now, more fully, becomes a main concern of this research, since the processes of *getting* were, to some extent, productively revealed in the two preceding chapters. With this particular group of research subjects, I am now in a position to explore questions of *living* and managing a relationship with the garden through time. It is over the course of time that plants might be more able to display wilfulness and it is, therefore, interesting to consider how those that live with them can accommodate this life. I want to now question, firstly, how these various agencies can go about interacting and, secondly, and more specifically how this manifests itself within a temporal framework of human experience.

As a way of making a start, I want to consider two particular things that found their way into Charlotte's garden. Specifically, I am interested here in her water feature and her euphorbia bush. This is perhaps an unusual beginning, but the temperaments of these two are a little different and these differences can make a useful touchstone as we, together with Charlotte, get to know these two a little better. Charlotte is a consultant living with a designed garden and her husband near Brixton. She had always wanted to get her garden designed. This was in part because she has such a nice home, but also because she thinks its good to be outside - good for the soul (interview one). Eventually she found a designer that she thought she could work with

in the local paper - she was attracted by the flower that the designer has sketched in the advert. They got on well, decided to meet and gradually her new garden begun to take shape. One of the things that, at the outset, Charlotte definitely wanted was a water feature - but it was difficult to decide which. So they looked around a number of different garden centres and through a number of different catalogues. The problem was that she found that a lot of them looked, to her, 'naff and silly' (interview two). Eventually, however, after quite a process, they picked out one that she found attractive and acceptable and it eventually found its way into her garden. It's pictured below.

Figure 6.6. Charlotte's water feature.

Another thing that was also in Charlotte's garden space was a swathe of euphorbia. At the beginning of the process, Charlotte wasn't as sure about her plant choices as she was with the water feature, as indeed was often the case with this group of people more generally. So that part was more left to Kelly, her designer, and Kelly put in a swathe of euphorbia, since she knew it would grow fairly well, it would fill the space and it would help shape the composition that she had constructed for the garden. Unfortunately I don't have a picture of the euphorbia within her particular garden, but it looked something like the plant below, although it was a bit more tamed within its home in Brixton. So far here, Charlotte and Kelly have offered us a fairly unremarkable story of how different categories of things are differentially embraced at the outset and where this can lead the garden designer in terms of building certain facilitative infrastructures. However, as things went on in Charlotte's garden, her ideas about these items gradually began to evolve.

Figure 6.6. A euphorbia bush that's a bit like Charlotte's.

At the outset, the water feature basked in a great deal of thought and concern - there certainly seemed to be a lot at stake in picking the right one. Yet when we were out in the garden itself, I asked her about whether it was going to remain a central feature. Some of the plants were growing around it and I was interested to know if she was going to help it keep its assigned focal point status. She said she wasn't really - as time has gone by such concerns has become less important to her (interview two). As for the euphorbia, that also came to elicit a degree of indifference. The designer had put a big bank of it in, as a way of helping to make an immediate impact within a use of space. In chapter four, with the designers, we saw how swathes of planting could be successfully used to make the limited range of plant forms into better, and more remarkable, components to a visually designed experience. Here, however, the very fact that such a visual organisation had been installed now tended to preclude a closer engagement on Charlotte's part.

Russell: and we were talking about the euphorbia, and you were saying that you didn't really like them, but then you have got a lot of them out there?

Charlotte: Yes that's right and I think that maybe you don't develop the same special kind of relationship with any one of them, that's true. Whereas if its something that is single or only comes out at certain times of the year, you notice it better, care for it better than they do take up space. If you look through there, I can see the plants and nothing beyond them (interview two)

What Charlotte exemplifies well here is a gradual uncoupling from the constraints of style. Although, this was difficult for this group and they often didn't have as much time as they would like for such experiences, this was still possible. The water feature was something that she could handle with ease at the outset and enjoy from the beginning. However, as time passed, it was the very stoicism that made this possible that inclined her to loose some interest. In short it was a bit boring because it wasn't changing much. The euphorbia, meanwhile, lost some favour for similar reasons. It was striking and a useful part to an initial composition, but these

same attributes meant that, over time, her affection was less successfully drawn to it. So clearly there are some different issues that come into play as time passes in the garden and I want to interrogate these further now. Firstly in terms of control and, secondly, in temporal terms.

6.5 CEDING CONTROL

> I take a huge pride in it. I really do. And it looks so good because it was designed as an entirety, a unity. And if I had done it gradually I don't think I would have felt the same about it, but because it was all started at once, it was different and it was all brand new and it looked just so pristine! (Samantha, interview one)

For Samantha, then, one of the pleasures of her garden was associated with its completeness. It was 'done' now and she could just sit and enjoy looking at what her designer had achieved. A first thing to say here is that, to a degree, all of this group expressed such sentiments. That is to say that the designer had provided them with a pristine ordered unity that they could, from that point forward, approach aesthetically and enjoy – often as a backdrop to social occasions, just as the designer Jane had earlier assumed that they would. This was, of course, part of the reason, for many, in hiring a designer – to find themselves with the type of product they required, or desired. James would only talk in these terms when I pressed him about his garden activities (interview one). For him, the garden was a backdrop only and this had now been successfully provided. It was a foil for social occasions and sculpture and that was how it should be – there was nothing more to say. Jessica knew that some of the plants were apparently fragrant ones, but they were 'so far away' from the decking that 'you can't really smell it' since she never really ventured much beyond this platform (interview one). Kirsten's relationship was mostly one of just looking at it – she was often busy inside and the pleasure came from looking out occasionally from her window (interview one). Through a range of technologies like the sprinkler system, materials like the paving, and forms of planting like the docile fern, as discussed in chapter four, it was now possible to think of it as such. The plant care system was now, to a degree, undemanding and autonomous - they had wanted a landscape and a backdrop and this is what they had successfully acquired.

Yet, as time passed, other elements could come to the fore. Clearly there were signs of human activity in these gardens, regardless of how respondents might have wanted to dismiss these or think them uninteresting to an interviewer - other activities than looking. Although people initially spoke with more ease about aesthetic requirements, they were clearly also involved in other, more intimate and superficially mundane, activities than those of distanced visual consideration.

Figure 6.8. Clues suggesting potential human interactions: sheds at the bottom of the designed garden.

Sarah talked of how she found herself doing all sorts of activities in the garden and how visual considerations had become gradually more difficult. And this, interestingly, was despite the fact that she felt that this was a way in which she ought to think about the garden. We were talking here about different things to be done in the garden:

> 'But I know that most people say you should stand and look different parts of the garden to get different sorts of views, and but well when I am in there I am doing stuff, so I'm not sure how to do that now really' (Sarah, interview two)

So the garden is clearly a backdrop to activities, and a visual environment to be admired, but it can also equally become, in some respects, a practical encounter with the components that go into making this garden. As time goes on, some members of this group talked about being drawn into the garden and its more daily, mundane concerns (Debbie, interview two; Sarah, interview one). The garden was now both a 'product' and a 'process' and, although, in the garden centres of chapter five, owners were assumed to want more of a product, now they were juggling both frameworks. James certainly wanted something that was 'low maintenance' and, indeed, they all initially wanted something along these lines since they were nervous of getting involved and so this was a safer thing to suggest. Yet James also wanted something that was evolving and indeed he was quite abrupt at the suggestion of a 'product' format for thinking about the garden (James, interview one) - a process was what a garden 'should' be, after all, for him. Yet, how exactly were the demands of these plants and other agents to be dealt and dwelt with within these competing agendas?

Clearly there were active interventions that these people found themselves making. However, these interactions were not without difficulty. They were also perhaps unexpected since the garden was initially framed as an arena for social relations. It would be a place where you marked yourself out or took part in social interactions. But there are also other relations than specifically social ones here. Although the social scientists of chapter two tended to downplay these, this is not to say that they are not, nonetheless, there. The things of the garden could

require interventions in their own right as active demanding things, but what was the character of these dealings?

As I have been exploring, plants are, in many ways, our strange companions around whom we are unsure about how to rightly behave. As such it was, for instance, a difficult and harrowing process to think about pruning and cutting back plants. They were alive after all and you wouldn't really want to cut off the limb of a living thing. Yet, gradually, these new garden owners would try to find and use the necessary knowledge about how best to interact with and maintain their new gardens, if they could. Finding a useful sort of knowledge was difficult though. None of these garden owners really felt they were totally sure of what they were really doing, if they were doing things at all and if they could bring themselves to get involved. Sarah said she took 'a couple of years' to be fully ready to bring herself to interact with the garden (Sarah, interview one). Things needed time to root and she needed time to see what she thought of the arrangement - plants needed to bed down stylistically and biologically. Yet, once she had started getting involved, after a while she found a problem with one of her trees:

> 'So I took it to Sion Park (a garden centre). I went with my branch because I couldn't identify this, and this man was off with the fairies somewhere, he was an aged person, but totally off with the fairies, and I showed him my branch anyway, and he then proceeded to talk for half an hour about all sorts of diseases. I said 'But can you tell me exactly what this is?' He said 'Yes, I think it's a scale,' 'Fine what's a scale?' Anyway, he went through it all and he said there's nothing in this country that can treat them because of these EU regulations - I'm aware of that anyway: that so many pesticides have been taken off the market. So off I went no more the wiser other than a scale, and I thought I'd go somewhere else...and anyway we found out it was something called 'fluffy scale' or something. He said, this is terribly interesting, and of course when somebody says that about anything of yours you think: 'Oh yeah – what does that mean?' Then he suggested that I ring Kew Gardens or Wisley to see how to treat it. It was in the book so it was fairly common. So I rang Wisley yesterday and I spoke to a nice chap who said could I describe it. When you see it and you try describing it, it's very difficult. Anyway he identified it, and he said, 'Oh dear it's not terminal but you do need to treat it.' I said 'Fine but it's nearly all over the tree now' and he said, 'I'm not sure what you should do' and I thought 'Oh give me a break!' So he gave me a couple of names of things and it won't kill it but it may...'Sarah, interview two)

Gaining knowledge, confidence and a means of dealing with plants was clearly difficult. Ideally the designer would have labelled the plants or given the client an index of what was in the garden and where - then they could look them up and decide how to behave successfully with them. Designers also sometimes gave short lessons about gardening - but this did not always happen. Correspondingly, the garden was often treated as an overall range of things and interventions were made more or less uniformly across the garden – giving water and the like. The point was, however, was that this was never with a total confidence. They were never totally in charge and sure of their actions.

This returns us again to the wider question of control. Clearly control is difficult, as the above example suggests, since channels of garden knowledge can be, to some degree, both confused and confusing for the newly designed garden owner. Interestingly, for Samantha, a trip to a garden centre would be too much of a stressful thing since she just wouldn't know what to do there or be able to decide what she should actually successfully get. In this she echoes the results of the observational work done at this site and consolidates the analysis that suggested an unease for the contemporary customer. This was part of why she hired a designer and the changing formats of the garden centre, that I have explored, might only accentuate this in terms of gaining a knowledgeable confidence. Controlling the garden is, therefore, problematic. Yet this is not to say that people didn't want to know that their garden was broadly doing what was expected. This made, therefore, for a tricky situation. Clearly they had invested quite a sum in providing themselves with a space in which they imagined they could socialise or onto which they could look down with pride and this was something they wanted to continue having available. Consequently, they commonly picked low-maintenance options but, even if maintenance was low, it was still there - there were still interventions to be made. A designed garden is, by implication, a controlled garden. As I discussed earlier - a focus on control is a corollary to an idea of design. However, the physical elements of the garden were now gradually coming alive and, to an extent, doing something of the unexpected. This leads us to consider how these garden owners would, then, respond.

A garden was clearly, for this group, something that shouldn't be associated with stress – these people were, after all, already hard at work elsewhere. Indeed that was often how they could afford their designed garden in the first place. As such, they didn't feel that they were ever 'working' in their gardens. There should be tasks to do, certainly, but they shouldn't be too many and they shouldn't be too important to the overall continuing aesthetic success of the garden space. The garden, then, should rightfully be what Jessica called 'a small sort of burden' (interview one) - a place where there are things to be done, but if these things do not find themselves done, that is not really a problem. Charlotte, to return to a theme from chapter four, had specific areas in which she could 'play' (interview two). She was a busy woman and, sometimes, she had other priorities on the weekends. Yet she still wanted to have a way of being connected to garden goings on, when she was at home. Sarah had a 'structure,' but certainly didn't want 'it all to be planned for her' (interview two). James, equally, wanted a reason to be out there. He described it as like having a dog, that encouraged him to go for walks - walks which he wouldn't have thought of doing otherwise, but would nonetheless enjoy doing in practice (interview two).

Yet to pursue this metaphor further, this would have been a very patient and self-sufficient sort of dog. James would go outside only when work would allow him to be there - he wanted something to encourage him to be out there, but he certainly wasn't going to come home especially if there was a deal going through, for instance. What was being fostered was a controlled lack of control - a situation where things could be left to do what they will, such that the garden would always look quite good, but where human intervention could still be of benefit. We can relate this to the dilemmas of chapter four here, where designers tried to successfully tread a line between providing a beautiful product and inculcating an enjoyment of garden lives. This type of relationship was one where plants, and their particular characteristics, had a clear role - Charlotte's euphorbia bush, for one, did now not seem to do so well. That they wanted plants to be alive, I think is the argument I am making here. For Kirsten, there is a beauty associated with viewing an attractive landscape - but then there is a different beauty associated with the garden:

Kirsten: It's to see your garden and it's something happening, it's something alive, most of the things in your home don't have life, except human beings, and some of the plants.
Russell: Does that make a big difference to you?
Kirsten: Yes a huge difference. It means that things are changing, there are surprises and it's alive. (Kirsten, interview one)

Not being in control, then, can be the excitement of having a garden. It is through this that you can have enjoyably unexpected encounters, such as these. Notably this is quite a different framework of consideration to that which made Samantha previously enjoy the pristine completeness of her garden. These were small things like seeing a butterfly - Charlotte had seen a butterfly in the garden a few days before our second interview and knew the garden was going on, and liked to think of it doing so (interview two). These were small things like noticing that a flower has come into bloom as being witness to the 'livingness' of these things seemed to take people out of more mundane concerns (Sarah, interview one). They would physically talk in a different sort of way here – they were more relaxed, contemplative, sitting back in their chairs.

Plants are things that these people wanted to be alive. As a result they could get socialised into a different sort of mindset to that which these people are more habituated to within their professional lives. Plants are also it seems special in this respect as garden technologies, by contrast, were treated in quite a different way when they became unruly. James talked at length about his water feature's pump system that was in quite a different register to that associated with the plants surrounding it. This was something to be fixed and just done - a pumping system was a machine and a machine should do what it was told it, or, if not, forced into doing so (interviews one and two). For a good period of our interview we went through his quite determined struggles with this system. Plants, conversely, were expected to do things on their

own. There was a pleasure here to be taken in their alien ness - a pleasure in not quite knowing and not quite controlling.

6.6 BOTH LOSING AND FINDING TIME

So, with plants an enjoyable lack of control has been seen here to develop and I want to interrogate this matter further in the final empirical chapter. For the moment, however, I want to develop my work at this site further within the temporal framework that is becoming significant to this research. So far in this research, I have taken a fairly crude approach to the ways in which time is managed and thought about in the garden. The trends that Juliet Schor (1992, 1998) and others have focused on and which I discussed in chapter two, whilst clearly capturing an important component of the changing structures through which time is managed within modern industrial cities, also miss out other elements. That is to say that even though, in a general sense, people may be spending more on owning things and less time actually being with them, this account also fails to capture the complexities of temporal experience that can be hidden within these aggregate phenomena. In the last chapter we moved closer to these concerns through a focus upon 'waiting' as an emphasis on co-ordination moved us closer to these experiences. Yet we could get closer still. What the substantive chapters have begun suggesting is that it might be good subjectively to wait for things in the garden, but why exactly might this be? To answer this question it is first necessary to challenge some of the assumptions within the temporal research I have been using so far - since this framework buys into a certain notion of the way in which time is experienced and lived with by people.

In this way it is, firstly, problematic in the way it ignores an argument for dealing with the complex 'temporalities' of life. The accounts I have been using so far emerge more from a framework of what Barbara Adam calls 'clock time' thinking, where time is conceived of as a container and a neutral backdrop that provides a uniform rate of change. Such dominance is, she argues, a product of the success of Newton's scientific conceptions. Yet, in physics, this Newtonian framework has now largely been superseded by a relative conception of time and what she argues (Adam, 1995) is that social science should, therefore, to keep pace and explore how this temporal relativity is experienced through practice.

The above account is, secondly, problematic for being associated with an idea of a uniform time experience within societies. In this it can be related to Thompson's (1967) famous article on the evolution of capitalistic time consciousness and the historical diffusion of a 'modern time competence' (Glennie and Thrift, 1996). Thompson here argued that the advent of factory based industrialism restructured business working habits in such a way as to change people's inward

subjective notations of time. Life moved from a 'task orientated' approach, where time was organised according to the need to complete specific tasks, towards 'time discipline', where work was organised around a particular increasingly prevalent device – the clock. Whilst this argument was persuasive, it was also problematic in its assumption of an unproblematic wholesale transition toward a new way of experiencing time (Glennie and Thrift, 1996; Ingold, 1995a). Such notions of specific societal time consciousness (on this see Munn, 1992) have been challenged as lacking in nuance, particularly in terms of capturing variation *within* the experiences of groups (Munn, 1992; Gell, 1992).

From this vantage, time is more of a personally enacted sense and less of a uniform container. People now could perceive change, rates of change, and how our lives are situated within them differently in different instances. That is to say that time may be experienced subjectively, rather that objectively existing as there were now any number of factors involved in constituting temporal experience. Here Adam (1995) suggests that time experience is 'profoundly rooted in context' whilst Albert (2002) emphasises the increasing importance of studying 'temporal diversities.' Such temporally organising devices can include many other things in addition to the clock. Symes (1999) for instance traces the history of the diary as a 'technology of the self' in the way in which its changing structure and design both reflects and constitutes our relations with routine. Shove and Southerton (2000) take the case of the fridge freezer and show how, as a device, embedded within certain infrastractures, the freezer itself can help dictate our routines and the temporal experiences associated with food preparation. Horning et al. (1999) explore and question the ways in which the technology of the computer is complicit in shaping the practices and feelings of time passing whilst using that computer. Different devices, then, help us locate ourselves within different sets of temporal parameter.

More interestingly for my purposes, though, these affective abilities can also be embedded with other types of material things and things we might think of as embodying more 'natural' forces. Within this, it is interesting to think about the ways in which particular plant temperaments take effect upon us. Broadly speaking, as I have argued earlier, such encounters have been largely obscured by an assumed dichotomy between 'natural' and 'social' times, where natural time denotes the rates of change at which nature is supposed to take place and social time signifies the, usually accelerating, pace of human life (see Hofmeister 1997; Macnaghten and Urry, 1998; Adam, 1999; and recently Newton, 2003). That is to say that these two are often positioned as discreet forms of temporal activity. Yet, given my concern for how humans and materials interact, they could also be explored according to how they jostle together in the specificity of certain contexts. We might want to consider the subjective temporalities associated with the

garden to see what results from a close scrutiny of the ways in which those involved can come together and affect each other through time.

Ingold (1993) argues that it can be through the practice of being with some of nature's ambassadors we come to 'dwell' in the world. Drawing on Heidegger he suggests that the ways we view the world is a product of the ways in which we have already always been experiencing that world - thought comes through action. His particular example is the activity of harvesting where, through living within certain of nature's apparent rhythms, we can allow ourselves to connect to such tempos and to reconsider life. As he argues elsewhere (1995b), through dwelling, one set of rhythms can make others follow, as time consciousnesses emerge from actual practice. Potential temporalities, then, can be rooted in the assembly of entities encountered within certain places (see Thrift and May, 2001 and particularly Shaw, 2001). That is to say that there is geography of temporality. Consequently, we might question the temporal experiences associated with the London domestic garden to see how the involved rhythms can work together.

A relevant example here is the work of Heide Inhetveen (1994) who spent several months with some female German farm workers to explore the possibility for an 'aggrarianization of consciousness.' This was the notion that people who worked and lived with 'the land' possessed a positive connection to the rhythms of nature and its 'ecological time.' However, in a similar way to other work by Adam (1997), she found such connections to be less and less in evidence, as the rise of industrial processes made for a rupture between such subjective temporal feelings and the increased speeds that these processes demanded. Yet, Inhetveen does not pessimistically lament this potential loss of 'agrarian consciousness.' Rather, she decided to talk with these women about some other organic relations more close to home might also be taking effect through a potentially positive 'horticulturalization' of time consciousness. In her research, she concluded that it was only in the garden where industrial processes had yet to penetrate. It was only in the garden where her respondents said 'they came around' and, as she puts it, 'found the right sort of tempo' for living their lives.

It is within this context that I want to question again the temporal issues at stake in the London domestic garden and particularly here, the designed domestic garden. Elsewhere, with respect to mountaineering, Schneider (2002) discusses how 'a confluence of agencies' can come together to produce a sense of time within a place and this brings me back to the gradually co-evolving systems of material infrastructure, human practice, and social meaning that Shove (2003) discussed in chapter two. What, then, are the factors and agencies involved in shaping temporal experience here and where are the rhythms of their activity leading the London garden?

A first thing to mention are the ways in which waiting, as an experience, is dealt with by this group. As I have argued, there is sociology to waiting - waiting can be done in a right way and a wrong way. In chapter four we saw how designers can try and structure the waiting associated with plants through some different means. Tim, for instance, used photography to better help people to see how the garden would develop. The photograph here was a technology to telescope time and help people ease themselves into, what was for him, a better way of dealing with plant temporalities. Yet despite such technologies, many of the group that concerns me now had difficulty with this form of temporality- they wanted plants to be done, to be ready.

Sarah, in particular, described how at the beginning, when she first received her designed garden, she would worry about her plants, frequently go outside and check on their development (interview one). She was measuring them and mentally hurrying them along. She even called her designer a couple of times to ask why it hadn't yet done what she was waiting for. However, gradually and over time, she came to find herself more in step with the garden, so that she 'loved' waiting for things and checking up on what was happening. She found that she would block certain amounts of time to be involved with the garden. She enjoyed becoming so immersed in what she was doing that the time would 'just pass'. As she put it,

> you do everything else by time, cook by time, get up in the morning, meet people at certain time. Everything is by time, everything is by the clock and there are very few moments in your life when you can just do things with no thought of time. (Sarah, interview two)

The wonder of the garden for her was now that there were always things to do there and she could just go and spend time with it, engaging with these things and escaping other pressures. It made her feel that she was 'actually doing something' so that her 'sense of time actually reverted back to the way it should be' (interview two).

This was an absorbed coming together of attributes, an escape from other forms of time. Plants were drawing her into a web of quite different concerns associated with soils, temperature changes, seasons, and the like. Other members of this group, although also often recounting a certain initial impatience with their organic partners, talked of 'losing yourself' out there (James, interview one), how 'one thing leads to another and you become engrossed' (Samantha, interview one), how 'your mind just sort of wanders' (Charlotte, interview two) and how it was like 'being in some sort of really amazing dream' (Sarah, interview two). This was, in part, because they were away from the infrastructures that arrange us into alternative rhythms and, in part, because in the garden things happen when they will. Two respondents, for instance, mentioned deliberately taking off watches when they went into the garden in order to be more

fully within this framework – to better escape the more commonplace technologies of routine. Plants now were no longer to be controlled, but rather to be engaged with, wondered at and waited for.

The garden was now an escape from stress and an effective management of time that was taken as an explicit part of London life. A new sort of waiting seemed part of what the garden was to do for these people. They were not scheduling and planning explicitly now, as the garden really didn't seem to fit within the organising structures of clock time. The point of the garden was almost that such scheduling would not make total sense these, as there were any number of different uncontrollable forces at play in deciding when something would flower, how much something would grow. It seemed fair to say here that, for this group, there could be a different sense of time passing and a pleasure derived from the on-going constant continuation of plant temporalities. They seemed less akin to the city professional now and more akin to the Algerian peasant. That is to say they had a similar stoical time consciousness to that of these southern Europeans that Pierre Bourdieu famously studied (1963). In Algeria, he argued, no big plans were hatched and no great projections were made since the indeterminacy of natural processes made people more inclined to embrace and live within this indeterminacy. As such, the garden in London can provide a more relaxing temporal experience, as a different approach to control is structured through this temporality. Once on board with this sort of temporal indeterminacy, the garden can be waited for and waiting, more generally can be understood in a more positive sort of way than the demeaning one in which Schwartz (1975; 1978) framed this matter. Now 'it happens so quickly and five years can be gone in the blink of an eye.' (Debbie, interview two)

> I think gardening for me is probably not a top priority, I would like it to be, its part of the fantasy of not having anything else to do, because it seems almost like a luxury to be able to garden, these always something else which is more sort of essential in life. (Jessica, interview two)

There was a connection associated with slowing down and connecting to the rhythms of plants being evidenced here. However, this particular way of being in the garden that I have been outlining seems under pressure by the more 'essential' things that Jessica alludes to. That is to say that, even though it may exactly be these sorts of experiences and escapes that make the garden experience appealing, the opportunities for having them may, in many ways, be in jeopardy. Different temporalities, after all, jostle against each other in practice and struggle against each other in different contexts. We all feel busy sometime and at other times are more relaxed.

It is here that the range of factors that dictate the potential for particular temporal experiences return to the fore. The possibility for escaping routine is nonetheless encased within routine.

These people are busy people and they correspondingly need, to some extent, a self-sufficient garden. Some are even thinking about hiring gardeners for occasional maintenance work. They also tend to have harder landscaping for reasons that I have discussed earlier. The garden is often mentioned as a 'social space' where a social space is one in which these particular sorts of experiences that I have outlined here become difficult. As Sarah described, if she was talking to people then she was much less likely to connect to the concerns of plants – she was busy and *they* could wait now (Sarah, interview two). They also seem to have less time to acquire the knowledge of how to deal with things out there, even though a partial lack of knowledge can be part of the pleasure. They have books on gardening, just as generally there are many books on gardening these days, but these books here are, to some extent, failed intermediaries. That is to say that these garden owners don't often find themselves with the time to open them. Such a powerful set of conditions encourage, as we have seen, the designer to amplify them further through their choices of things for the garden. They then, with the aid of accomplices like the tree fern and the irrigation system, make the garden a bit more self sufficient, as we saw in chapter four.

What now seemed evident was a difficulty in terms of making room for this stoical, patient and half-controlling temporal experience within the changing conditions that surround the person with the designed garden. Here, I have been documenting a sort of garden gear change where people can slow down, pleasurably put clock time to one side for a period and immerse themselves within a set of plants that have a lively in-built character. However, for these people with busy lives, plant and things in the garden can be slowed down or made to be self-sufficient. Plants that are undemanding can be found that work within their routines and rhythms. Devices such as irrigation can be used to make an engagement on the part of the owner less necessary. As elsewhere in society (see Tsouvalis, 2000) the temporal regimes of managing human and nonhuman forces require adaptive efforts on the part of both groups. Here at least, it seems, for this group, that there could be a movement towards a busier life and a more self-sufficient set of garden companions.

The garden now is a site for occasional 'play' and an occasional engagement with the agencies, control and temporalities that I have been outlining. However, this play more broadly seems to be encased within a set of shifting factors, a potentially shifting organisation of normality (Shove, 2003), that might help preclude any greater closeness than this. Its an impressive achievement on the part of the designer if they can foster the sort of temporal experience that I have been outlining here, when owners can only attend to things on an occasional basis.

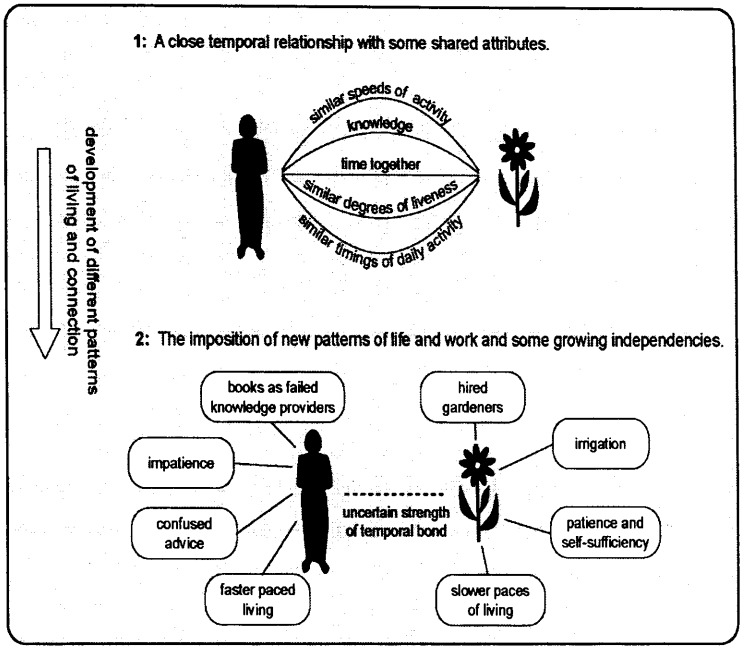

Fig 6.9. A 'confluence of agencies' coming together to produce different temporal connections within the garden (after Schneider, 2002).

6.7 CONCLUSIONS: ON THE CONTRADICTIONS OF LIVING IN A DESIGNED GARDEN

I began this chapter with a discussion of how this particular group of garden owners could state that they really were not, or ever would be such a thing as 'a gardener.' Despite the fact that there might be any number of ways of classifying what a gardener might be, this was something that they apparently resolutely were not. However, it seems to me that it is through this very process of saying that they are not gardeners that they can allow themselves to become something of a gardener. To be a gardener within their framing, I think, is to be someone who knows a lot about plants and who spends a great deal of time within the garden organising things. This is clearly something they are not. Yet, to be a gardener, from another vantage, however, is to be in tune with the, always partially controlled and indefinite, outcomes and rhythms of plant behaviours and this is something which they do experience, at times.

Gardening, then, within one framework, is about controlling and taking charge of how and when things happen in the garden and this is not quite what they did. However, within another, it is about enjoying being involved with a process that you can never fully co-ordinate in the way you might like and this is something that was sometimes involved here. Rather than an exhibition of modesty, rejecting the title of 'gardener' can allow you to get closer to the garden, as the pressure associated with the moniker are sidestepped. Through saying that they are not gardeners, they can better allow themselves to relinquish control and time management in a way that allows them to, at times at least, be more involved with the changing processes involved.

However, such experiences were only possible at limited times for this group and it is here that a temporal contradiction within the designed garden emerges. Despite a common enjoyment of being with plants as a conduit to other rhythms and as a means of subjectively escaping routine and hassle, the infrastructures through which the garden is managed seem to be moving towards certain systems which preclude this. That is to say that, rather than these lives potentially slowing to live more closely alongside a lively set of plants, the systems of organising plants are developing here such that our lives can continue to be busily occupied elsewhere as the garden is pacified and occasionally glanced down upon. The garden is slowing, or at least becoming more self sufficient, so that the people living nearby can accelerate. Issues of style and visual experience, meanwhile, remain significant, not least because the people that are buying these designed gardens seem more confident about operating within such frameworks.

In this chapter I have begun to consider some of the ways in which we deal with plants in terms of practically living with them within private gardens. Whilst they are clearly still evident, we have now begun to move further beyond questions of style, display and exchange to consider something of how we live with and experience actual garden sites. Through so doing, I have deepened the analysis of what it means to be with plants – with respect to control, once again, but also specifically with reference to time and temporal experience. It is true to say that these designed garden owners have had their gardens for a limited time. They have only had them for a few years and, as such, we could argue, are still getting to know them. A more wholehearted shift in their affections towards plants and away from water features could yet take place, although I am unsure of the extent to which these people will have time to effect it. The same, however, might not be said of the final group that I want to discuss. These are the more experienced gardening people that I have researched. Interestingly, the people we have met in this chapter sometimes tended to talk about plants in an aggregate way, rather focusing upon individual specimens, they would talk about 'the plants'. As we will now see, this tendency is not always as evident, as, with some more experienced gardeners, I will now continue to interrogate how issues of life, control and agency are made manifest there.

-7-

Some mysterious animisms for the experienced London gardener

7.1 INTRODUCTIONS

Russell: So, there used to be a lot more grass here, then?
Sandra : Yes, but gradually the plants have sort of moved in upon it all. (Sandra, interview two)

Talking one afternoon with Sandra, a gardener of over eight years, about the development of her garden, we came to the issue of her lawn. Above is her response. Sandra's point here about her plant encroachments is a straightforward one, perhaps, but one which could be analysed in a number of ways. This retreating lawn could be understood as the achievement of a range of driving agencies. It might be a product of the ways in which the plants have grown onto it - they will have got bigger in size as they responded to their surroundings. Then they will have naturally struggled against each other to find more space, light and nutrients and this struggle would have taken them towards the wide-open spaces of the central lawn. That would be one explanation. Another might be because, as Sandra became increasingly involved in the garden, she might have added more and more plants that then gradually came to cover the lawn space - perhaps without even noticing. The retreating lawn then could therefore be seen as something to do with Sandra taking control and adding more specimens to the visual collection she was organising. We can certainly see, for instance, below the prevalence of plants in pots in Sandra's garden and these certainly will not have appeared gradually, as part of nature's course. That would be another account. The retreating lawn could also, finally, be seen as something to do with the plants and the way in which they might have persuaded Sandra to care for them and help them increase in size and significance in the garden. They might have got her to think of them as needing her care so that she provided assistance to these living things. That would be a third account.

This example is suggestive of the range of potential agencies working together in this final set of domestic gardens. In Sandra's case they are working harmoniously together as an evolution towards a more plant-centred garden moves effortlessly on. We might speculate that this gradual progress of plant encroachment in her garden might be a happy combination of all of these factors working productively together. Yet, at other times, these factors do not necessarily

cohere so easily and it is the dynamics between them that I want to highlight here. In this final empirical chapter, then, I want to interrogate the ways in which a group of more experienced gardeners consider their gardens, how plants, as a category of things, fit within these frameworks, and the extent to which the different garden frameworks from previous chapters can also apply here. As I suggested in chapter five, a particular concern that I want to disentangle here is associated with control and how we understand plant 'liveness'. In some senses this chapter serves as a good final empirical resting point as plants are dealt with most actively here. Throughout the empirical chapters presented so far, I have been moving closer to intimate plant relations and, here, I want to consider how they work most fully, before, in the conclusion to this thesis, discussing how the changing agendas of the other three sites might reconfigure these relations. In this chapter, then, I firstly discuss conceptions of agency and how 'life' and 'livingness' can be understood. Then I discuss how I went about research at this site, before interrogating how the attribution of individual 'livingness' is organised by people living within it. Finally, using the anthropological concept of 'captivation', I consider plant liveness as a conduit to wider chains of forces in the world, which serves as a useful point to finish.

Figure 7.1 'Gradually the plants have sort of moved in upon it all': Entanglements of agency and the mystery of the retreating lawn.

7.2 PLANTS, LIVENESS, AGENCY

As the cognitive anthropologist Roy Ellen (1998, p71) suggests 'unlike animals, which are visually autonomous and can wander around as individuals, trees and plants are, like rocks and hills, not simply in the landscape, but of it as well.' There is something, therefore, about the biological properties of plants that makes for an uneasy mixture of collective landscape and independently struggling organism when they present themselves to us. It is difficult to decide whether they are a mass of things composing a bigger visual entity or a range of individuals that we should relate to in their specificity. In this, his argument echoes Hirsch's (1996) idea of the landscape as a 'process' and something that, according to the context, we can be both inside,

dealing with specific components, and also outside, looking upon visually in a more aggregate sense. Ellen, however, is more concerned with how we decide what is 'living' within this landscape and such ideas are useful to me here. The attribution of inherent agency to the entities that surround us, in terms of according them a degree of independent life, is a fascinating area of enquiry. What exactly does it mean to be a 'living' thing? According to Gell (1998), for a particular thing to be seen as an agent in its own right, then it must be seen as initiating causal sequences of a particular type. That is to say that it has to be seen actively to do something to the world because of an intention that it possesses. This can be distinguished from events which are simply part of the endless succession of cause and effect happenings that are better explained by fundamental physical rules of behaviour. Living things do things because they are perceived to want to and not simply because natural or physical laws say that they must.

In this regard plants occupy a challenging position. They can be thought about as causal agents, acting purposively on the world, and also as unthinking ciphers of biological processes, stoically responding to the dictates of natural law. Plants are potentially difficult to categorise with satisfaction in this context and may, accordingly, be interestingly examined. There are many ways of exploring such difficulties but what I want to begin by reinforcing is the way in which these difficulties are differentially negotiated within particular contexts. Philosophers and environmental ethicists have been racking their brains about what might rightfully be called an agent or a sentient being and how we might rightly want to consider them for much time (on this see Paden, 1994; Cloke and Jones, 2004). Meanwhile, people in everyday encounter have to decide all the time where intentional agency should be attributed. We decide in a contextual way whether we want to think of specific things as 'alive' with regard to, for example, computers (Suchman, 1998), foetuses (Casper, 1994) or toys (Thrift, 2003). That is to say that although these are fundamental questions, the ways in which we answer them might depend as much on 'the contexts of social practices' as they do on 'privileged sets of metaphysical principles' (Robinson, 2002, p279).

Generally, within western societies we have traditionally liked to suppose that we only place agency where it rightfully should go: people can confidently suggest they are pretty sure they know what is living and what is not. Partly because of the disciplinary heritage of anthropology, we are inclined to think of 'animism', for instance, as an erroneous belief system located within more primitive societies. In such societies, apparently, things that we feel we surely know to be inert are wrongly attributed a degree of active agency. This has been seen as a specifically religious practice where confused, apparently non-scientific cultures, are overcome by the complexity of the forces they are subject to within their lives. As a result, they retreat into an apparently misplaced worship of specific objects to which they wrongly impute the ability to

render such arrays of forces more beneficent. Stones, for example, might be seen as the containers for natural powers and, if these stones were treated well, then they might wield this power in a kindly way.

Yet the contexts in which physical things can be seen to exert intentional agency are diverse and not necessarily uniformly either present or absent within certain cultural groups. That is to say that animism is not something that is necessarily always present or absent within a supposedly homogeneous society. Gell (1998, p19), for instance, discusses how he, personally, together with many others in Britain, practices a socially acceptable 'vehicular animism.' At times, within his culture, it is common for car owners to attribute a particular personality to their cars. They might be reliable and considerate, for instance, which is partly to do with the particular ways in which they can quietly help us achieve our routine tasks. Doel and Segrott (2004), similarly, discuss how, in alternative therapy, certain physical things such as stones and plant extracts can be seen to exert all sorts of powers over those with whom they come into contact. This is a type of animism more akin to these societies we supposed alien, yet it is evident in the Western city high street, even in the pharmacy. We can now begin to see that the attribution of agency might be manifest in any number of contexts and allocated according to any number of factors. Guthrie (1993), for instance, claims that, far from being the distant practice of other societies, the allocation of a human-like agency to more docile entities is an abiding feature of human cognition. Hardly surprising, he argues, since it is strategically safer initially to impute the highest degree of liveliness to any given encountered object - safer to presume things are alive and be better prepared if they try to bite you, than to assume a seemingly static object is not living and risk being bitten. A degree of animism is, here, a wise safety mechanism when faced with the complex array of entities with which we share the world.

To return now to the 'social lives' (Appadurai, 1986) of botanical things, whilst it is accepted, amongst adults at least, that trees and plants are, at a broad level, 'living' things, there are clearly different ways of dealing with this livingness and different degrees of 'livingness' that can be displayed and accommodated. Indeed this very attribution of 'livingness' is not necessarily guaranteed. In an interesting link to both the temporal ways in which I have been exploring agency in other chapters and the perceived relationship between seeds and types of people evident in the garden centre, Carey (1985) documents how children, at least, might be less than willing to think of trees for example as 'living.' This is for a number of reasons that we can associate with their particular size and gradual ways of behaving.

Like Gell's car then, plants might also possess particular traits that either sustain or challenge our frameworks for thinking about them. Whether things are living or not is something far from

immediately evident. The argument that I am moving towards here is that the attribution of agency in practice might vary according to a number of factors. Therefore it might be productively explored in specific social contexts. Clearly there is some unease when it comes to how we categorise and deal with plants - indeed this has been an issue running throughout this empirical work. In this chapter I now question more fully how agency is revealed, obscured and, more generally, dealt with in some domestic gardens. I am concerned now empirically with a type of garden where some close relationships may have been evolving over a number of years and a group of self-confessed, relatively experienced gardeners.

I want to now investigate a number of different ways in which these gardens work in terms, more specifically, of the person-plant experience. This has been an aim throughout this research, yet it has only been with this particular group of people that the closeness within this particular relationship could be most fully explored. A mixture of physical interaction and social understandings can now partly explain how these gardeners find themselves at home in their gardens. As I have said, a particular concern is with the apparent liveness of the garden and how this is controlled and managed. I should however, first, say something about who I spent time with and how.

7.3 GETTING INTO THE GROWN GARDEN

So what exactly is this thing called a gardener? As we have seen in the previous chapter, such a question can be a difficult one to answer and may depend upon different frameworks of understanding domestic outdoor activities. With this contentiousness in mind I should elaborate on how this particular research group was selected, how a more experienced gardener was defined within this research project, and what I did together with these people. The criteria that I initially took here were simple. I decided I was interested in spending time with people that thought of themselves as 'gardeners' and that had been undertaking an activity that they considered to be 'gardening' for a number of years, which, for ease, I specified as eight. The route I took was through contact with some different Horticultural Societies local to me within North London. Such societies are common in the UK, although as informally based developments they are hard to find data on. They provide a forum for people to discuss informally their gardening issues, organise plant sales, and arrange trips to gardens around the country. Generally they serve as a lively social forum for an often-solitary hobby, or at least a hobby without a specifically human companionship. I spoke initially to people from the Hampstead Horticultural Society and also the Islington Gardeners group.

Interestingly, a first expectation was that I would have some quite specific perameters for the people that I wanted to talk with. They assumed that I would want a specific gender, or a

specific age, or a specific size of garden. People obviously have some clear ideas about what a social scientist might want to do and here they were eager to help me get the right sample. Eventually I persuaded them that I simply wanted volunteers that met my simple criteria. This was sometimes hard since their certain expectations of sampling that seemed to go with an idea that abounded about proper social science research. In order to maintain credibility I, correspondingly, had to make sure I appeared professional in other ways - by being efficient and well organised and clearly explaining my objectives, for example.

Nevertheless, eventually I recruited through such means seven pairs of gardens and gardeners. All except one were female and I should note that that some academics argue that men and women can sometimes find different meanings from both gardening (Bhatti and Church, 2000) and nature more generally (Warren, 1990). However, I was interested nonetheless to explore my concern for plant agency and how it could be made manifest within differing garden agendas with this final group. I was interested to explore with some experienced gardeners how they lived with and considered their gardens in the context of the wider project. Correspondingly in this chapter we will meet Sandra, Diane, Peter, Rose, Joy, Caroline and Sue.

Methodologically, I used similar techniques to those employed in the previous chapter - a mixture of qualitative methods including mobile interviewing, observation, in-depth interviewing and photography. This time this was over the course of three house visits[1]. Once again these methods were complicit in evoking certain aspects in certain ways and these will be revealed as the chapter develops. These interventions made for some interesting outcomes as, for instance, we will see, they sometimes responded differently to the designed garden owner. Mobile interviews in the garden here, for example, tended naturally to take quite a different form. My account now, once again, starts with a determined involvement on the part of the person, before gradually coming to see how the plant can complicate matters.

7.4 A DETERMINED HUMAN INVOLVEMENT

Entering Diane's garden, her aspirations immediately came forward:

> 'We are planning quite a nice patio, it's not quite finished yet though, but that's the type of thing that we need (...) you see I develop things part by part as I need them (...) it all develops' (Diane, interview two)

With Diane, as with these people more generally, the garden initially seemed something to be constantly planned and developed to present it to best advantage. Whilst an informal process,

[1] Although this group, for narrative reasons, is here presented last, in actuality they were researched first. These gardeners were interviewed twice as part of a master's thesis, published as Hitchings (2003), and then later interviewed once again in the light of how this work developed towards a PhD thesis.

there was a definite degree of intent to this - not to concern yourself with the proper arrangement of the garden was to be vulnerable to criticism from other gardeners and, besides, designing was part of the fun. The garden was therefore to be organised and this was to be done according to different aesthetic ideals. Indeed, to consider what they were doing as an artistic enterprise was to use a metaphor not so far removed from their own conception, as an idea of 'composing' the garden emerged throughout my conversations. When, for instance, I asked them about gardening as a creative process, responses were broadly similar to Peter's:

> 'One definitely has a vision of the garden that you desire, and you work towards that (...) it's like imagining a painting and doing it. What you see down there is (...) a rough version of the image that I have of the garden that I want' (Peter, interview one)

As such, Peter, in a similar way to the owners of chapter six, had an idea that his garden should be photographed in a particular sort of landscape format as a way of best displaying the painting he had imagined. Or at least, this was how he knew that people might expect to photograph a garden since, as we will see, his own photography developed in some different ways. It's below. These people, then, were planning and designing their gardens according to their particular tastes and, initially it seemed at least, with an apparent ease. The garden here seemed to be an inert space upon which their aesthetic sensibilities were laid down and, at this point, there was little space for plant agencies within the associated talk that took place.

Figure 7.2 'Its like imagining a painting and then doing it': Peter's garden landscape vision.

However, whilst they initially downplayed the physical strategies adopted in maintaining these achievements, these nonetheless gradually came to the fore. Interestingly, their determined involvements were not things that they thought that I would be interested in. Once again here, design and style seemed to be a better and more comfortable register for conversation. Yet I was determined to persevere with a concern for mundane encounters and interactions and this was,

in part, better revealed through our garden tours. I was interested in exploring with them their practical activities in achieving these ends. Indeed, such activities were certainly determined and there were a number of specific processes by which they could find themselves successfully *planning* and *designing* and also a number of techniques involved.

A first was through a diligent and determined interaction with the garden itself. Whilst the garden was often, here, conceived of as an aesthetic object and a social expression of good taste, this in no way negated the actual personal physical labour involved in its creation as such. Regular monitoring of what was happening in the garden and what 'needed to be done', was commonplace. This was almost a pleasurable activity in itself as it was part of creating the garden 'design.' The perfection of this design seemed almost to obscure the hard physical labour in some cases – it was a means to an end and a means of moving in an almost unthinking, pre-discursive way towards a more attractive form of visual experience. You could see small things in the garden that needed to be done - then you just did them. Whilst the people in the garden centre, for example, often didn't know what to do with themselves physically there, this group had much more of a familiar embodied interaction with plants and so just got on with things, without necessarily having much to say about how they did so. On walks around the garden, they would often simply begin doing things - deadheading or tying something back. Then, when I asked them what they were doing, sometimes they were not even quite sure –it was not quite part of their discursive consciousness (Giddens, 1984).

> 'I find it very difficult to actually sit there. Because you sit there and you think 'now what's that yellow thing in the middle' (...) And then you suddenly think 'it would be much nicer if I just did such and such' and so you start to just move things round, or cut things off, or (...)'. (Rose, interview one)

Another technique came through mobilising specific gardening knowledges. For the garden to be an inert individual expression, the right materials and the most appropriate plants had to be selected. From this process came the notion of getting 'value' from plants. Value meant that a plant might flower for longer periods or provide the gardener with a desired colour, texture, or shape. Value also meant an easier means of creating a garden they were visually happy with for longer periods. Flower successions could be staged so that aesthetic value could be maintained throughout the year; ground cover would be promoted so the emergence of weeds, and thus weeding, would be minimised. These people were using their knowledge here through the use of specific devices that allowed them to control their plants. They were now tactically co-ordinating allies to achieve more visual aims:

> 'You see if it gets dry and you just water it (...) then the next day it's all drunk by all the big trees! But if you have the watering system and you have it on at certain times - it waters enough - and they all grow!' (Diane, interview one)

The watering system thus made it easier for Diane to make the garden do what she wanted. Through such techniques and other tools, such as slug pellets, gel crystals and fertilisers, the gardeners were able to organise their plants into their aesthetic compositions, so that the plants simply 'all grow' in an apparent effortlessness that belies a range of determined activities. Whilst they are certainly involved, this is not to sat that they didn't want to make things easier. So the fears that the designer Jenny expressed in chapter four about the sprinkler irrigation system and how it might lead to less pleasurable human involvement might not necessarily be the case, although I think that Diane might be unusual in this regard.

Such were the means by which the seemingly effortless design and planning could be carried out and a specific idea of the plants in the garden could take shape. Diane used her knowledge in such a way that specific plants became no more than component parts of her design:

> 'Otherwise, well, the whole garden is all right. You see, as I said, it has got its bones there and the skeleton, and the spaces that are left' (Diane, interview two)

Plants, at times, therefore, became a passive 'skeleton', providing the structure to this design. From this vantage, they were all treated with a uniform, determined will and the garden was the garden, in that it was an aggregate canvas just as it seemed initially to be in the last chapter. These were the means by which an artistic metaphor for gardening flourished and the means that allowed people to discuss the garden as 'a lovely medium to work in' and the act of gardening as 'something like painting.' The garden, here, was organised into something like a docile landscape upon which the creative stories of the gardeners were written (Duncan, 1990). The garden was to be easily furnished and organised now and the 'grass carpet' of the garden could be conceptually thought of as akin to the 'woollen carpet' of the house where design and layout was once more about personal expression and style that Chevalier discussed (Chevalier, 1998). This was a style expressed through plants primarily, however, and interestingly not the hard materials that were happier to help in previous sites. These landscapes might very well be visual means of expressing certain cultural ideals and aspirations (Cosgrove and Daniels, 1988) as they were strategically managed and organised so as to produce a specific type of aggregate display. Individual properties and concerns for certain plants were put to one side as they were manipulated to achieve desired pictorial and visual ends. To return then to the arguments of Hirsch (1995) and Ellen (1998), although these people, more than those of chapter six, were determinedly involved and active in the garden, they were nonetheless involved in such a way as to allow a pleasurable remove and a visual experience. They would work hard so that they could stand back and view things, just as an artist would momentarily step away from the painting and admire his work. The plants of the garden were, here, the embodiment of the

physical processes they were to master to achieve such ends, rather than more wilful living things.

However, whist these gardeners were certainly exerting some sort of control, there were also keen to emphasise that this was only one part of the activity. This was often felt to be an increasingly evident framework in which to think about gardens by this group and, from the previous empirical chapters, I would tend to agree with them. They thought that people were more and more thinking solely in a way where the garden was to be organised so as to achieve efficiently fixed and visual ends. As we have seen, they did do so themselves to a degree, but they were also certainly unsure about it. If things were solely about conveying style and messages of taste, then we might have expected harder landscaping to be more evident than it was here, in the same way as this was increasingly evident in other sites. Yet, although many of this group wanted the garden to look a certain way, they also wanted to be closely involved with making it so. But why would this be? Things were certainly not about achieving ends as easily as possible – they liked gardening after all. But why?

> 'Yeah they just want to get it all sorted, they want a visual thing, and really they are the ones that aren't really bothered...and its sort of like having a child isn't it., saying mmm, well no, I want a toddler really, I don't what this sort of baby. Can I have a toddler then? And they suffer a lot from that I think and they miss things half the time. It's weird because they are just not watching the ways that things are growing really and the ways they are growing up.' (Sandra, interview two)

As Sandra suggests here, in her disdain for more instant approaches to plants, there was another account of the process to be written. This would suggest that gardeners were not always so determined and strategic. Making a certain sort of aesthetic landscape was certainly an element that they were, to a degree, concerned with, but it was less than the most important one. Others emerged more forcefully when we talked about individual plants. Sandra's thoughts, here on buying more mature specimens, seem relevant here, as to not be involved closely with the specific plant almost warrants condemnation for bad parenting.

In this section we could argue that the social scientists of chapter three might very well be right in suggesting that the garden might really be about social relationships. The garden here might be a passive conduit to other people in terms of display and communicating the certain aesthetic sensibilities of the garden owner to others. It seems from this vantage that the gardener was certainly working hard to support the perceived correct visual display. Then when friends came around they could admire their taste and creativity accordingly. Yet I have become convinced that, for this group at least, this is not the central part of the process. An important part, I think, but not the central one.

Interestingly, although they were very concerned with correct display, their gardens were also to be very private places and, although materials can serve as reminders to their owners of how they, more privately want to perceive themselves (see, for instance, Marcoux, 2001), I think that relations are more clearly in evidence between people and plants. These are plants in their own right, not as social conduits. Conduits perhaps, but not so specifically social ones, as I will elaborate. This is not least because of the eagerness with which this group wanted to disassociate themselves from being fully committed to creating a certain full aesthetic vision but also because the garden was, for them, often an intensely private place, that they often wanted to keep separate from neighbours and even friends. This was a retreat from people and an encounter with some other sorts of companion, which, as I will explore, explains something of Caroline's different type of pleasure:

Russell: You said it's not really a beautiful garden as such...
Caroline: It's not in design terms, well it isn't designed, but it is actually practical from my point of view because I have the things I want. I have to say my garden does give me an awful lot of pleasure, and whilst if I look at other peoples beautifully designed gardens, this is a mess, particularly at the moment. But against that it gives me huge pleasure. (Caroline, interview two)

7.5 GROWING TO LOVE SOME PLANT PERSONALITIES

Whilst the humans of the garden in the previous section wanted then to have things ordered and organised into attractive landscapes, the plants which lived there with them had other concerns. They had to persuade the humans to let them stay certainly, but they also had other needs - light, water, nutrients, and the prevention of pest attack, for instance. They wanted to survive in the garden and different sorts of plants had different ideas about how to do this and to manage the things around them in achieving these ends. In the last chapter, and so far in this, the garden was treated as an aggregate experience. Now I want to interrogate these spaces from the vantage of the plants themselves and see how these gardeners came to deal with what Latour (2004) calls 'the parliament of things' and the diversity of wilful other creatures we can, at certain times, recognise as evidently and actively there.

Conifers, cordylines, and the buxus that we met earlier, for example, adopt a fairly stoical stance. They cut back on their care requirements and grow in a gradual and, steady manner. This is what they had been used to in the places they had came from, such as the steep stony slopes that *Pinus mugo* ably colonised in central Europe (Rushford, 1999). Such skills also, to an extent at least, also serve them well in the gardened domestic gardens of London as they made for a particular approach to managing people. These plants would ably help with the described aim of creating an attractive cultural landscape with a minimal degree of effort. They could be

planted and then ignored as part of the 'bones' or the 'skeleton' of the garden that made up its structure and the building blocks of a cultural expression. They seemed necessary in some cases but they didn't elicit much affection from the humans:

> 'I will never ever, ever have conifers. Because they are so dull and heavy (...) in their natural habitat, yes, but not in gardens. It's nice to have sort of backbone structural plants that are there all year but (...) it's also nice to have the fun ones, you know.' (Sandra, interview one)

Figure 7.3. Plants as 'a bit of a waste': the stoical *Pinus Mugo*.

Ironically, given that plants with these more fixed material culture attributes have been considered by other groups in previous chapters as exactly those that might best allow them to express their design ideas and enjoy the garden, here the very opposite was often the case. It was this particular category of slowly behaving, more architectural specimen that made the whole thing 'a bit of a waste' for Diane (interview one). Here she seemed to be echoing a similar sentiment to that of Charlotte, who found herself in the last chapter a little bored by her large structural euphorbia and eager for a closer kind of relationship. I asked Peter about being creative in the garden. My assumption was that he would talk about his own personal creativity as almost everyone else had done in terms of providing a vehicle for him to express himself visually and stylistically. Yet his response was about gradual creativity and working with plants in terms of helping them build themselves up and behaving in interesting ways over time. Clearly he was circumspect about the pleasure of getting immediate effects, whilst achieving specifically visual aims was not so significant here:

> Russell: So what does having a garden give you in any sense?
> Peter: well it is to a certain extent a creative thing, one is building up what one has been given over a period of time. It's creative. Most people feel that the bamboos and the palms are a creation of the people, with all these popular and stylish things of the moment, they feel that they have created something that they have thought about or that someone has thought about...but that is essentially a very simple way of creating something, that way, don't you think?

Bedding plants were also treated with a degree of indifference because, like the more docile conifer and cordyline, they were simply too easily marshalled into a desired artistic effect. Like

the cordylines, for Peter, with these he could not be sure or did not feel that these were really even true plants (interview one). These were just 'too artificial and too temporary' (Peter, interview two) when seeing things develop and change was emerging as something that was more part of the pleasure, 'more part of it' (Sandra, interview two). Joy had a space left in her garden and she, like the others, didn't really like to have any wasted space. So she made a decision this year to put in some bedding plants quickly. But this was to be unsuccessful:

> 'Well these are the plants that I don't think that I am going to put in again. They look too out of place. It's also funny because these are the similar to those ones. But they just look too neat…I just think that I like them to be more wild' (Joy, interview three)

The problem with these bedding plants was that they were too temporary and ephemeral. The conifer and cordyline, meanwhile, were too long lasting and doggedly there. As in the last chapter, there were different degrees of temporal co-ordination to be managed here. These gardeners needed time to get to know and feel affection for plants, as typified by Peter's disdain for instant make-overs, yet they didn't want to be bored by them. Plants could do better by gradually eliciting the gardener's affection through a period of time and a degree of liveness.

Figure 7.4. Joy's unsuccessfully temporary bedding plants that too easily gave an immediate visual display.

There were clearly, then, certain attributes that made for a stronger attachment on the part of the garden owner to specific plants. A plant could make itself desirable and the gardener loyal through a number of different routes. One was by being 'fun' and this was, firstly, associated with the individual aesthetic attractiveness of the plant itself, over and above its contribution to any wider artistic composition. Sue talked about how she simply 'couldn't let her hostas go' - these architectural forms that were emerging from the earth around her were simply too attractive. However, this was not simply a question of letting them stay. Despite the ways in which these garden owners were often reluctant to discuss their mundane labour and care, this involved hard work. Hostas are prone to slug and snail attack. It is essential to protect them from these predators at all stages of their growth. When we walked around the garden beds she told me how she 'would get up in the mornings and go around first thing, sometimes even in my

nightie to get rid of all the little beggars' (Sue, interview one). The pleasure of the variegated foliage of the *Hosta fortunei* and the way in which the leaves push through the ground and gradually unfurl before her was enough to enlist Sue into such a daily routine. In an interesting link back to the garden centres, here, it was ironically, and perhaps understandably, the very specimens, which were then passed over as uninspiring buckets of earth that, could now inspire such active concern.

Figure 7.5. The *hosta fortunei* which once was a dull bucket of earth, but now exhibits some fascinating forms that Sue, for example, is committed to caring for.

A higher risk plant strategy was to take a more lively and opportunistic approach to survival. Some types of clematis, for example, take a more vigorous approach to capitalising on summer conditions of long days of sunlight and warmth, as a means to achieve flowering. Whilst it would clearly be in their interests to offer up their flowers for aesthetic human consumption in the most attractive way possible, they had some other pressing concerns. Concerns like getting as much light as possible in the often walled, overcast gardens of London. This desire would make plants like the *Clematis montana* 'shoot up' such walls to get as much light as possible. For some gardeners this was problematic and they would have to be 'hacked back' annually. Indeed more generally and aesthetically gardeners are advised to control these wayward and sudden summer spurts to prevent 'a tangle of stems, well above eye level' (Fearnley-Whittingstall, 1997). Yet this dogged determination could also be disarming. These gardeners found it comical that they would go out after a few days and find such summer climbers falling all over themselves in a quest for light. These plants were endearing in the way in which they would make such vigorous bids for sun, over and above the range of large flowers that would hopefully also result from such endeavours.

Another approach could be related to a more studied plant indifference. These gardeners described how, with the passing of time, they knew more and more about plant varieties. This

knowledge then made for a certain attraction to the unusual. As such, unusual plants could capitalise upon this and make greater demands upon their human companions.

> 'there are times when you get tired, and times when my knees feel stiff or whatever, but you know what's coming as a result of it, so it's (...) there's a sort of anticipation in thinking, well, is it going to come, is it going to grow?' (Sue, interview two)

Rose had persevered with a certain type of lily for over two years. The fact that it has defeated her for such a time made for a determination to keep persevering. I was lucky enough to be there at the time in which the lily had finally decided to open up its flowers.

> 'Oh, but did you see my martagon? Excitement! Excitement! Um I had some martagon lilies in a pot and they never did anything except produce some greenery, and then I said to the lily man at Westminster one day 'I've got these martagon lilies, and they don't flower' and he said 'where have you got them?' and I said in a pot, and he said that that's no good they don't like hot feet, so I put them in (...) and look...a flowering martagon lily! (...) I put it in a little while ago, um, and I thought that it wasn't going to open up for me before I went away (...) but its just opened up, and look (...) isn't it pretty?' (Rose, interview two)

Through such means the attributes and techniques of plants would make for a differential success in different gardens. It was also the case that, through these different strategies, the gardener would be drawn into the garden and the activities that were taking place around her there. The garden was now 'totally alive', 'another world' in which to escape and spend time with these endearing plant companions. Crucially, here these plants were particularly lively ones and, to echo the concerns of the last chapter, it was only through displaying such life at the right sorts of tempos that the humans could best be brought into these relations. Then, when they were there, they could exert a real ethic of care with respect to certain garden companions and these were often the frail ones like Rose's martagon lily and 'the pretty ones' that are often also the delicate ones (Sue, interview two). Peter certainly had a commitment to seeing how best he could help his agapanthus along in life.

Russell: What's that big blue one?
Peter: Yes, that's an agapanthus. That's not very hardy. So I have to wrap it up in the bubble wrap in the winter, because it will just about make it through then because we are in London. It wouldn't if we were out in the country.
Russell: So how do you go about wrapping that up in the bubble wrap then?
Peter: Well its in a pot, you see, so you just wrap it around really. And then it can be all right, but that one is a special one and that's why that one gets that. (Peter, interview three)

Indeed, Peter told me with a laugh how there was almost 'not a single leaf unaccounted for' in his garden. Yet, this accounting was not now a result of the exacting nature of design intent and its rigorous implementation. Rather, he monitored the welfare of his particular plants in a way

that he likened to petkeeping as we return to a concern for them in their specific liveliness that was alluded to by Sandra when she earlier talked of plants as though they were children.

Peter: I think its almost like keeping dogs (...) you know, they are one's familiars.
Russell: Yes?
Peter: Oh yes, definitely. You know one needs to water them and feed them and to protect them from the greenfly and the snails (...) and, oh yes, yes its definitely a child-substitute in some ways.

Figure 7.6 Peter's Agapanthus that gets a 'special kind' of care because of its frailty.

He also talked about caring for things as 'a fundamental human need'. Yet what was also the case with that the garden also embodied an on-going organic process. Whilst the people I spoke with were certainly determined and hardworking in taking care of these plants, what was also the case was that if a plant did die it would leave an opportunity for another plant to try its luck and live, with their help, in that garden space. So whilst certain plants get special care this would have to stop at some point, since, in due course, there would be others to care for, as these different plant personalities came and went. What was evident was how these different plant 'characters' would gradually draw the person down into their world, and make for an understanding of their concerns and a commitment to their care. This was not a total knowledge, as we will come to, but an eagerness to help them along and to be involved with their activities:

Russell: But, on occasion, sometimes you take a chance?
Caroline: You take a chance and go for it, and really, I know I shouldn't have put the Maclea in there and I know I ought to take it out because it's going to ruin the peony that's there, so I've put a little shrub in there that will not be happy unless I get rid of that, so I need to do a bit of hoiking out. It's going to have to go even though I don't want it to go (squirms), but it's going to have to so that the other one can grow. (Caroline, interview three)

So this was less now of a performance of exacting intervention and more to do with helping things along. If the garden, then, correspondingly didn't quite match their desired aesthetic vision, then this was to matter less than the fact that they had helped some specific plants grow. This was more about care and involvement, less about control and detachment.

This commitment seemed to take shape most forcefully in the ways in which a couple of gardeners here had used photography themselves, before I got there myself with my own kit. As we saw in chapter six, with the new garden owners there seemed to be a sense in which a photograph *in* the garden was often explicitly to be reframed as a photograph *of* the garden. Now this was also often repeated with the experienced gardeners when I initially asked them what sorts of things I should take a photo of. Yet, a number of these gardeners had albums of garden photos they had taken already themselves and these often adopted a different format. Here they often had photos of particular plants that had done well for them - plants that were attractive and that they had helped to really thrive. What I came to think was that these collections most resembled was a family album as their intimate relationships with specific living plants were better exposed.

Figure 7. 7. Plants they have been particularly proud of: a family album of past plant companions.

7.6 MAKING THE HYBRID GARDENER

What I have developed so far here in this chapter's empirical work are two emergent accounts of the garden – one which privileged design control and social communication and another which focused upon how plant liveness and dynamism can affect and incite care from its owner. In making sense of these contrasting accounts they can, I think, usefully be understood within a 'relational' approach to the materials of the world (see Law, 1997). Here, the ways that different entities are understood is a product of the relationships in which they are located and these relationships are, in turn, evolving as an outcome of the agency of the things involved within them. These relationships and, consequently, the status of the entities within them are therefore 'performed' (Law and Singleton, 2000). Performance is not easy, however, as successful performances depend upon denying other performances and, in this way, performance is connected to the idea of 'enrolment' – an idea that captures the ways in which some entities exert power over others so that their own desired performance can take place. It was through

these insights that I came to understand what was happening so far in these gardened gardens of London.

When I first started thinking about the determined creativity of the people, what was evident was the power they exhibited in their own performance. They used a variety of means to enrol the plant actors of the garden. They were able to work vigorously in the garden, whilst symbolically denying that this was the case. Through such means the garden could become a feat of their own creative expression and these people could perform themselves into the status of a garden designer. This also made for a particular view of the plants themselves. If we think relationally, and remembering Ellen's (1998) argument that plants are not necessarily always plants, attention is drawn to how they have to work to be considered as an active entity rather than rest on the laurels of actual physical properties. This may be particularly the case when, as has emerged throughout this empirical work, we are more habituated and familiar when we assume that the materials around us are malleable and docile. In this first account, plants were unsuccessful - the plants were there all right but, within these gardeners' symbolic conceptions, their materiality and agency was of a limited concern. This was what Latour (1993) would call a 'purified' garden space, where cultural expression was achieved through the determined symbolic denial of more active and mundane physical exertions.

Through beginning with plant concerns, however, a different picture began to emerge. The plants now displayed their individual liveliness, beauty and unpredictability and performed themselves into existence as discrete entities, such that they became almost considered as similar to people. And this was something that the gardeners enjoyed. They enjoyed their enrolment as happy stagehands, not lead actors, waiting for and coaxing out different personal plant performances. So it was equally through an active enrolment by plants themselves that the status of these gardeners could be understood. The gardener now pictured herself as the contented 'plantsperson' working with a lively and dynamic set of nonhuman companions. A direct involvement with active plant needs now constructed a person committed to their care. Here was a more direct and intimate hybrid mixing of forces and capacities (Whatmore, 2002).

What was evident, then, was the shifting and unstable locus of power within this relationship. The status of the garden and the gardener were not fixed. They were constantly shifting between the enroller and the enrolled, the performer and the stagehand. Plants shifted in and out of being; the gardener oscillated between a designer and a plantsperson. There was a range of entangled agencies here that were beginning to start explaining phenomena such as Sandra's retreating lawn. Some were more deliberate in the execution of their plans; others were happier to let

things take their course. Some became very determined in what they were doing; others found it heartbreaking to kill things off.

This ambivalent instability was evident in a particular methodological way. Talks inside the house often elicited quite different discussions than would walks around the garden. In practice they seemed to think that the researcher wanted deeper social meanings, not mundane plant interactions. Such interactions seemed to be the last thing that a social researcher might be interested in and, in the house at least, it was difficult to steer conversations toward them. In the garden, however, a different relationship emerged and the nature of their relationship with plants was more clearly enacted. Interestingly, within the house, keen gardeners seemed eager to emphasise that ultimately the plants really had to 'just get on with it'. With just a distance of metres between the living room and the garden, they achieved a symbolic distance that stood them apart as they reflected how, ultimately, they were having little impact on the plant's struggle for survival there. It was there that their effective commitments to individual plants and their degree of care and affection would come to the fore, even though, with just a short spatial movement they could also achieve a more detached emotional stance.

Peter, interestingly, within his living room at least, emphasised how he was just a small part of the garden and how nature would just really ultimately take its course. Yet once outside he recounted with gusto how he used a water cannon from Woolworth's to wait in ambush for the squirrels that had been attacking certain specimens. This was a striking contradiction of opinion that suggested how, with the minor shift in research context, the garden could be both a distanced landscape and also a closely protected collection of living plants. In part, of course, it was also evident in the range of different activities that had left their traces there and hard to deny when faced with a rack of seedlings.

Figure 7.8. Evidence of active involvement in the garden where plants apparently 'just had to get on with it': cuttings, watering cans and fertilisers in Peter's garden.

The unstable power within this relationship was equally evident in a conversation with Rose when we talked about two flower shows she had visited recently. Between these the critical

difference was that at one you could buy things and at the other there were a series of display gardens:

> 'Well, I do still like Chelsea very much, I know it's crowded (...) but it's such perfection. And Hampton Court is not as perfect and (...) I know that it may sound stupid, but in way I find the fact that you can buy plants at Hampton Court, a distraction. I am so busy looking at what I can potentially buy that I don't look at the stands properly' (Rose, interview one)

Her appreciation of these different events depended on a single part of their organisation: the fact that you could buy plants at one show and not another. So it was that a small thing completely influenced the way these gardens were viewed. At Chelsea, Rose would be thinking about artistic expression and how she could potentially enrol her garden to recreate such effects. Here she was the designer thinking of plants as paint. At Hampton Court, however, the beauty of individual plants came to the fore, together with how they might enrol her. Now she was the plantsperson falling in love with particular specimens.

This quote, therefore, links out to a range of concerns that have been evidenced throughout this research. It suggest well how certain structures of purchase, discussion and experience can go about dictating how we might feel or consider plants – how certain ethics are rooted in particular places and our particular practices of inhabiting them. As with Gow's Amazonian example in chapter one (1996), here Rose can quite easily slip between being sometimes inside, and sometimes outside, the landscape. What this effortless change of registers also suggests, of course, is the potential ease with which structuring practices, like those I explored in the studio and centre, might be able to reconfigure how we think a garden should rightly be considered and lived with. If Rose can flip between different frameworks, like the customers in the garden centre could, then the routes, such as those I have uncovered, along which people are channelled take on a particular import.

Such shifting enactments of power, performance, people and plants at this site are represented in figure 1. I found myself agreeing with Latour's suggestion that 'humans and nonhumans take on form by redistributing the competencies and performances of the multitudes of actors that they hold onto and that hold onto them' (1996:225). The status of both the gardener and the plant was, therefore, something that was decided collectively - the outcome of a variety of properties and motivations. The place of the garden within their lives sat in a precarious balance where the agency of different sorts of thing was of variable significance. This was a 'relational materialism' (Goodman, 2001) in action, within which these gardeners were unsure of how determinedly to act. They were unsure about the irrigation system, for instance. As I have enumerated, this was a device that could help the gardeners perform the garden more easily into

a cultural landscape and also a device which we saw, in chapter four, being accorded an increasing importance. However, it was also something they were uneasy about since, once installed, it might make for a diminished human engagement with the living garden and a loss of the particular pleasures associated with this.

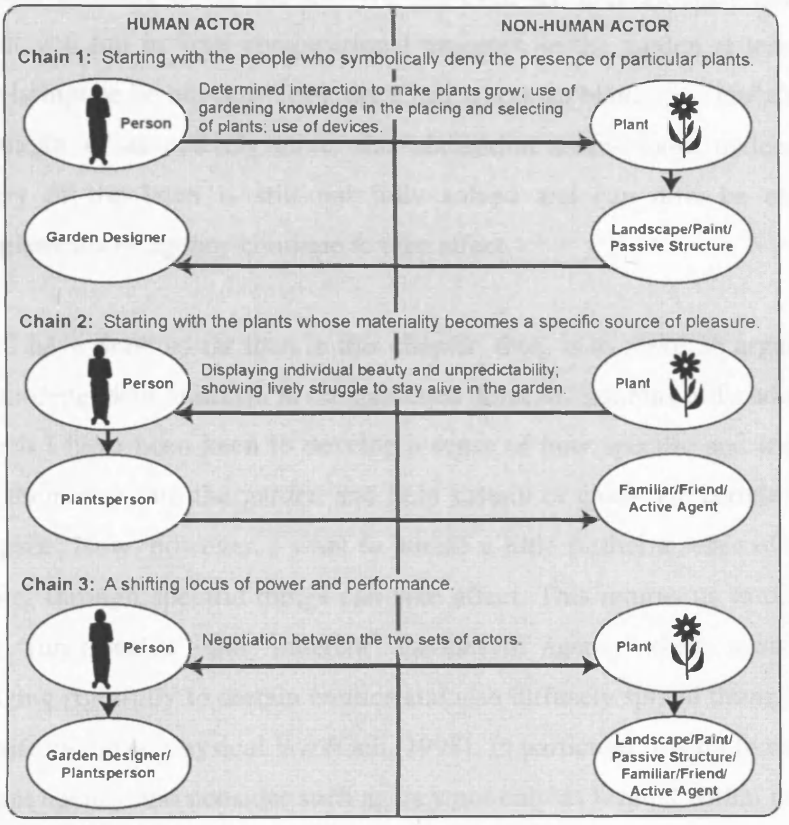

Figure 7. 9. Making the hybrid gardener: chains of enrolment in the garden.

What I have been documenting is a performative animism where the importance of context, for which I made an argument at the beginning of the chapter, seems evident. Just as Guthrie (1993) suggested that we instinctively think that it might be best to wait and see what something does before assigning wilful agency to it, so it might be the same for the researcher, as volatile animistic framings in the garden can both exist and not exist within specific gardens and specific individuals (on this argument see Laurier and Philo, 1999). Furthermore, it might also be wise for the gardener also to follow Guthrie's 'wait and see' advice with respect to according life and livingness. The gardener has to wait and see if there is time to make the garden into a collection of living and needy things since, once something has been accorded the status of life, then an ethic of care can follow when the physical practice of care can require much work. Just as it was with the garden owners in the previous chapter that found themselves struggling with different temporal frameworks of experiencing the garden, so these issues are also evident here as the potential for garden animisms is in part dictated by the circumstances and leisure of the garden owner and the time she has for attributing them.

So, to return to the mystery with which I began this discussion of liveness and agency in the garden, it may very well be these entanglements of agency, such as those evident around Sandra's retreating lawn, that now begin to explain something of how the activity is enjoyable. It is the mixture of being in control and being out of control that, so far here, makes for the particular pleasure of the garden. We can even see it as an entry point into being 'creative', since if you fail in your compositional attempts, in the garden at least there are always other active beings to be blamed. They say a bad workman blames his tools but, when these tools can be thought of as actively alive, this abdication seems more understandable. However, the mystery of the lawn is still not fully solved and can now be explored further as these entanglements of agency continue to take affect.

What I have done so far then in this chapter, then, is to make an argument for a performative, context-dependent animism in the gardened domestic gardens of London. So far throughout this research I have been keen to develop a sense of how specific and locatable material agencies work their way into the garden and help sustain or challenge certain ways of comprehending this space. Now, however, I want to pursue a little further a sense of how more diffuse forces working through specific things can take affect. This returns us to the philosophical dilemma about 'functionalist' and 'inherent' theories of agency where agency can be seen as both belonging rightfully to certain entities and also diffusely spread through these entities as part of a manifestation of physical law (Gell, 1998). In particular, I want to extend this chapter's work on plant agency and consider such agency not only as located within individual entities but also in the sense that the plant may link us to wider biophysical happenings. In this way, I am now interested in how the plant can symbolically and practically serve as conduit between people and some chains of, sometimes elusive, worldly processes.

7.7 How that gardener becomes captivated

In a recent comparative consideration of the role of art, Gell (1999) argues that artworks serve as a conduit between people or, at least, that this is how the anthropologist should study them. That is to say that, rather that working with notions of style, aesthetics or art movements in a more general sense, to generate a sense of how art functions in *practice*, we should look at how it goes about sustaining particular relationships between specific human individuals. Such is his broad argument and it is an innovative one in its determined 'foregrouding of process' (Thomas, 2001, p2) and a concern for how artworks practically work within particular contexts. An artwork, he argues, can mediate as an index between any number of people. These are people such as the artist, the person funding the artist, the viewer, or other artists. It is in this way that the artwork, therefore, serves to sustain or challenge different social relations.

So far so good, but what he also argues is that, in practice, it is not always so easy for us to discern the causal relationships embedded in the artefact. The range of potential ways of tracing the agency channelled through the artwork can sometimes become too difficult to deal with all at once. The sophistication and artistry of the piece of work can, at times, be such that the viewer can become stuck, left in awe and unable to attribute the work to any particular set of causal relations between people. As he puts it 'the spectator becomes trapped within the index of the art work because of its virtuosity' (Gell, 1999. p71). The brilliance of the artist lies here in the ability to achieve what he terms a state of 'captivation' where the viewer becomes unable to do anything but marvel at an artwork that is almost impossible to locate within a decipherable pattern of agential forces - we cannot quite figure out where the artwork could have come from and, consequently, it becomes unworldly in this unfathomableness. Captivation, then, can be rewritten as a pleasurable incomprehension of the forces embedded within a specific artwork on its presentation to a person. The viewer just cannot figure out who authored the piece and where it might rightfully originate - it is simply too complicated and impressive to understand in these terms.

Figure 7.10. A Celtic cross with intricate designs that might beguile malevolent daemons into confused states of stupefaction.

One example he explores is a painting by Vermeer which he finds personally captivating in his inability to imagine himself being able to reproduce such a work of skill. A second example relates to the Celtic knot and cross designs that are traditionally common in Ireland and Scotland. These, once again, served as a means of hopefully captivating the spectator, but in this case to alternative ends. Here, for example, the role of these designs was originally one of protecting the people living behind the doors on which they are inscribed. People were fearful of evil forces and daemons and here, it was hoped, the complexity of the designs would be such that any malevolent agent coming across them would be stupefied into forgetting any original aggressive intent. The adversary might not be able to figure out how the design (such as that above) came into being and, so, become pleasurably confused.

A third example that he develops in most detail, however, relates to the canoe prow-boards of the Trobriand islanders of the south western pacific (Gell, 1992). These, he argues, are 'psychological weapons' in the context of overseas Kula exchanges. As the Trobrianders paddle in to meet the residents of other islands and to, hopefully, conduct business, the first thing that their hosts see are these canoe prows which have been minutely and ornately carved and painted. Indeed, they have been made with such a degree of craftsmanship that these prows will be, so the Trobrianders hope, unlike anything their hosts will have ever seen before. Their temporary hosts might, then, also find themselves 'captivated', distracted and consequently unable to drive hard bargains. The Trobriand Islanders might, then, find themselves in a better position to trick their neighbours and be the clear winners in ritual exchange. These boards, depicted below, would confuse the welcoming islanders, ideally dazzling, confusing and beguiling them to surrender their valuable Kula shells for less than their value.

Figure 7.11. Example of a Trobriand Islander prowboard that beguiles the spectator in the virtuosity of its design.

My argument now is that, for the experienced gardener, dealing with plants can have elements of a different sort of captivation as plant agency serves as an uneasy and beguiling conduit to a range of possible forces. The issue of control, and the possibility of a pleasurable lack of control, has been discussed to some extent in previous chapters where different individuals found that they were, to a degree, socialised by their plants into some different frameworks of experience. With the particular group of gardeners that I am dealing with now, this was perhaps more evident. Indeed, whilst they were clearly engaged in lots of different activities and interventions in their gardens, a common way of framing how they encountered what they were presented with there seemed to be along the lines of a kind of 'witnessing' with regard to what was taking place. Issues of time and impatience, although common in chapter six, were less a problem here since, as soon as you go out there, 'it all just starts around you' (Sandra, interview two), it all 'just sort of happens' (Caroline, interview three), 'its just moving on and the whole thing is sort of coming and going and it is just constant' (Sue, interview two). As Caroline puts it:

> 'Its amazingly therapeutic and calming and its all sort of going on all the time and you know that you can do things to it but with the force and the size of the growth. Well it will just go on anyway.' (Caroline, interview three)

Such an attitude of witnessing, I think is very much wrapped up with the plant's appealing liveness which I have, to some extent, already discussed. Yet it also seemed linked to the fact that gardeners were well aware that ultimately, to a degree, they would never really know how things were to behave or develop there. For Caroline this meant it was 'just magic' for her (interview two). Others had a 'sense of wonderment' that the ground can be alive (Peter, interview three). This wonderment and witnessing then made for an affecting process where they were 'just taken away' (Sandra, interview one) towards an experience quite unrelated to more mundane concerns.

Interestingly in the way in which they discuss what it means to be around plants they use many of the same terms that Gell uses to describes the experiences of the South Pacific islanders. They are in awe of the 'magic' embodied in these prow boards, just as Carol is in awe of the 'magic' embodied by her plants. I want to now suggest that we can think about these gardeners as being 'captivated' by the chains of agencies embodied in the specific plants of the garden. Here, then, plants can be thought of as conduits to the chains of forces and biophysical processes that we might perhaps want to call 'nature' - they are the ambassadors for the physical activities and execution of any number of processes. These processes would be things like the cycles of the sun, the patterns of precipitation, the flow of nutrients within the soils, even vagaries of animal behaviour, all of which go about affecting how the plant itself might behave.

I want to suggest that these gardeners might, like the welcoming islanders, like Gell himself before the Vermeer, and like the malevolent Irish spirits, also be 'captivated.' That is to say that they are pleasurably finding the range of distant forces, channelled through the specifics of the plant, too complex to fully understand. The garden then is like a work of art here, but not in the sense of it being the creative expression of the owner. Rather it is a specific kind of captivating artwork in that we can never fully understand who the artist is. For Peter there is 'too much intent' in modern gardening as garden owners want too fully to be the masters of what takes place before them there (interview three). The implication here, of course, is that there is also not enough witnessing, when witnessing can be part of this specifically pleasurable way of responding to the space.

These gardeners, however, are, of course, always in part the architects of what takes place around them. Yet they are also, in part, the witnesses to what is unfolding through the passage of these processes. The location of the driving agency behind the garden changes is clearly difficult to abstract and, as Miller (2001c) argues, it may be quite possible to be captivated by

something that you are in some small part the architect of. It is also quite possible to transfer the insights of Gell's theory of captivation to entities that may not be considered as traditionally belonging to the realm of a specific sort of 'artwork'. As Bolton (2001b) argues, whilst his theory was developed in the context of debates around art, it is more rightly a theory of how we could respond to entities more generally. The garden here, and the specific plants that help make it up, can be seen to help bridge and foster a certain type of relationship. Gell, as a social anthropologist, sees things as mediating specifically between agencies that might be attributed to the people of the social world. However, I think this could be usefully be expanded out now to consider the chains of agency and force at work within the biophysical world and how they inform garden experiences.

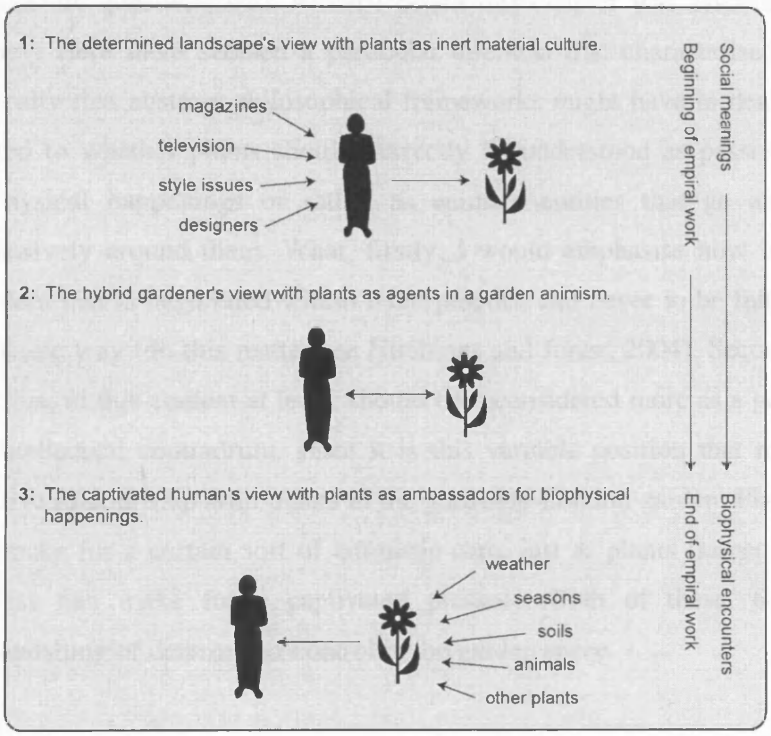

Figure 7.12. A diagrammatic representation of the progression of ways in which the person-plant relationship has been considered both within this chapter and also, more gradually, as I have moved between sites.

The conceptualisation I have been describing here is represented above and can broadly now, be, firstly, seen as the final stage in a progression that these gardeners might go through. Here they gradually come towards a state where caring for plants and marvelling at their activities can become as significant as more familiar concerns for aesthetic display. More generally, this movement can, secondly, be seen as the final stage in a conceptual progression that has been running throughout my empirical work, as the sites have been moved through in such a way as to explore how we can come to relate closely to plants. Thirdly and finally, this process also, to some degree, mirrors the academic movement I have been trying to develop whereby previously linguistic and cultural frameworks of understanding the garden, as discussed explicitly in chapter two, can be complemented through following chains of agency in an alternative

direction. The garden is now a channel for the many different happenings of the biophysical world that affect the humans there. This is rather than a more familiar story where the desires and meanings of the cultural world inscribe themselves onto the raw materials of organic life. Just as the process of developing a hybrid framework for understanding the gardener could be represented diagrammatically, so, then, can this process of captivation, as an extension of the concerns I have been developing so far in my work. Now, rather than the gardener being fully in charge of the knowledge of how the garden will behave, so she is equally a witness to the range of forces made manifest through plants.

7.7 CONCLUSION: ON THE UNSOLVABLE MYSTERY OF THE LAWN

One of the questions with which I began this chapter was associated with the attribution of agency. Here there seemed a particular dilemma that characterised the plant in terms of the difficulty that abstract philosophical frameworks might have in dealing with it. This difficulty related to whether plants should correctly be understood as passive bearers of the effects of biophysical happenings or rather as animate entities that go about organising the world purposively around them. What, firstly, I would emphasise now is how this is a conceptual problem that is negotiated within lived practice and never to be fully resolved in any removed academic way (on this matter see Hitchings and Jones, 2004). Secondly, I also want to suggest that this, in this context at least, should be reconsidered more as a positive attribute, rather than an intellectual conundrum, since it is this variable position that makes for a certain type of positive relationship with plants in the gardened London garden. Plants framed as active agents can make for a certain sort of animistic care, just as plants framed as conduits to biophysical process can make for a captivated pleasure. Both of these, then, lead to an enjoyable relinquishing of determined control in the garden space.

In the first empirical sections of this chapter I discussed how, whilst the function of plants as a passive landscape onto which aesthetic sensibilities could be played out was significant, for this group there seemed a greater pleasure associated with getting to know their plants and their particular temperaments. In this these gardeners were actively according them a degree of agency - a garden animism that would lead us towards thinking about the second of these two arms of the above framework. That is to say that here, as hybrid gardeners, they felt they were dealing with active and dynamic plant agents that were doing things around them and enrolling themselves as gardeners into being committed to their care. Yet, it is also, of course, possible to think about plants in practice as the message bearers for the endless chains of physical processes that are constantly happening throughout the world. This is what I explored in the following section which reworked Gell's theory of the artwork. What I discussed here were the ways in which plants can be ambassadors for endless chains of nonhuman forces in the world. These

were, then, encountered positively by the 'captivated' gardener as a means of achieving a manageable relationship with these beguiling processes. Again here active human control was less significant as the gardener was now conscious of the many strange and exciting factors that complemented her own activities.

Such close familiarity, yet simultaneously bemused awe, is something that seemed to characterise the particular kind of close garden culture more generally. Throughout this research I have been exploring how the particular behaviours of plants can help us adapt some standard approaches to how we might live within different contexts – in designing, in shopping and in living within domestic environments. Elsewhere, but in a similar way, I have throughout this research always been intrigued by the ways in which gardening radio advice programmes such as Radio 4's famous 'Gardeners' Question Time' work. One thing that is striking here is the happy way in which the expert panellist, brought to the studio explicitly to offer sound advice about dealing with plant problems, is willing to just say that, sometimes, they don't really know. They have been brought there to display knowledge, yet they so willingly admit ignorance, and the assembled audience seems quite happy to accept this. It would be hard, I think, to imagine another nationally broadcast advice programme where the experts are so willing to admit ignorance - a DIY show where the carpenter just says that, sometimes, he just doesn't know how shelves stay up, for instance.

Some of the discussions in this chapter go some way towards accounting for this phenomenon. It is the very sense of affection and awe that I have been exploring which may also support this diffident admission of ignorance. We know plants, but we can never quite fully know plants, is what these experts seen to be suggesting and what I have found here to be no small part of the pleasure of living with plants. This, finally, returns me to the mystery of Sandra's retreating lawn. This is a mystery that I think now should perhaps never rightly be solved as a particular aspect of the enjoyment of the garden is a bemused inability to exactly trace the agencies at work there. Whilst, as I will go on to discuss, I would argue that it seems, through this research, that some types of agency are becoming more forceful within garden sites than others are, a degree of enjoyment, at this one at least, derives from the many, many other forces that could never all be accounted for.

Figure 7.13. The mystery, once again, of Sandra's retreating lawn that, for this group at least, should, perhaps, never quite be solved.

-8-

Conclusions

8.1 INTRODUCTION

The ways in which we go about knowing plants is clearly context dependent - there may be any number of ways in which we go about being with the vegetable world. Yet, despite the ubiquity of organic matter, what a number of academics were arguing at the start of this thesis was that people in the western world, at least, were finding it difficult to know how best to live and relate to plants. Broad arguments such as these, however, require practical investigation. Imagined juggernauts of change do not effortlessly plough through history. Rather, they contain within them developing systems of practical negotiations, thoughts, practices and encounters that co-evolve through the daily management of life. Such evolving systems could, therefore, very productively be examined to shed light on our changing relations with the plant world. This has been the aim of this thesis, where the empirical case concerned the private garden within London.

This thesis has reconsidered plants according to how we practically encounter them within the superficially routine experiences that shape the organisation of contemporary domestic space. In this enterprise this thesis is novel in its method of considering the particular thing we have come to understand as a 'garden.' In contradiction to previous geographical approaches and a wider enterprise of garden history, I have considered these matters in an ethnographic way better to understand why and how we deal with plant life. Rather than necessarily treating the 'garden' as a source of aggregate visual experience or cultural representation, I developed a concern for the material entities that work together there. Whilst there is much contemporary discussion about the role of the garden, this has been at a rather rarefied level which could be, therefore, enriched by the kind of close examination I have undertaken.

In this enterprise I used consumption theories in so far as they deal with how specific things are sold, consequently bought, and lived with thereafter. Through questioning these frameworks I developed two particular concerns for this research. These were a concern for, firstly, how the consumption system through which gardens are organised is moving and, secondly, for how the specific characters and behaviours of organic plants are accommodated and experienced within its contexts. Consequently, this thesis was based on periods within a range of sites, as it was

only through the layering of the material produced from each that I was able to explore both the richness and the dynamic involved in these evolving urban relationships. Robbins and Sharp (2003) have argued that gardens are sites of the extraordinary within the very ordinary. This research has elucidated some aspects of this extraordinariness through an approach which reconsiders fundamental qualities to our plant experiences.

Such would be a summary of this work. For now, though, as this piece of research comes to an end, I want to focus on where this now takes me, as there are a number of different audiences to which, I think, this research can speak. I have followed the plants for a while. Now I am interested in where they lead in terms of what this work can do. Here there are three particular aspects I want to emphasize. The first of these concerns plant encounters and the ways in which we might want to research the restorative benefit that particular plant relationships can offer. Here the approach I have taken can potentially offer much to some prevalent ways of conducting research. The second relates to a perennial geographical concern for the transactions between societies and their environments. Building on a current concern for how humans and others live closely together, I want to extend this towards accommodating such companions according to the qualities they embody and through richer empirical accounts. The third concerns the dynamic within the relations I have been exploring and seeks to speak both to academics and more widely about consumption matters. It is here that, finally, I discuss how people-plant relations in London seem to be changing and what these changes might suggest about elements of urban life and culture.

8.2 ENUMERATING THE BENEFITS OF PLANT ENCOUNTER

Environmental psychology offers a range of fascinating studies that numerically and persuasively document how proximity to vegetation can be of real benefit to human wellbeing. Within hospitals, we now know the effectiveness of windows overlooking green spaces in speeding recovery or reducing the needs for healthcare services (see Kaplan, 2001). Indeed, here Ulrich (1984) even finds that mediated plant experiences could have similar effects, as recovering patients recovered more quickly when shown videos involving natural scenery. Meanwhile, within prisons, Moore (1981) documents how prisoners whose cells faced the internal courtyard used health care significantly more often than prisoners whose cells faced onto farmed fields further beyond the facility. That is to say that if you looked out onto organic environments in prison, you statistically were less likely to feel unwell or unhappy. Within offices, Kaplan (1993), similarly, finds that, of those workers with views, those who looked out onto vegetated spaces reported fewer ailments and also showed a much higher job satisfaction. Once again, looking out onto green space seemed to make people happier.

In more domestic settings, there is also a strong case to be made for the overall benefit of natural encounters. Kaplan calls these 'micro-restorative opportunities' (Kaplan, 2001) as she explores peoples views from their windows at home. Here those windows with elements of the natural vegetation outside proved to provide greater senses of wellbeing and positive feeling amongst her respondents. Having a view was good, but having a view of vegetative life was better. Being near and able to look at plant life with a degree of ease and frequency is, then, statistically associated with a personal sense of benefit and restoration.

The benefits, then, from having a visual encounter with plant life have been forcefully enumerated by work within this tradition. Indeed the case here seems to have been won - being able to visually see plants seems to lead to improved material senses of wellbeing and health more generally. Correspondingly, research has moved on from this starting point and sought to examine the particular organisation and pattern of vegetative forms that provide us with the greatest sense of visual satisfaction. Based on provocative evolutionary arguments suggesting that the natural views we prefer are biologically hardwired, empirical work has, for instance, sought to elucidate whether this may be the case. Balling and Falk (1982) argued that we instinctively prefer landscapes similar to the savannah in which the human species first developed, whilst Appleton (1975, 1990) further contended that it was also related to the refuge that trees can offer in terms of a need to be screened from potential predators. Working from such contentions, further studies, for instance, now aim at elucidating which types of tree form yield the greatest senses of wellbeing and satisfaction visually (Sommer and Summit, 1995; Summit and Sommer, 1999). Apparently the tree form we statistically feel better looking at is one that is similar to the acacia tree, rather than, say, the pine (Summit and Sommer, 1999).

These enterprises clearly reveal some fascinating insight. However, they also tend to adopt certain specific approaches and it is here this thesis has the opportunity to contribute. Firstly, they tend to focus on more visual experiences. This could be explained by the methods employed here and, perhaps ironically, is a further consequence of the photograph as a durable technology. That is to say that the methods employed within this research tradition tend to use questionnaires and, as such, it is fairly easy to use photographs within these questionnaires better to ask people about, for instance, which photographic image they prefer. Secondly, this body of work also tends towards a statistical means of validation and, as such, we get senses of how people, as aggregate groups represented numerically, respond to specific questions about specific images.

As Summit and Sommer reflect (1999, p574) with regard to the drawings of trees that they asked respondents to rate, 'the experience of looking at a line drawing on a page is not

equivalent to seeing a tree in a forest; none of the sensory elements will be identical in the two settings.' Whist this point still lingers around the visual, what begins to seem lacking here is a sense of how encounters, as much visual as practical, might influence matters, together with the mechanisms that link these enumerated senses of wellbeing to actual personal encounters. Questions follow, firstly, about being with vegetation as much as about looking on vegetation, as well as, secondly, why exactly they have a beneficial effect, rather than whether they statistically do so or not. Research of this kind can, however, be methodologically difficult. Being with plants can just seem to be a self-evidently good thing. Like the experience of birdsong (Kempton, 1981 p, 185) having them around they may just 'make you feel better.' For those involved it may just be as simple as that - this benefit might be such that we cannot perhaps articulate it as it might work in more of a fundamentally affective way (Sheets and Manzer, 1991, Cooper, 2003).

One aim of this thesis was to look afresh at how people and plants interact, according to the ways in which they behave, to better explore the character of these encounters. In this sense, I was occupied less with how we necessarily look at plants and more at how we do things with them. Issues of the visual were to emerge, certainly, but they were not the primary concern at the outset. I was also concerned less with numerical and statistical tests of relationship and more with qualitative accounts of process. Equally, I was not initially concerned particularly and specifically with notions of wellbeing. Rather, I was interested to explore how plants and plant agency is accommodated within practice and routine. Nonetheless elements of why and how this dynamism was manifest and received became central to my concerns. As such this thesis began to speak to issues regarding the wellbeing generated from vegetative encounters, as these themes became significant. Correspondingly, it did so in such a way as to offer an account of how wellbeing emerges from within such relations.

Such an account, however, may not necessarily be so novel. As Betrabet argues, within horticultural therapy, there are many models of how gardens yield restorative experience (see Betrabet, 1996) and, here, rather than using more visual means, these are accounted for with reference to actual physical human engagements. Although arguments tend to centre around models and means of providing productive beneficial experiences for particular groups such as the young, the old and the disabled (Moore, 1989; Simson and Straus, 1998; Woy, 1997) here a variety of individual benefits are enumerated. Indeed, as Relf (1973) argues, the benefit of horticulture may stem from its multifaceted nature. Some of the positive aspects she points to include intellectual benefits, such as learning about plants; social benefits in terms of interacting with other gardeners; emotional growth, such as senses of achievement and success; and physical benefits, in terms of bodily movement and exercise (Relf, 1973). Here, then, there are

rich conversations about how to instil and promote beneficial experiences from being with plants.

However, a more fundamental concern for plant behaviours and their accommodation within gardens not specifically designed for therapeutic purposes is downplayed here. These are practitioners and, as such, have a keen interest in how specific physical environments can be built to maximise the range of potential benefits that can be derived by certain groups from vegetated spaces. What they are, correspondingly, less focussed upon might be the more fundamental, perhaps self-evident, issues that have been my concern. - self-evident issues like the fact that plants grow and behave and respond to their surroundings and how humans, as a more general category, can feel and accommodate such growth and behaviour.

The garden could be explored as a site in which connections between human and plant activity is organised. This thesis has sought to do exactly that and in a way where these connections are questioned according to how they are accommodated within developing systems of living. Within this, a particular kind of account of how wellbeing might be found through these patterns of cohabitation begins to emerge. I want to flesh this out in more detail in the next two sections, but for the moment I want to suggest that this thesis provides an innovative approach to the wellbeing generated within these encounters. What this thesis has begun to consider is the benefit derived from being, specifically, with things that grow. Within this, two particular elements became salient through the course of the empirical work and I want to now give these a little more consideration. These concern, firstly, issues of control and, secondly, issues of time.

8.3 QUESTIONS OF CONTROL IN CONTEMPORARY PLANT EXPERIENCE

The things with which we share our domestic lives are always less than fully domesticated. There is an inherent physical agency within all things, although some manifest this more wilfully than others. The first of these two axes of analysis, then, relates to control and to questions of who or what is exactly in charge of our developing domestic relations. Clearly here there is a sense in which certain types of materials and entities are more easily dealt with within contemporary formats of garden encounter. People are happier to behave around furniture and ornaments in the garden centre than they are around plants. This is both physically and discursively and the response from garden centres, therefore, is to develop the space allocated to such materials. With the garden designer, hard landscaping elements are more easily differentiable and harnessed in such a way as to convey the aesthetic sensibilities of owners and designers alike; CD chippings could be sent in the post; tricky issues of maintenance and care seemed less significant for decking and for stoneware. Certain plants that are more passive and

architectural can provide better foils to hard landscaped spaces and require less maintenance in the first place. Consequently they become an easy choice for the apparently rushed London professional. There are several arguments and associated practices that can be stacked up here to suggest that certain properties can fit more neatly and easily into our existing formats of behaving within consumption and these are properties to do with being, as physical objects, passively compliant.

There are a number of reasons, then, why we might want to be in charge of the physical things that find their way into the garden spaces of London. Through being more resolutely in charge of them, we can better perform certain types of more avowedly social meanings for the garden space. Hard material things can act as better social signifiers and, if we were to follow a more sociological account of the processes involved, we can, therefore, together with their help more easily perform ourselves into people with clear design aesthetics. If spaces of sociality were our concern, as they were within geographies of consumption, confident interactions between different people and an easy sociality were more clearly in evidence around the pots in the garden centre or the water feature catalogue in the design consultation. This was much more than around the unfamiliar and standard plant. If anthropological approaches to human relationships embodied by our object are paramount, then a more docile object that will solidly continue to embody that relationship might be best - unlike plants, they don't potentially die and so the relationship they represent might have a stronger potential footing.

Yet what is lost through treating the garden in this way, and how do living plants fit within such frameworks? This has been a concern running through this thesis and has been, more particularly, discussed with the designers and experienced gardeners. From psychiatry, Ainslee (2003) discusses the benefit of becoming aligned to an idea of serendipity in terms of appetite satisfaction. To know how to gratify your pleasures and to be able to satisfy them can, surprisingly, lead to a decrease in appetite as this excitement gets dulled through it routinely being sated. Indeed, that within contemporary western consumption patterns, that fulfilling appetites actually leads to a decreased pleasure or wellbeing is a cornerstone to an argument about orientating lifestyles towards less resource intensive but, nonetheless, apparently more pleasurable, patterns of living (Abramson, and Inglehart. 1995). It is useful to reconsider the garden in this context and how the agencies at work there may relate to such debates around this matter of 'control.'

With the garden designers of chapter four, this was manifest within the laughing way in which plant agency was recovered. As I have argued, plants can never quite be controlled - plants, by their definition, did things. Although this was sometimes a difficult attribute to marshal within

client meetings, plants did nonetheless behave. Indeed this very fact of behaving was something that designers really found pleasurable and this was a pleasure that they wanted to inculcate in their clients, even though this tended to run against an expected controlled professionalism on their part. Hence the laughter, as all of these different component parts came together in a slightly uneasy, but nonetheless pleasurable, recognition of the self-evident fact that plants are alive - that plants may always do something a little unexpected and could never be fully controlled.

With the experienced gardeners of chapter eight, I reconsidered whether a plant should, in practice, be thought to be 'alive'. Sometimes a plant seemed to be an individual agent, sometimes it was a passive thing, and sometimes it could be thought of as a conduit to wider forces and processes in the world. Here this uneasy classificatory nature made for a particular pleasure in the garden. Gell (1998) argued that, under certain circumstances, the entanglements of agency, or the perceived entanglements of agency embedded within an artwork can lead to a beguiling and pleasurable feeling of losing control on the part of the human onlooker. A similar process can be related to plants, which, I argued, can make for a similar experience. That is to say that the fact that they can both submit to our will, do what they want to, and also react to any number of other factors can encourage humans into a pleasurable interaction with the involved processes which they can only ever partially control. There was laughter here too as relinquishing control was enjoyed and the indeterminate outcome of determined actions was once again recognised - plants would have their way.

Returning briefly to environmental psychology, what Kaplan and Kaplan (1983) have argued to be a necessary characteristic for an environment to facilitate recovery from directed attention fatigue is for that environment to leads to feelings of 'fascination.' Such fascination is found in environments that 'draw one's attention effortlessly, thereby involving involuntary attention and, apparently, allowing the neural inhibitory mechanism underlying directed attention to rest. According to Wells (2000), natural phenomena such as a babbling brook, the stir of leaves or the chirps of birds illustrate this characteristic. This concept of 'fascination' as it is understood here, seems akin to Gell's notion of 'captivation.' That is to say that both frameworks offer an account of categories of thing that draw attention effortlessly away from other concerns. With this idea in mind, I think it is possible that, under certain circumstances, we can add 'being near to and involved with plants' to this list of fascinating and captivating experiences. As such, the lack of control and feeling of being subject to other concerns embodied by the plant may offer a material sense of wellbeing to the individuals that encounter and experience it. Larsen et al. (1998) in a study of workplace performance found that when plants were present they led to a decreased productivity in terms of repetitive tasks. This was initially surprising – plants were

thought to increase wellbeing, which was supposed to then knock onto productivity increases. Reflecting further on this apparent anomaly, they eventually suggest this to be an indication of the relaxing distraction that being around plants can afford. Plants may be captivating and, as such, happily take people's minds away from a determined execution of tasks. Within gardens, a sense of being only ever partially in control of such plants can, I think, go some way towards such phenomena as the involvement that comes from a partial control helps encourage people towards a pleasurable consideration of the range of places where agency could lie.

Not being fully in control of the plants in the garden can, therefore, be understood as a process of encountering their agency and coming to deal with it in a certain way. This experience I would argue is restorative through the process by which it takes place and, as such, an argument for how Kaplan's (2001) micro-restorative encounters might actually work begins to take shape. However, the extent to which such restorative experiences can be accommodated within the changing sets of infrastructure, meaning and practice that surround our plant experiences is something that is also at stake and something to which I will return. For the moment, though, I want to now move to the second axis of analysis and questions of how we relate to plants through time.

8.4 QUESTIONS OF TIME IN CONTEMPORARY PLANT EXPERIENCE

Not unrelated to issues of control in our changing plant relations are issues associated with 'time'. Being in control of things often involves a strongly temporal dimension in terms of making things happen at the time when you want it to. These concerns were, once again, evident throughout the empirical work although, for the sake of an even spread of analysis, questions associated with timing, rather than with control, were focussed on specifically at the garden centre and in the designed London garden.

As I have documented, what a number of academics argue is that in contemporary western societies people do not like to be kept waiting for things (Schwartz, 1978; Adam et al. 1995; Macnaghten and Urry, 1997; Schor, 1998). Queuing is a negative experience, and waiting in the context of airports, for instance, is something that went unmentioned for fear of implicitly reminding passengers of their subordinate position with regard to time management there. With these ideas in mind, evidence emerged throughout the empirical work that pointed to the salience of these issues with respect to managing plant behaviour. Waiting was a difficult experience. Specific plants could be bought that would necessitate less waiting before the desired appearance would be achieved. Bulb sales were falling as were those for the herbaceous plants that, in the wintertime, were hidden within pots that London customers found easy to overlook. There was much potential hidden with these bulbs and pots, but the garden owners

seemed less inclined to wait for it to become manifest. Designers and garden centre workers alike, consequently, would employ specific rhetorical and physical strategies to encourage people to potentially embrace the idea of an enjoyable waiting. Holding on until the plant could muster the strength to achieve a desired size and form was talked about with excitement. Specific visual devices and pictures were employed to similar ends, depicting what the plant might actually finally look like if patience and care were involved.

This was achieved with difficulty, however, as people in their consumption routines wanted something to provide them with a desired impact and appearance sooner, rather than later. If they were to pay for it and, when they seemingly have increasing amounts of money to do exactly that, why should they wait? Specific plants were chosen, then, that are fairly stoical so that their impact can be paid for now without the associated worry of how they might, subsequently, grow and become problematic. Specific hard landscaping items meanwhile, of course, take no time at all and can, therefore, be more temporally appealing which, in turn, relates to the popularity of garden 'makeovers'. If you have friends coming around later that afternoon to sit outside with you, then the instant impacts of ornamentation and bedding plants can suddenly become attractive to manage an attractive display within such timeframes.

Yet within this more standard narrative of what Held and Nutzinger (1998) and others call the 'non-stop society' where we live within what Urry (1999) terms 'instantaneous time' I was interested to explore how we might not always be so fully determined with regard to the evolving temporalities at work in the garden. Furthermore what was also emerging was a sense of how we might not actually want to be. This developed from my previous concern for control as such issues of control were now worked out with respect to co-ordination and routine within our plant co-habitations. Here a set of arguments for a more subjective time consciousness seemed to play a part in accounting for what was at work here. This was to suggest that the passage of time could be differentially experienced in different places according to the range of forces and influences at work within them. Here I developed an account that went some way towards explaining why those involved in garden centres and garden design alike, both liked to relinquish some control to plants and, equally, found a deal of pleasure in waiting for them to decide to manifest their agencies. This was an engagement, then, with the ways in which plant growth and behaviour could empirically enrich the subjective geographies of temporality, rather than of any objective idea of time management.

People would talk of losing track of time in the garden, as different tasks and plant needs meant that they unthinkingly moved from one thing to another. They also talked of how the fact that plants behaved in the way they did brought them down to earth and made them enjoyably

engage with another type of pace to that which they were more habituated. Within each garden there were different sets of rhythms at work and what emerged here were the ways in which different sets of plants and people could productively establish a pace of behaviour that would fit with both their ways of living. Interestingly, for people to slow down and to connect with the different pleasurable subjective temporalities that I have sketched, plants were to behave more quickly so that people could slow and meet these ever-present emergent needs. Meanwhile, less genetically demanding and slower plants, however, could be accommodated by busier folk that continued on in this non-stop society without the inclination or opportunity to engage with a differentially dynamic set of plant companions.

Goodin (1992), in a similar way to Kreiger (1973), argues that it is necessary to enumerate exactly what it is that we value in nature if we are to make clear cases for why and what we want to protect as such. One of the more persuasive arguments, he suggests, relates to the processual nature of the physical things that make up this category. According to his argument, we value 'natural processes' because people want to see some sense and pattern in their lives, which is something that can be productively achieved by setting their lives within a larger context like that provided by the slow movement of ecological process (Goodin, 1992). In this notion he arguably builds upon an idea adapted from Gestalt psychology by Zerubavel (1981) where the human perception of objects involves the separation of a 'figure' from a 'ground.' Here 'time constitutes one of the major parameters of any ground against which figures are perceived' (Zeubavel, 1981, p19). That is to suggest, then, that different places have different temporalities, or at least that they serve to help people locate themselves as 'a figure' within different scales of temporal change constituted by the physical 'grounds' they find themselves in. Thus, when we are in a shop we may see our lives within the routine temporality of daily provisioning, but when we are in a church we may see our lives within the larger sweep of our own lifespan. From this standpoint, Lynch (1976) may be right to ask 'what time is this place', as certain geographical places have embedded within them the makings of certain temporal grounds to human experience and feeling.

Others, including Macnaghten and Urry (1998), Adam (1995) and Szerszynski (2002) echo such accounts of the temporalities emergent from our experience of the nonhuman world. Lash and Urry describe a 'glacial time' (1994, p243) which develops in opposition to the speeding up of contemporary life's 'instantaneous time' and which serves as an antidote in the way that it encourages us to think about our descendants and the slower rhythms of the earth. For Goodin (1992), here, what makes people's lives seem valuable to them is the unity and coherence of the projects from which they are comprised. As such, the gradual and cyclical nature of certain nonhuman processes help us to 'locate the self' in 'a deep sense that matters enormously to

people'(Goodin, 1992, p37). This he argues within the context of a wider set of logically argued rationales for why a commitment to certain representatives of the natural world takes shape in human consciousness.

Whilst I am aligned to a lot of these arguments, they do, however, tend to buy into a binarised conception of, to some extent, distinct 'natural' and 'social' times (for another example here see Newton, 2003). In practice, however, there is a range of different temporalities worked out through particular contexts of activity. Szerszynski (2002, p188) is useful here in his concept of time 'synchronisation' and the potential for multiple temporalities to mesh together within certain contexts. Whilst accounts such as Goodin's (1992) go some way towards developing a sense of the wellbeing generated through connecting to plants in a temporal sense, such arguments can be productively related to the ways in which rhythms of activity are co-ordinated between humans and nonhumans in particular empirical cases. This would give a sense of how different temporal pressures could conspire to foster such beneficial experiences. Szerszynski (2002, p188) questions whether this could be thought of as like the 'meshing' of 'mechanical gears'. I would suggest that it can as it is only when certain conditions and activities conspire to make it possible that a rich ongoing immersion of the person within the temporalities of plants is possible.

Ingold (1993, 1995, 2000) recently and persuasively argues for a 'dwelling perspective' to be adopted across the social sciences. The argument goes here that it is only through the ways in which we live in the world that we can think about the world in the ways we do. We 'dwell' before we 'build' (1993) as practical living practices prefigure and dictate what thoughts then follow. The example he takes is of landscape and the ways in which the temporal activities of the people and plants living within that landscape help frame the ways in which the landscape is to be thought about. From the empirical work of this thesis it seems that certain physical contexts of activity can inform certain frameworks of understanding our place within wider processes. In this his argument seems akin to that of the 'figure-ground' approach taken by Zerubavel (1981), however, this is not to suggest that they always do so in a similar way.

Ingold can be criticised for his romantic association of specific people and specific landscapes, as if we don't move around and spend time in all sorts of places (Cloke and Jones, 2001) and I would agree. People can set their lives within bigger processes and can come to dwell within the plants of the garden. However, this is only under certain conditions and the factors shaping these conditions are multiple. People need the time, the inclination, and the correct set of plants and technologies that allow them to relate to such spaces in this sort of way. That is to say that through an empirical understanding of how wellbeings are generated from plant encounters it is

possible to speculate about the physical likelihood and possibility for such feelings of time to become manifest within evolving developments of lifestyle and consumption. People talked to me about taking their watches off before going into the garden. This may have been a technique to help them better dwell there, in Ingold's terms, but it is also an example of how such temporal landscape dwellings are only possible when a wider set of practices and technologies allow.

What can, at least, be said here is that to conceive of cities as quintessentially fast-paced phenomena with an overwhelming speed of activity (see Paolucci, 2001) is to ignore the nuances within the many involved speeds and temporalities and how they might layer upon each other in such a way as to make places liveable. Plants can enrol insects to respond to their required temporalities. Through the release of certain scents at certain times or through adopting a colour that is striking to insects that are awake at certain times, plants can, then, organise the daily temporal rhythms of those that help them reproduce. We could think of plants and people finding a similarly productive temporal relationship as they find together, within individual gardens, paces of behaving that fit well within each others lives. Here plants can help slow people down and generate a sense of wellbeing through encountering their processes. However, with changing contemporary paces of life the potential for these sorts of symbioses to continue is another matter. Clearly the temporal character of the relationship between humans and plants is significant in explaining the benefit found within them. The future potential for these productive changes of pace, meanwhile, is something I will later speculate on.

Such is the second of the two particular axes of analysis that were used in exploring human plant relations. I have examined issues to do with control and to do with time as these emerged as salient within the process of research, but how do such endeavours contribute to more theoretical debate within geography? One of the guiding approaches adopted in this thesis concerned particular plants and how their lively presence was felt within certain contexts. In this I argued that I was building upon some geographical approaches that used science studies to focus in a new way upon our dealings with other living entities. I want now to return to this context and say something more about how this research contributes.

8.5 New geographies of life and the social encounter with biophysical process

It has always been a central concern of geographers to account for how humans and their environments interact. Yet what tended to be the case for a long time was that certain geographers would talk about human forces and agency, whilst others geographers concerned themselves with the power we supposed belonged to nature. This has been a perennial division

(Spencer and Whatmore, 2001) as certain academics have concerned themselves with human social life whilst others focus upon physical natural process. However, this is not to say that the human geography camp was not concerned with what we could call the 'natural' world, but rather to suggest that the processes it embodied were not as fully and explicitly accommodated as they might have been for this group. Indeed within the more social camp and with respect to human encounters with nature, a dominant recent trend framed our analysis as one that might best try uncover their explicitly 'socially construction' (Demerritt, 1994, Gandy, 1996, for a review see Castree, 2000). Developing from Fitzsimmons' concern for 'social nature' (Fitzsimmons, 1989), the socialities involved in understanding this strange world of other matters seemed a more reassuring concern for those schooled in social scientific human geographical enquiry (Whatmore, 1999) as 'patent-leather shoe geography' seemed here to be winning out over 'dirty boot geography' (Allen, 2001, p487). Correspondingly, in a hardline form, the argument from cultural geographers went that 'what biophysical science reveals is less a glimpse into the workings of the natural world than the culture and politics of scientific knowledge' (Proctor, 1998, p353).

It was in this context that the ideas from science studies that I discussed in chapter two were thought a particularly exciting development (see Demerritt, 1994; 1996, Whatmore, 1997). They seemed to suggest a way of reconciling the agency of both the human social and the nonhuman natural without ever, in final analysis, fundamentally coming down on one side or another. They allowed a space for a wilder and more unruly world that was certainly always there, but not yet as fully acknowledged within human geographic accounts of it. As I have suggested, geography has always had a strong interest in things 'natural.' Correspondingly, whilst those in science studies excitedly begun to use these same ideas to reconsider the active agency of machines in social context, within geography the new possibilities for creeping up upon the representatives of the biologically living world of nonhumans were more interesting. What then followed was a range of studies that have begun to explore these possibilities, as geographers began busily to concern themselves with living entities and the ways in which we co-habit with them according to their particularity (see for example Whatmore and Thorne, 1998, 2000; Davies, 1999, 2000a).

One of the significant benefits of this particular stand was the determined intimacy with which it envisaged our encounters with nonhumans. Rather than considering them as aggregate groups of things, as a rather unwieldy category of 'nature', or as things only rightly understood through 'representation', the world was now populated with an exciting array of companions. Such a development was not only an exciting theoretical move but also a productive ethical stance (Castree, 2003) as this project both allowed us to document the volatile material associations through which cultural life is organised and to develop a social science narrative that places

people more humbly and rightly in a world of relations we might never fully control (see also Fitzsimmons and Goodman, 1998 here). A forceful geographical argument now goes that we should reconsider the ways in which particular humans and particular others work and live together and this, undoubtedly, has been an argument upon which this thesis stands. Having acknowledged this debt fully, however, there are ways in which this research has developed this approach. This is in two particular ways.

Firstly, to an extent, arguments here have been made on a more theoretical terrain where they may make little impact other than within geographical debate (Castree, 2003. p208). This is despite the fact that there is, I would argue, much scope for using these resources to tell useful stories to society about itself. The ways in which differential agencies come together in practice could, therefore, be more fully revealed here. That is to say that, rather than continuing to reconsider our ontological perspectives and how they align humans and others, we might want to flesh out how the particular specifics of how they come together in practice. Whilst diffuse agency has been championed in theory (see, for one example, Murdoch's arguments, 1997, 1998a, 1998b), its transformative potential in practice could be more clearly exposed. Whatmore and Thorne, perhaps, come closest, but the physical agency of their elephants (2000), their leopards or their crocodiles (1998) is more mediated and less directly there than it might be.

We recognise now that we are often in daily negotiation with a range of different sorts of entities, but what geographers suggest we get out of such negotiations, however, is less clear. Within this framework people have tended to appear as more Machiavellian strategic organisers (Davies, 1997; Hitchings, 2003). Yet there may be many aspects to the ways in which we deal with the nonhuman world. Whilst we are happy now to admit the evident truth that humans and others do spend much time together, we have not, within this framework, yet said much about why exactly they might want to. This thesis has questioned these matters within a detailed consideration of how plant agency is dealt with and considered at some different sites through which plants circulate in London. It has explored these with regard specifically to the pleasures and annoyances of how we live with plants in terms of control and in terms of time and this may be a useful development.

My second point relates to way in which we understand 'agency' in this framework. Whilst we should be aware that other things have the capacity to act, as others have forcefully emphasised (Castree, 2000, p539), we should also recognise the different ways in which they do so. Although living together, people and plants, for example, have some quite different concerns that they manage in quite different ways. Whilst a current argument for a 'post-human'

geography (see Anderson, 2003; Wolch, 2002) seeks to emphasise how humans and others might not be so materially different in actuality and how this was simply a conceit of intellectual history, there clearly are nonetheless certain capacities that particular types of thing might, or might not, possess. Whilst I agree with Latour (on this see Laurier and Philo, 1999) and others who argue that agencies should be discussed according to how they are manifest, not how they were previously theorised, this is not to say that we should not discuss how the specific capacities revealed are encountered according to their particularity. As I have explored, plants can be both thought of as other beings, as malleable material, or as conduits to other forces, according to how they are encountered in practice and it was only through an agnostic stance on researching such encounters that this may have been documented. Yet this is not to suggest that we might not want to start developing work which aims at considering how these very specific types of processes are accommodated within human cultural practice.

Developing from Haraway's work (1991, 1992), an idea of the world as a set of 'material-semiotic' actors has become something of a mantra within this area of geography. This is valuable in its enshrined recognition that cultural understandings are only formed within a set of material constraints, whilst material entities can equally only ever be understood through sets of cultural lenses (Demerritt, 1994). Within this geographical approach, however, things could become more nuanced through a consideration of the specifics of the physical behaviours of the materials involved and how the humans creating their semiotic interpretations deal with these as such. This is not to suggest that understandings of such behaviours are not mediated but to point out that we could explore further how the specifics of the ways in which things go about acting is received in certain circumstances. This is less well-developed in geography, but could productively be explored further.

It is perhaps because my research has concerned itself specifically with plants and plant behaviour that I come to make such an argument. The category of entity that has been most studied in recent work using this framework is that of the animal and the lively wilfulness of animals is perhaps more easily recovered and placed alongside that of humans (on animal geography see Wolch and Emel, 1998; Philo and Wilbert, 2000). That is to say that animals do all sorts of things, just as humans do, in a more immediately discernible fashion. Their agency is more similarly made manifest and, correspondingly, may not require too much conceptual development to accommodate it alongside human action. With plants, however, there is a different story to tell. This is one that Jones and Cloke (2002) have said something about with reference to trees. For our botanical brethren there are clearly some different ways of behaving and, through this thesis, I have sought to explore how people deal with these propensities. In

particular here I have developed arguments about controlling and waiting within our relationships with plants, although there could be other axes of analysis.

In this I feel that I am pushing at an approach that some recent geographical papers hint at. Dominy (2002, p15) for example suggests we use historical and ethnographic analysis to examine the significance of land and place in relation to what she calls 'biogeophysical and cultural components.' Here her concern is with New Zealander colonialist practice and how the behaviour of the human and organic inhabitants of the 'land' help sustain or undermine particular discourses of what place means. Robertson (2000, p485) argues that we should 'specify nature' in so far as we should desegregate the different elements of natural processes that occur and how they are encountered by people. Here his concern is with land restoration and how when American wetlands are arbitrarily moved geographically around to ensure 'no net loss' we should reconsider what utility they provide and whether this movement undermines this. Finally, Mansfield (2003, p390) argues we should consider 'cultural-biophysical-economic relations' and how these different factors interpenetrate within particular contexts. Her concern is with American legal disputes and how protectionist ends are pursued through the classification and stigmatisation of particular kinds of river movements and fish capacities.

In this I come back once again to Kreiger's (1973) bold question. What exactly is wrong with plastic trees? Clearly and intuitively both we and the people that vandalised these trees feel there is something not quite right about this notion. There is something about the fact that trees are living - that they behave - which we prize. Such attributes may afford us restorative capacities in a sense which is not as explicitly visual as that which the environmental psychologists tended to focus upon. There is something, therefore, about such forms of behaviour and acting that we value. What this thesis advances here is a concern for 'biophysical processes' in their 'social contexts.' That is to say that it argues it could be a productive move to concern ourselves with the particular ways in which a bigger category of nature becomes manifest and how the humans dealing with it receive this. Whilst remaining committed to questioning how types of living nonhumans are closely encountered, we could also begin to question how the qualities embodied within their differential behaviours is received according to the ways in which it is manifest. This is not only with animals, but also with the thornier questions associated with other processes, such as growth, weather, decay and so forth.

My own work has been concerned with plant growth and liveness. As such, it is about one particular biophysical process and how humans in personal domestic life experience this process. Whist environmental psychology forcefully underlined the fact that we like to have growing things nearby in our lives, geographers with their particular emphasis on empirical

context could begin to offer some explanation for this pleasure. Spencer and Whatmore (2001) have argued for a fertile reconsideration of 'biogeography' to help map what are, quite literally, geographies of life. I have taken the example of plant life here and explored it within some particular urban social contexts. Here, at times, there was too much nonhuman liveness for people and, at other times, too little. At times, slow plant life was deemed a necessary antidote to fast paced living and, at other times, such manifestations were annoyances amongst the tightly controlled materials that were the background to busy human activities. The task for those organising their domestic organic encounters was to co-ordinate better those they live with and to persuade them to manifest the right amount of life. In this sense we can imagine an evolving geography of life to the city and the potential for future geographic research that questions the wellbeing emergent from encountering such life. This would be a reanimation of the city in the style which Wolch discusses (Wolch, 2002) that could help us better understand how people can manage to live happily within them.

Of the two central concerns of this thesis, one was to reconsider the character of human relations with the plant in the contemporary London contexts and this, now, has been discussed. Here, to some extent, throughout this thesis, I have been championing plant life as I sought to consider its transformative potential within human lives. Yet whilst I may have been championing this agency within my own writing, the potential for such agency to become manifest is more powerfully enacted elsewhere. Following on from Law's (1994) framework of 'ordering' practices, the wider import of my thesis may be minimal in comparison, say, to the activities of the garden decking industry. This returns me, finally, to my other central concern - how contemporary plant relations in London might be developing.

8.6 SOME IRONIES IN COMTEMPORARY CONSUMPTION

Linguistic anthropologists interestingly document some of the changing ways in which we categorise the things around us. In a similar way to Schneekloth's discussion of our changing understandings of the word 'vegetative' (Schneekloth, 2002), another example here is that of 'tree.' Whilst a distinguishable category of 'tree' might initially seem a self-evident truism, this category can be different for different groups and within particular groups through time (Witowski et al., 1981; Ellen, 1998). The idea of 'tree' was, for instance, traditionally, in the West conflated with an idea of 'wood.' That is to say that when we thought of, or represented, a 'tree' what was paramount within our cognitive schemas were its material properties and what could physically be done with it - it was, like wood, understood as something we could do things with, something we could practically use. However, as societies developed, this 'polysemic' link has drifted out of our ways of thinking and talking. A tree has come to be

something more to do with aesthetics and visual appearance, and less to do with how we might interact with it.[1]

Other inquiries into the historical dimensions of language document the decline in other terms we use for vegetative matter. When we might have previously automatically said 'oak', 'elm', or 'ash', for instance, now we increasingly just say 'tree'. What Witowski et al. (1981) argue here is that with the increased urbanisation of societies, and the correspondingly increasing distance between ourselves and trees, so we have found the range of potential words to describe such things to be of less use. Other work, meanwhile, suggests a contrasting increase in the amount of words actively used for different colours (Berlin and Kay, 1969). This is again, so the authors suggest, a consequence of changing lifestyles and the range of potential colours we have made easily available to ourselves. So perhaps we only now know magnolia as a potential paint choice for our living room, not as a dynamic tree that we live alongside. It may be that the living botanical things are increasingly lumped into categories that are less and less salient in our lives. Nature could be becoming something that we don't quite understand and, consequently, treat in a uniform and removed way.

In this context, a focus on contemporary urban plant relations such as I have undertaken is of interest. On a very broad level these linguistic studies suggest a decreasing knowledge of plants and know them now more in a visual, and less in a practical sense. Conversely, we know and talk more authoritatively about the colours and coloured materials we organise and arrange around us in our lives. Whilst plants are certainly and irrepressibly there within many urban contexts, the ease with which we encounter them is another matter.

During the recent media coverage surrounding the annual Chelsea Flower Show, an interesting caption to an illustrative photo in the Daily Telegraph reads: 'Green has emerged as the dominant theme in many gardens at this year's show' (The Telegraph, 2004). Now, many would suspect that green may have been a perennial theme in any garden given that plants are, for the most part, uniformly of this colour and often expected in these spaces. From this vantage, such a caption has a certain comic element. Yet, in a less ironic reading, captions such as this suggests the many different garden framings that jostle against each other. It is now possible on the front page of a national newspaper to say that green is the new 'theme' for gardens. Frameworks of fashion and choice seem those that apply here, rather than any concern for plant biology and the limiting nature of chlorophyll. Given the suggestions made by the linguistic anthropologists, captions such as these could seem less comic. We may be increasingly disinclined to accept a

[1] although such processes of cognitive framing are still, of course, in flux as Knight's work (1996), for example, suggests.

limiting palette of garden colour when we are more adept at identifying, choosing and expecting the colours we desire around us. Meanwhile, we may have less of an awareness or understanding of plants to counteract our tendencies towards embracing the ephemeral fashions involved.

A concern for such potential developments has been central to this thesis, as it has considered how, in practice, plants are dealt with in comparison to other materials. Here, in an ethnographic way, some of the very tensions that these linguistic studies point to have been clearly manifest. As discussed with reference to 'control', the people involved more easily embrace the more docile and versatile nature of material cultures. These, at least, helpfully sustain any number of more traditional symbolic meanings within processes of consumption. Yet meanwhile more lively plant entities remain doggedly there and, despite their possible strange alieness, they can yet forge productive relationships with different humans. The purpose of this final section is to consider, from this research, what exactly I want to say about our changing relations with living plants in London.

As Shove (2003) argues, to productively account for changing normalised practices of consumption is a difficult task. As lifestyles evolve, she suggests that we have a 'folk' sense that it was not always as it is now, yet accounting for the processes involved is a more difficult matter. Evolving patterns of consumption cannot be explained solely with reference to developing cultural meanings, changing patterns of innovation, or, indeed, the reorganised scheduling of routinised practice. Rather, all of these factors co-evolve and promiscuously interpenetrate within the specificity of the situations in which they do so. Particular factors may take on particular import at different times. The evolution of bathing, for instance, can perhaps be better explained by evolving routines and moral orders, whilst home freezing is potentially more fully accounted for by the diffusion and stabilisation of certain infrastructure systems (Shove, 2003). Here I am concerned with the different factors involved in shaping how we consider and experience the thing that we call a 'garden.'

Instinctively it seems a little foolish to talk about the evolution of 'normal' garden practice when, unlike many other areas of life, gardens remain characterised by a sanctioned individualism on the part of the owner (although this may be changing, as Groening and Schneider, 1999, suggest). There is more of a sense of permitted societal openness when it comes to how we arrange these spaces than within other arenas of consumption - a creative individual approach to organising kitchen cleanliness or personal bodily hygiene, for example, might be more frowned upon. A trip down any suburban street will reveal gardens as places for socialising, tending plants, parking the car, storing unwanted rubbish, drying laundry and any

manner of other activities. Such spaces are, to some extent, under the surveillance of the public sphere, as they bridge domestic privacy and communal neighbourhood. However, there remains a willingness to allow people to behave personally there, as they will.

Yet, this is not to underestimate the array of conditions that help structure how these spaces are used, organised and thought about. Whilst we are certainly allowed a degree of autonomy in our gardens, this is not to say that the amount of time we have available to be there, the quantity of money available to spend, the agendas of those that help us organise them, the media depictions of what they could be and the array of products and plants on offer do not impact upon individual practice. This thesis has concerned itself with four particular identified groups and, of course, conditions will be different for others in society. Nonetheless, based on my time with these four groups, it seems that certain tensions with regard to the garden have tended to be resolved in certain ways as the 'socio-tehnical landscape' that informs how we relate to plants evolves (Rip and Groen, 2001, cited in Shove, 2003, p69).

Talking of evolving 'landscapes' and 'structures', within which people operate, however, is to somewhat solidify things and to lend them more power than they should rightly be accorded (Latour, 1993, p125). This is particularly the case when this research has progressed through a multi-sited approach that works *within* such structures and recasts them as precarious networks of activity. The confusions and anxieties of the people that populate these structures are clear when such an approach is adopted. The garden designer is unsure about how much hard landscaping to use, for instance, whilst the garden centre manager still wonders about the extend to which they should stay committed to bulbs. I don't see structures here, but chains of association and patterns of collective organisation.

It is with this idea in mind that I situate my work within an idea of a radically open history. I may have explored and arranged some bits of information here, but where things now depends upon others (after, Law, 1994). The future is always undecided and any commentator or academic should be humble enough to recognise this fact. Regardless of what conclusion this thesis draws, its power to determine what will happen in the future may be minimal compared to the efforts of those whose jobs depend upon the outcome. The garden decking industry, for example, will work harder to keep their structures popular than I ever could. I have identified tensions and I have explored how contemporary involved individuals negotiate them. How these negotiations will actually progress in the future, however, is not for me to suggest. Rather than describing where I think things are headed, then, I would rather point to some ironies within the ways in which they have gone - or, at least, how certain tensions were being overcome during the course of this research. In this I return to the tension between *having* and *doing* that was

identified as a central concern. It is through documenting how this tension is manifest in practice that I see this thesis making a final contribution. That is to say that, in conclusion, I don't want to say what *will happen*, but rather prompt reflection on what has *been happening*.

Reisch (2001) argues we should reconsider how, as societies, 'wealth in time' could be better placed alongside 'wealth in goods.' As Schor (1998) also reminds us, notions of happiness in western economies have orientated for too long around the latter, to the neglect of the former, and this has made for detrimental effects. As others (Jackson and Marks, 1999) document in the UK 'indicators of social health' and 'quality of life measures' began to diverge from GDP in the mid 1970s. They had previously moved in tandem for decades and, correspondingly, for Max-Neef (1995), we have reached a 'threshold' as materially consuming and personally prospering have eventually become incompatible states. Yet rich, high-spending consumers are systemically crucial, in economic terms, to national success and the political power of terms such as 'GNP' is hard to shake. Subjective wellbeing research, meanwhile, suggests that we soon become habituated to these increases in wealth, such that they no longer make for any greater human satisfaction (Argyll, 1987; Kaplan, 2001, p539). Having more money and owning more things, although a situation to which we are increasingly habituated, does not seem to make us any happier. Interestingly for this research, being near to and experiencing natural environments, by contrast, seems 'remarkably resistant to habituation' according to Kaplan (Kaplan, 2001, p539). That is to say that the benefits we derive from being and doing things around plants and trees does not peter away but rather seems to provide a steady on-going utility.

The 'having-doing tension' is clearly played out on a grand societal scale. This thesis, meanwhile, has sought to question these matters through a smaller empirical case. Here nonetheless, a number of factors emerged as significant in fostering a certain controlling approach to the garden. These include the ease with which materials other than plants are dealt with, the difficulty in understanding plants, the limited physical range of plants in comparison to other materials, the expectation and pleasure of delivering a finished product and the time available to be in the garden and the unpredictability of the times that are available. All of these seem to stack up towards suggesting a notion of the garden becoming pacified as something that you more fundamentally *have*. Yet some of the principal ways in which the garden has been pleasurable to the people that I spent time with has been associated with a different range of activities. These include trying to figure out how plants behave, waiting for them to manifest their agency and to do what they will, spending time with them and losing track of time through engaging with the temporal ways in which gardens can sometimes behave. All of these, by

contrast, seem to be associated with dynamic engagement and the garden being something that you more fundamentally *do*.

This is an ironic situation. Although there is pleasure to be had from the beguiling temporalities and agencies at work in the garden, the extent to which they might 'configure' the owner (Woolgar, 1991) to engage productively and enjoyably with these attributes seems to be decreasing. Rather we seem more inclined to control and 'domesticate' (Silverstone et al. 1992) the involved plants and materials in such a way that they better meet a set of more immediate aesthetic requirements. The patterns that the linguistic anthropologists pointed to seem evident within these tensions and their development within this research work. We are having and owning things here, not doing things and living with them.

In terms of advocating more fulfilling and sustainable lifestyles, a developing argument goes that innovative work needs to be done to account for why and how people behave in the ways that they do, rather than simply extolling the wider benefit of particular actions (Burgess et al., 2003). Within this, pieces of research could usefully expose the contradictions within contemporary consumption patterns and prompt useful reflection on our evolving patterns of living. Exposing how such contradictions are played out within the 'having-doing' tension, Reisch (2001) argues, would be a productive academic endeavour to help us question, as societies, how and why we live in the ways that we do.

When I first started research for this project I went through a number of garden trade journals and magazines to try and map some sense of how things might be developing. There certainly were a lot of different activities going on. The Flower and Plants Association were launching a campaign to encourage people to buy flowers more frequently, stressing the emotional benefits that would follow (Bristowe, 2000). They may have had some success since plants were remaining popular gifts, although only the elderly tend to favour those pot plants that actively flowered (Horticultural Industry, 2000). Young garden owners, meanwhile, were becoming especially likely to choosing labour saving devices for the garden. (Directory of Plant Wholesalers, 2000). Newer gardeners were apparently more interested in convenience (Ayton, 1991) and, if they needed the convenience of easily seeing what was on offer, Horticultural Industry magazine has one suggestion. Through the use of digital cameras and websites, they described how customers could now monitor the progress and appearance of the plants they would potentially then buy (Horticultural Industry. 1999).

All of these factors, and many others, point in different directions and suggest potential avenues that we could follow in our urban plant relations. What I would rather say is that some of the

patterns that they have been following over the course of my work have a certain irony to them and, whilst I am keen not to predict where things will lead, I am keen to prompt reflection with regard to these ironies. Some of the existing tensions in how we live with plants suggest we are moving towards a situation where a rich and satisfying ongoing relation with dynamic garden companions is increasingly difficult. Whether this is to become a reality, however, is an outcome of many decisions and actions. That our relations with vegetative life are always in flux is the argument with which I started this thesis. The argument I end with emphasises that our future ways of experiencing and understanding plants is both an individual and a collective choice.

APPENDIX A

Below are examples of the interview schedule that were used in this research. One example is given for each site of research. As discussed in chapter three, each respondent was interviewed twice (or three times as was the case for the experienced gardener group). For the second interviews, a tailored schedule was constructed for each individual, based upon their responses in the first interview.

Garden Designers

Introduction to the project
Tape Recorder
Confidentiality

Your position and background

How did you come to be a garden designer?
Has it been a difficult choice?
What was the main factor in your decision?
How has life changed since becoming one?
Do you plan to be doing if for a long time?

Do you garden yourself?
Does this have any bearing on how you work?

What areas of London do you tend to work within?

The things that you use in your designs

How do you decide what to include in a garden design?
Are there particular things that you always like to use and why?
What encourages you to use different things?
Have you changed the kinds of things you would be inclined to at beginning of things?
What is your favourite thing to use at the moment?

Do you get involved with the planting?
What kinds of things do you like to use in your gardens?
Why do you choose these?
Is it easy to source the types of plants that you want to use?
How do you source them? Has this changed?
Has this impacted upon the things that you use?

What is it like working with the materials that you do?
Is it a pleasure or a chore?
What about the best and worst things?

What about the plants specifically?
Are they hard work? Does it make any difference?
Are some plants difficult to maintain? Do you mind this?
Is it good to work with plants?

The people that you make your gardens for

Why people come to you for help?
What are their motivations for getting a designed garden?
What are the things that they look to you to provide for them?
Do they have certain expectations of what is going to happen?
Are these met?

What are the people that come to you like?
Are there any characteristics that unite them?
Or are they really all wildly different?
What do they want specifically? Or do they have any idea of what they specifically want?
What are their main fears or concerns about getting a garden with you?
How do you address these?

Are there any trends in the ideas that they might have for their garden spaces?
Trends in the types of people that seem to be interested?

The way that you work with your clients?

How do you handle them then?
How do they react to design ideas? *Aftercare Issues*

So you have done your garden now?

How do they react? Any usual responses or problems?

Do you get involved with how the garden progresses afterwards?

How do people manage their upkeep afterwards?
What kinds of things do they need to do and do they do them?
Do you actually know what happens with the gardens that you have done?

Representations of the garden

What do you think about the media portrayals of gardening at the moment?

Are they a good thing or a bad thing?
Would you change them in any way?

Have they affected the way that people see the garden in London?

Do they alter the ways that garden designers work at all and to what effect?
Do you think that they have had any effect on the way that you specifically work?
How do you imagine the relationship developing?

Other ways of getting the garden organised

What are the other sources of help to the garden centre that people use to organise their garden?

E.g. Internet? Magazines?
Do these impact upon what you do?
Do they come up in the conversations that you have with clients?

What about garden centres?

Do you have any relationship with them?
Do they come up in conversations with clients?
What about other designers?

Other designers more generally

Do you think of them as an audience for your work at all?
Is there much communication between designers and of what sort?

More general matters

What are the main pressures on the garden designer at the moment?

What about opportunities?
How will they impact on what you plan to do?

Finally something about what it is like working on gardens?

What are the particular demands?
What are the particular pleasures?
Best and worst things really.

Thanks very much

The opportunity to talk again?

Introduce the ethnography

Why I want to do it.
See first hand how a garden centre works before I talk about it.
Best perspective is to see how it is done.
Happy to negotiate actual strategy and stuff
See what she thinks

Garden Centre Managers

Introduction to the project
Tape Recorder
Confidentiality

Your position and background

How did you get involved in garden centre management?
What do you see as your role in the workings of the centre?
Do you plan to be doing if for a long time?
How do you find working in the garden industry?
Is it stressful and in what ways?
What are its particular demands? Particular pleasures?
How are things in London different from elsewhere?
Do you garden yourself and does this have any bearing on how you work?
In what ways?
How important is this skill in garden centre work?

The things that you have and sell in the garden centre

What are the best selling things this summer then?
To what extent do you focus on plants in terms of the products that you sell?
Are their significance differences in the ratios of things you sell to the past?
What other things do you sell and has this changed?
What kind of other things are good to stock?
How do you organise the layout of the centre?
Has this changed at all? How come?
How do you decide which plants you are going to stock?
What has dictated the plants that you have in stock now?
How often do you change the types of plants on display? For what reasons?
Are there things that you always sell or things that you try and change?
Have the types of plants that you sell changed in recent times or more generally?
How do you organise the display of your plants?
Do you try and present them to the people?
In what ways?
What is it like working with plants?
Is it a pleasure or a chore? Why?
Are they hard work? Does it make any difference?
Are some plants difficult to maintain? Do you mind this?
Could you run through how things change here through the spring and summer?
How do things change and develop

The people that come to the centre

What kinds of people come to the garden centre at the moment?
Why do they come here?
Are they gardeners would you say?
Do different people come at different times of the year?
Do you often see the same people at all?
Do they actually buy things or not?
Do different kinds of people choose different kinds of things?
Do they know what they want before they come?
Has this changed in recent times at all? Why do you think this is?
What about ideas of the 'instant' garden and low maintenance plants?
Do your customers ask questions often? What about?
Do they know very much about things? How do you respond?
How do you find out about them and what they want to buy?
Do you anticipate their requirements and act upon them?

What information do you get about the market and how do you use that?
Do you try and create any particular sort of experience for them at all?
How important are ways of getting customer feedback for you?
Do they ever bring things back? Or any sort of aftercare at all?

Why do you think people garden?
Do you think these motivations have changed at all?

Garden representations

What do you think about the media portrayal of gardening at the moment?
Are they a good thing or a bad thing?
Have they effected the way that people garden generally?
Do they alter the ways that garden centres work at all and to what effect?
Do you think that they have had any effect here at this particular centre at all?
Are you happy to engage with the sorts of ideas that they have?

Other ways of garden organisation

What are the other sources of help to the garden centre that people use to organise their garden?
E.g. Internet? Magazines?
Are there any changes in the significance of these?
What do you think about the role of landscapers and designers in London at the moment?
Do they affect the way that you work here? The amount of business that you do?
Do you have any particular relationships with them at all?
Do you think that their clients ever come here at all?

The development of the garden centre and its future role within London gardening

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So, how has the way this garden centre works changed in recent years?
What have been the main things?
What initiatives have you undertaken and to what effect?
Have you changed the layout of the centre?
Any marketing activity?
Is there a kind of community around the idea of the garden?
Do you think that this could apply and in what ways?
Or does this not come into the ideas that you have of what is going on?
How might this centre fit into this community would you say?
What are the main pressures on the garden centre in London? Are there pressures?
What about opportunities? Do they impact on the way you operate?
How do you envisage the way that garden centres work here developing?

Thanks very much
The opportunity to talk again?
Introduce the ethnography
Why I want to do it.
See first hand how a garden centre works before I talk about it.
Best perspective is to see how it is done.
Happy to negotiate actual strategy and stuff
See what he thinks

Designed Garden Owners

Introduction to the project
Tape Recorder
Confidentiality

Before the garden design

Background to the respondent

What do you do?
How long have you been living here?
How long do you plan to live here?
How much time do you get to spend at home?
Have you ever had a garden before?

What did you do with the outdoor space before you thought about getting it designed?

Did you spend much time out there?
Did you try and develop things out there at all?

Why did you finally decide to get it designed?

How come you didn't decide to develop it yourself?
How did you choose who you wanted to go with?
How was the process of finding someone?

Did you have any firm ideas about what you wanted?

What were you hoping for from the process?
What were the most important things that you wanted to achieve?

Did you have fixed ideas about what it should become?

Any things that you specifically wanted to include?
Any firm ideas about what the process would entail?
Where did you get your ideas from?
Books, magazines, TV?
Do you look at garden books at all? Why? What you get out of it?
What about garden TV things?

During the garden design

So how was the process of finalising the design then?

Did you have any sorts of expectations of what the process would entail?
How did you go about deciding what should be put in?
Who chose what things?
What things were chosen and why?
How did you choose the layout that you did?

Did you have a specific look that you wanted to go for?

Did you have specific things that you wanted to include?
What about hard landscaping? Much of that? Why?
(Any irrigation? Any evergreens?)
What about the plants?
Did you talk about the amount of work that it would be? Low maintenance etc?
Why did you choose the plants that you did?
To what extent did you follow the ideas that the designer had?

Then what happened?

How was the whole process?
What were you nervous about?
Were you worried at all?
And then how was it at the end?
Totally happy?

Now after the garden design

Using the garden – you and the garden

Do you use the garden very much?
When was the last time you came out here?
What do you do out there?
At what times do you go out there?
Particular times of the year?
What do you like about being out there? What's it like?
What sorts of things do you think about there then?
Do you use it in the way that you expected that you would? Or is it different?

Having the garden

Does it change much throughout the year?
When did it reach its best? Has it?
What do you like about it?
Which parts of the garden do you like best?
Any favourite plants?

Do you like plants?

Do any of them have any particular associations for you?
Are you pleased with it?
Have you changed the way that you think about your garden space?
Are there any particular aspects of the design that you like?
How important is it to you to keep it looking nice?

Sharing the garden – the garden and other people

Do other people come and see it or use it with you at all?
Who uses the garden and for what purpose now then?
What do you think about when you are out there?
What do friends think about it?
Neighbours? - Do you see the neighbours?
Do you talk about it much with other people?
In what sorts of ways?

Developing the garden

Has it changed at all since you got the designs done?

Have you developed things or changed anything about it?
Any things that have proved to be successes or failures at all?

What are your favourite things about it?

Do you have a favourite plant within the design?
Any least favourite things?
Do you have specific aims and intentions for how it might be in the future?
How do you think that you might achieve them?

Do you garden now

Who looks after it?

A big job? Do you talk about developing it at all?
Do you have any routines that you have to keep it looking well?
Have you put any new plants in at all? Any other things?
How have they gone?

Have things grown much since the design?

Do you have to do much to look after it?
What if you go away for periods?
Pests – have they come into play at all?

Do you have any tools?

Do you want to, or think that you would, get into gardening?

What about in the future?

Do you think you would get your garden designed again?
Would you recommend it to others?
What would you say to them?
If you move would you plan to do a similar thing?

How would you feel about moving?

Would you mind leaving the garden?
What about when you are older, maybe retired?
What would you do with the garden then?
Is there anything that you would change about the garden that you have?

What would be a good garden in your opinion?

Do you have an idea of a good garden?
Would you have an idea of what a bad garden is?
What about in the London context?

A bit of natural space?

In what sorts of ways?
Do you use other green spaces or do you prefer this one?

Summary final questions

Do you look at gardens differently now at all since it was done?
In what sorts of ways?
And finally what would be the best and the worst things about getting a garden designed.

During the tour of the actual garden

So tell me about what's going on out here?
Talk me through the different bits and pieces that we have here?
Which are your favourite parts of the garden?
Do you walk around it very much or go around it?

Ask questions about specific things:

Do you treat them all in the same ways?
Do you have favourites? Why?
Do you worry about some more than others?

Introduce the camera. Could I take a few photos?
What would you suggest would be as good photos to take?
What bits are important to you?
How do you like to present the garden?

Experienced Gardeners

Introduction to the project
Tape Recorder
Confidentiality

Using the garden

How do you actually use the garden? Is it just for gardening?
At what times do you go into the garden?
Who else uses the garden and how do you feel about this?
Do friends come to the garden? Do you talk to them about it? What do you discuss?
What do you associate the garden with?
What do you think about when you are in the garden and not gardening?
Do you ever just sit and admire your handiwork. Is this easy to do?

Gardening routines

What decides when you do your gardening generally?
What kind of patterns are there in the way that you garden?
Do you always do certain things when they need to be done? Or at specific times?
What about the seasons?
Is Gardening a pleasure or a chore?
What things make it pleasurable and what things are annoying?
Why and in what ways?
Do you ever feel that you organise yourself around the garden?
What are the best jobs? Why? And the worst?
What do you actually focus on when you are gardening?
What things, if any, do you usually think about when you are gardening?
Do you ever drift off and think of other things? What are they?
Do you actually think about specific aims and intentions for how you want the garden to be?

Growing individual plants

How did you go about organising the actual layout of your garden?
Has this organisation changed at all?
Which types of plants do you use?
How do you go about choosing specific varieties?
Have you changed the types that you grow?
Where do you go to get your plants? Why?
Have there been any particular successes or failures? Any surprises?
What do you do if a certain plant seems to be floundering? Do you mind?
What if it grows really well? Do you consider why that might be?
What knowledge do you draw upon in the whole process of growing plants?
Have these sources changed at all over the years?

Routines, organisation, materials

What aims did you have for the garden at the start and how have they changed?
How often are you out there?
When and at what times are you out there?
Annually, weekly, daily?
Do you worry if you haven't got time to be out there?

Do you have a plan of what you want to do before you go out there at all?
Do you stick to it or just go out when you have time and begin?

Does the garden make big demands upon you ever?

Do you mind this?
Do you always meet these demands and what if you don't?

Do you know more about how plants work, through doing your garden?
What have you learnt about?
Is that interesting?
Do you think that you need to know these sorts of things?

Do you always try and choose plants that fit with the conditions of your garden?
Do you think about what conditions they need?
Do you sometimes take chances on this front at all?
They need things at different times? Or just get on with it
Can you always accommodate these sorts of needs?
Do you put different sorts of plants in different parts of the garden?

Design in the garden

Would you ever have a garden designed by someone else?
What do you think about this sort of idea?
Do you think that it can be a stylish place?
What about a low maintenance garden?
Would you like this sort of thing?
If not, why? If so, how come you never ended up having one?
Do you like maintaining it then?
Have you thought about irrigation?
Or ever getting someone in to help with it?
What sorts of bits and pieces do you use to help sort out the garden?
Do you have lots of tools for instance? Any new tools that you like?

I'm interested, you see, in why people want to do their gardens themselves?
To what extent do you want to just make it look good?

During the tour of the actual garden

So tell me about what's going on out here?
Talk me through the different bits and pieces that we have here?
Which are your favourite parts of the garden?
Do you walk around it very much or go around it?

Ask questions about specific things:
Do you treat them all in the same ways?
Do you have favourites? Why?
Do you worry about some more than others?

Introduce the camera. Could I take a few photos?
What would you suggest would be as good photos to take?
What bits are important to you?
How do you like to present the garden?

More reflective questions

Do you feel like your part of your garden?
Like you are part of the different sorts of processes going on there?
Do you like getting your fingers dirty and all that? Why?

Has the way you think about a garden changed over the years?

What about your own garden?

So what if you didn't have a garden?
What would that be like?
What does having a garden give you would you say?
What about leaving this particular garden?
So what are the plans that you have for the garden over the next year or so?
Do you think that you or the garden will stick to them?
Are you working towards anything?
Or has the garden reached its best? Will it ever?

Do you think that it will ever be finished? Why is that ?

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