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FACULTY OF GRADUATE AND
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personal gardening literature

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**A PLACE BETWEEN HEAVEN
AND THE HEART**
**- a geographical interpretation of selected
contemporary personal gardening literature**

Renate Sander-Regier

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Geography

Department of Geography
Faculty of Arts
University of Ottawa

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Abstract

This thesis is an exploration, conducted in the open-minded spirit of humanistic geography, of the geographical meanings of the personal garden space as it is portrayed in selected contemporary personal gardening literature. Through an interpretive framework based on three geographical metaphors – the personal garden as a microcosm, landscape, and place – the personal garden revealed itself to be a cultural, social and personal space, essentially *human*, as well as a biological, ecological and environmental space, essentially *nonhuman*. This fundamental human-nonhuman duality at the core of the personal garden reflects the human-physical duality at the heart of the discipline of geography, as such making the personal garden a space of particular geographical significance. This thesis adds a new type of literature, personal gardening books, to geographical inquiry and contributes to growing geographical dialogue on the topic of personal gardens.

Cette thèse propose une exploration, menée dans l'esprit de la géographie humaniste, de la signification géographique du jardin personnel tel que représenté dans la littérature de jardinage personnel contemporaine. Sous l'angle d'un cadre interprétatif basé sur trois métaphores géographiques – le jardin comme microcosme, paysage, et lieu – le jardin personnel se révèle un espace à la fois culturel, social, et personnel, essentiellement *humain*, aussi bien que biologique, écologique et environnemental, essentiellement *nonhumain*. Cette dualité essentielle du jardin personnel reflète la dualité humaine-physique au coeur de la géographie, qui rend manifeste la pertinence du jardin d'un point de vue géographique. Cette recherche, qui présente à la géographie une nouvelle littérature, des livres de jardinage, se veut une contribution au dialogue géographique au sujet du jardin personnel.

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I would like, foremost, to thank my supervisor, Dr. Marc Brosseau, for his wise and patient accompaniment since the beginning of this thesis project. He played a significant role throughout the process – from helping shape the initial idea into a feasible study, to offering encouragement when I wanted to try something different, to providing support and assistance during the final stages. I appreciate his open-mindedness, his enthusiasm, his humour. I can't think of anyone I would rather work with for my PhD.

Many thanks also to the members of my thesis committee – Dr. Anne Gilbert and Dr. Daniel Lagarec – for their patience and cooperation, and for providing suggestions and comments which contributed significantly to the direction and structure of the study.

I owe a lot to Raymond for holding the fort during my physical and mental absences, and for supporting and encouraging my endeavours without fail. I couldn't have done it without him. Tim and Raggs, Quio while he was still in this world, and now Fame, provided much-needed cheer and diversion.

My apologies to the garden, which was seriously neglected these past months while I focused on understanding other peoples' gardens and on writing this thesis. I look forward to next spring, when I will try to make up for my delinquency in my own personal garden space.

I would also like to express appreciation to the University of Ottawa, Department of Geography, for facilitating my research by providing office space and access to a computer system, and for offering teaching assistantships to help increase my survival rate during this stage of my return to graduate studies.

A PLACE BETWEEN HEAVEN AND THE HEART – a geographical interpretation of selected contemporary personal gardening literature

Introduction

More and more people are making gardens. I don't know who counts them, but annually the figures are rising, which must say something about the human spirit. And it isn't just the obvious people – the competitive or the discontented; the middle-aged, the retired or separated; the thwarted painter or the frustrated genius. Many new gardeners are young. They are people with jobs, small children or part-time work; people who live in cities or who are commuters. They are the thousands who need breathing space and a space for creative licence all their own. Often leading hectic lives, they yet make time for this other dimension that is unique, personal and financially unremunerative.

(Osler, 1997)

Gardening, after walking, ranks as the second most popular physical, or leisure, activity among adults in both Canada and the United States¹, and its popularity has been growing over the past several years. It is no wonder, then, that the garden space, as well as the idea of the garden and the activities associated with it, have entered increasingly into the realm of popular dialogue and thought.

Why? What is this place people tend with such devotion? What is its attraction? What do gardens mean to people?

I was asking myself these questions one day, during a long, mind-clearing drive to an interdisciplinary conference in the United States the summer I was struggling to come up with a thesis topic – a topic that should be not only interesting geographically and fresh academically, but also meaningful to me. I suppose the seeds for the topic had been germinating for some time in my subconscious, but it was only then, relaxed and driving through a stunning natural landscape, that I realised I could develop a thesis around the concept of personal gardens.

The wheels in my mind kept turning. Perhaps my “fieldwork”, so to speak, could revolve around literature written about personal gardens, works similar to books I had started reading – a rather nebulous, yet growing, sub-genre of gardening literature sometimes called “gardening memoir”,

sometimes “gardening autobiography”, sometimes neither, and which I have chosen to identify as “personal gardening literature”. I started to get excited. Would it be possible to combine my love of reading and gardening, my previous literary studies and my current geography studies, my fascination with the ways human beings relate to their environments and my passion and concern for the natural environment? It struck me that a rising consciousness and concern regarding environmental issues has been intersecting with the growing gardening trend through the addition of an ecological element to personal gardening literature published over the last 25 years. Past and present, interests and concerns, activities both intellectual and physical – converging in my thesis topic. I felt a genuine thrill.

About five years ago, I started to participate more actively in the growing North American gardening trend, both in the vegetable garden my husband and I are establishing at our home in rural West Quebec, and in the native wildflower gardens I started with the goal of increasing native plant biodiversity around our home. The latter project was inspired by an ecologically oriented personal gardening book I read one long, cold winter. That book set off an unforeseen chain of events, starting with my decision to replace the former cow pasture around our house with native wildflowers – an ambitious project which will stretch over years and teach me much in the process. The chain of events continued with related gardening activities and research opening doors to communities I didn’t know existed – from the nonhuman communities within and around my garden, to a regional community of ecological gardeners, to a North American community of native plant gardeners and seed collectors. Along the way, I also started reflecting on the role I was playing in the garden space I was creating, learning about bioregional ecology and ecological restoration, writing about my personal geography, and embarking on a second round of university studies at the graduate level, this time in geography, a discipline which I figured was more “me” considering my growing environmental awareness and zeal. I was particularly surprised and delighted to discover eventually that geography, if the word is broken into its constituent Greek roots, is

literally about the earth (geo) and describing or writing about it (graphy). Writing about the earth ... what could be a more suitable academic pursuit for me?

The chain of events has now culminated in this thesis, an exploration of the personal garden (described in detail in both Chapters 1 and 3) represented in contemporary personal gardening literature (defined in Chapter 3) as a multifaceted and geographically inclusive space – a space both physical or natural (e.g. biological, ecological, environmental) and human² (e.g. social, cultural, personal). I am interpreting these personal gardens and gardening activities through a framework based on the garden spaces as microcosms, landscapes and places – geographical metaphors, or geometaphors, which represent three different scales of geographical consideration, endeavour and consequence, with their associated characteristics and intricacies (framework described in Chapter 4). These aspects of the study are grounded intellectually in humanistic geography (described in Chapter 2).

The communication approach I am taking in this thesis, as you will have already noticed, diverges somewhat from the usual thesis format. It started when I was researching what interpretation meant, and I discovered an interesting array of rather experimental postmodern qualitative research approaches – some people have taken to calling them ‘paradigms’ – which recognise the merit of notions such as, among others, the biographical stance of the researcher, personal experience, individual perspectives, subjectivity, reflexivity, evocative representation, polyvocality, and the dialogic nature of research and writing (more detail in Chapter 4). These sorts of approaches appeal to the reader and writer in me, and since they are being increasingly taken by social scientists to carry out and communicate the process and results of their research, I thought I would write this thesis from a somewhat more personal perspective and add subjective elements here and there as they related to my own personal gardening experiences.

This dual exploration – predominantly geographical, and to a much lesser degree subjective-methodological – combines my literary, geographical and environmental interests and concerns; my love

of reading, creative writing, and nature exploration; my current geography studies and my previous literary studies; and the last five years of garden learning, reflection and action. I make no claims to provide a comprehensive picture of the geographical meaning of personal gardens with this particular study. What I am seeking to do is shed a certain amount of light on the breadth of geographical significance relative to the personal garden, add to existing dialogue on the geography of personal gardens, and stimulate and initiate ideas for further discussion and study regarding personal garden spaces and experiences and the study of geography.

This thesis is structured along the following lines. Chapter 1 offers an overview of the concept of the garden from historical, intellectual, philosophical, religious and geographical perspectives, while Chapter 2 looks at gardens from an angle informed by the tradition of humanistic geography. Chapter 3 describes personal gardening literature and the autobiographical tradition it grows out of, as well as the works selected for study and the selection process. Chapter 4 outlines my geometaphorical interpretive approach and provides an overview of new qualitative research paradigms. Chapter 5 looks at the personal gardens portrayed in the books under study from social, personal, and cultural angles, while Chapter 6 focuses on personal gardens as natural spaces, and Chapter 7 concentrates on the personal garden's role as an interface between the cultural and the natural.

MUSINGS FROM THE GARDEN

The end of May. It's my birthday. And the seeds are finally germinating in the greenhouse – the ones from the packages Anne gave me last fall when I went to visit her before the geography conference. "Wild Blue Indigo", "Prairie Dock", "Wild Senna" – flowers I've only read about, seen in photographs.

But soon, if all goes well, they will grow and thrive in the Wild Area, that messy tangle of non-native hay grasses, clover, and vetch beyond the rock wall, where a small island of tough native wildflowers I've been planting and expanding over the past few years has survived the winter and is reaching hopeful shoots toward the sun – beginnings of the wildflower meadow existing largely in my mind, my hopes, my dreams, and in the half-inch seedlings coming up green in the trays filled with tiny newspaper planting pots I rolled and pressed into shape over the course of the winter in anticipation of spring.

The Wild Area. In reality, it's a rough half-acre former cow pasture filled with tough-rooted plants whose roots have tangled into a thick thatch I need to dig up, one spadeful, one wheelbarrowful at a time, then replace with my little seedlings, one planting pot at a time, followed by watering, monitoring, and nurturing, maybe mulching if needed, until each one is established enough to make it on its own. It's a lot of work right now, but when they're established, these hardy native plants don't need much maintenance. The work now will be worth it in the long run. And the work itself, along with the anticipation and the dreams, is rewarding, a pleasure – an intense, deep joy.

It's a marvellous world, this garden both real and dreamed, so easy to get lost in. But I must be careful. I must restrain myself. I have a thesis to write this season ...

Introduction notes

- ¹ According to the Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute and the US Surgeon General. Sources: <http://www.cflri.ca/cflri/pa/surveys/2001survey/2001survey.htm> and <http://www.fitness.gov/execsum.htm#summary>, accessed September, 2004.
- ² The “physical” and “human” reflecting the labels of the main divisions within the discipline of geography.

Chapter 1 Geography and the garden – a review

1.1 The nature of gardens – a brief historical overview

God Almighty first planted a garden. And indeed it is the purest of human pleasures
(Francis Bacon, quoted in Merriam-Webster 1992)

Gardening and garden traditions vary among cultures around the world. By 1500 BC, Egyptians were creating decorative gardens which included walls, pools and trees, and not soon after, plants grown solely for beauty. Further east, the Assyrians and Babylonians created tree parks, for both hunting and spiritual renewal, as well as “ziggurats”, artificial terraced mounds of green to add interest to the flat landscape (Huxley 1984, 133). The famous hanging, or terraced, gardens of Babylon, listed among the seven wonders of the ancient world, were built in the early part of the first millennium BC (King 1979, 24). In China, pleasure gardens – stylised and idealised landscapes where rocks and water symbolised aspects of the larger landscape – existed by the 4th century BC. Japanese gardens – more abstract than Chinese gardens, with even stronger symbolism – date back to around the 3rd century BC. In these latter two traditions, gardens replaced the awesome and vast natural environment outside the garden boundaries (Huxley 1984, 133).

In western culture, the garden as an idea, an idyll, and a physical space, can be traced back to the first book of *The Holy Bible*: “And the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden ... And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it”¹. Landscape architect Clare Cooper Marcus points out that “the Garden”, the place where human life began according to biblical tradition, was also a paradise to which people would someday return, and that this myth was shared by other cultures such as the Greeks, Scythians, and Tibetan Buddhists who believed in a paradise, oasis, or garden of sorts, variously characterised by beauty, immortality, peace, happiness, warmth, and abundant food (Marcus, 1990, 26-27). Humanistic geographer Yi-Fu Tuan adds that the archetype of the garden is

Eden, or paradise, images of which change with cultures and historical periods (Tuan 1983, 66), although the different perceptions of paradise have in common characteristics such as egalitarianism, geographical isolation and a rich natural environment (Tuan 1982, 174). The myth of the garden as paradise continues to this day in literature, song and other arts, and in more contemporary utopian ideals, which Tuan describes as “no less than the Garden of Eden and the Celestial City combined” (Tuan 1998, 76).

*We are stardust
We are golden
And we've got to get ourselves
Back to the garden.*

Joni Mitchell, *Woodstock*²

Historian John Prest points out that throughout the Middle Ages, the biblical Garden of Eden was believed to have survived the flood, to be a physical place fifteenth-century explorers hoped to locate. When it became obvious they would not meet with success, the focus turned to re-creating Eden, to “bringing the scattered pieces of the creation together into a Botanic Garden, or new Garden of Eden” (Prest 1981, 9). Botanical gardens are just one of the many types of gardens that developed in the West, which traces its gardening roots to the Mediterranean basin where settled communities cultivated plants for food and medicinal purposes within enclosures which provided protection from marauders and desert winds (Hobhouse 1992, 11). Those first gardens, stresses garden designer and historian Penelope Hobhouse “emphasized the contrast between two separate worlds: the outer one where nature remained awe-inspiringly in control and an inner artificially created sanctuary, a refuge for man and plants from the burning desert, where shade trees and cool canals refreshed the spirit and ensured growth” (Hobhouse 1992, 11).

Canadian gardening historian Carol Martin reveals another set of roots, one which influenced gardening in North America. She writes about Aboriginal peoples whose diet included plant foods – nuts, berries, mushrooms, ferns, rhizomes, roots, seaweed – gathered from the wild. Sometimes, she

explains, “these wild foods came from nurtured groves or patches that were considered the preserve of an individual family or community, and were cultivated by them” (Martin 2000, 2). She adds examples of the Coast Salish nation tending and harvesting the blue camas lily bulbs; of Ojibwa families nurturing, weeding and harvesting wild rice; of the Iroquoian people growing corn, beans, tobacco, sunflowers, and squash (Martin 2000, 3-5). These latter crops eventually entered the gardens and farms of east coast settlers to merge with the gardening traditions they had brought from Europe (Hobhouse 1992, 258).

Through the ages, western garden types and designs, styles and ideals, have included, among others, monastery gardens, landscape gardens and sculpture gardens (Thacker, 1979); botanical gardens, “physic” (medicinal) gardens and enclosed gardens (Prest, 1981); princely gardens, statuary gardens and grand gardens (Cunningham, 1996); parterres, ornamental gardens, and xeriscapes (Hobhouse, 1992); military gardens, secret gardens, and emancipated gardens (Brown, 1999); railway company gardens, school gardens, and city beautification gardens (von Baeyer, 1984). In a recent publication, landscape scholar Diana Balmori and photographer Margaret Morton emphasise three categories of urban gardens: community gardens, appropriated gardens, and squatters’ gardens, which they group under the umbrella label “transitory” gardens to signify spaces created by homeless urban dwellers (Balmori and Morton, 1993).

1.2 The nature of gardens – intellectual and philosophical perspectives

What do these various garden types, styles and ideals have in common? It is difficult to pin down a concept as broad and elastic as the garden as it has evolved with time, but garden theorist John Dixon Hunt rises to the challenge with the following comprehensive definition of a garden:

A garden will normally be out-of-doors, a relatively small space of ground (relative, usually, to accompanying buildings or topographical surroundings). The specific area of the garden will be deliberately related through various means to the locality in which it is set: by the invocation of indigenous plant materials, by various modes of representation or other forms of reference (including association) to that larger territory, and by drawing out the character of its site (the *genius loci*). The garden will thus be distinguished in various ways from the adjacent

territories in which it is set. Either it will have some precise boundary, or it will be set apart by the greater extent, scope, and variety of its design and internal organization: more usually both will serve to designate its space and its actual or implied enclosure. A combination of inorganic and organic materials are strategically invoked for a variety of usually interrelated reasons – practical, social, spiritual, aesthetic – all of which will be explicit or implicit expressions or performances of their local culture. The garden will therefore take different forms and be subject to different uses in a variety of times and places. To the extent that gardens depend on natural materials, they are at best ever-changing (even with the human care and attention that they require above all other forms of landscape), but at worst they are destined for dilapidation and ruin from their very inception (Hunt, 2000, 14-15).

French architectural historian Monique Mosser and philosopher Philippe Nys elaborate on the personal, political, social and economic aspects of gardens from their European perspective:

Il [le jardin] relève d'abord d'un investissement affectif et personnel, par le biais d'une évidence première, la plupart du temps stéréotypée, qui s'impose à notre sensibilité, dérivant trop souvent en sensiblerie et qui possède son envers dérisoire, la 'haine' de la nature : le jardin attire, plaît, il est profondément ancré dans l'imaginaire sous la figure du mythe du Paradis perdu, il est un 'besoin de notre âme sensible', il est et serait de tout temps. Du point de vue politique et social, le jardin est aujourd'hui investi et même surinvesti par des enjeux économiques et politiques multiples liés plus que jamais à l'aménagement des espaces publics et urbains, des espaces de fonctions, à la fabrication de 'loisirs' pour des masses plus ou moins endormies ou, au contraire, à la fabrication de lieux hautement sophistiqués pour élites averties et, parfois, affectées. Bref, tout espace ou presque pourrait ou devrait inclure une dimension 'jardin' dans le principe même de son aménagement et de son devenir, communiquant ainsi, de manière complexe, avec la question des paysages, urbains et ruraux, mais sans que ces relations soient vraiment réfléchies et pensées en tant que telles (Mosser and Nys, 1995, 9-10).

The only element missing from these descriptions of the garden – one relevant to a more holistic geographical understanding of the space of the garden – is an ecological one. The garden is, after all, a space where individuals work within greater natural processes and participate as elements of both the ecological community within the garden and the greater natural system beyond the garden's boundaries. This is an aspect articulated by architect Bruce Allsopp, who makes the point that the garden is a small ecologically balanced system, albeit an artificial ecological unit, which the gardener directs to practical and aesthetic advantage, and in which the gardener is also a participant, an active element working *with* nature in the garden ecosystem (Allsopp, 1972, 40-48).

Landscape architects Mark Francis and Randolph T. Hester Jr. cast the garden in terms of both nature and culture – an approach I found highly relevant to more holistic geographical inquiry. They describe the garden as, simultaneously, [I emphasise key words in italics] 1) an *idea* that has served as a way of thinking about *nature* and *culture*, human control and natural unpredictability; 2) an everyday *place*,

small or large, arranged by human activity, a part of our common *landscape*; and 3) an *action* which requires intimate and direct involvement (Francis and Hester, 1990, 2-8). The garden, for them, exists on several levels.

The ideas of intimate and direct human involvement and participation in the garden have been stretched to the point of referring to people as “human plants.” Luther Burbank, who developed more than 800 strains and varieties of plants during the second half of the 19th century, parallels the organisation and development of plant and human life in his book *The Training of the Human Plant*³. More recently, botanist Kathleen Harrison depicts heritage seed collectors and distributors as active ecosystem participants, calling them “plant people ... a sort of marriage between people and plants. They’re like the birds carrying the seeds, or the animals with their seeds caught on their fur. It’s that part of evolution that is moving the species around” (quoted in Ausubel, 1994, 22). Ecologist Carmen Ditzler, who asserts that a “garden can be a place where humans and nature can interact and foster one another’s growth”, positions herself as a physical part of her garden when she writes about “Gardening with myself as one of the plants I nurture and the Earth as a partner who is full of surprises”⁴.

Philosopher Mara Miller points to these sorts of perceived similarities between people and plants as the basis for the metaphorical significance of gardens. The similarities, she stresses, are both biological and cultural – in the example she provides, the cultural is actually semantic:

Plants are not born the way we are, but there the dissimilarity ends. They grow and change and age and die much as we do. Even more strikingly, in doing these things, they exhibit the same dependency on their environment for sustenance and support as we have. They flourish or wither, suffer injury, survive, for similar if not identical reasons. The vocabulary of their existence serves equally well to describe our own; laying down roots, fertilizing, blossoming, budding, coming to fruition, unfolding are concepts which apply to human lives in many different languages (Miller 1993, 26).

She goes on to provide a variety of supporting literary references – from the Bible and the Kabbalah, to neo-Confucianist Chinese writers, Shakespeare and Goethe – which illustrate the garden as an expression

of the individual character of the individual who dwells in the garden, as a tool for interpreting the person who expresses him or herself in the garden, and as a representation of aspects of the human condition, particularly with relation to the divine order (Miller 1993, 26-31).

It is no wonder, then, that people feel so strongly about their personal gardens, that they participate so intensely in its creation and preservation, that they become so intimately involved in the space. By tending garden plants and helping them flourish, perhaps the individual gardener is also caring for him- or herself, for the divine within.

The relationship between people and plants is as old as the human species itself, and it is certainly as strong as ever. By extension, the relationship between people and gardens has great antiquity. If one accepts a biblical interpretation, people were created in a garden. If one accepts a scientific explanation, early people were gatherers who harvested the bounty of the land and over time became so familiar with certain plants that they domesticated them, most probably in protected areas near their homes – in protogardens.

(Doolittle 2004, 391)

1.3 The personal garden

The garden as an idea, action, idyll, and metaphor; the garden as a social, cultural, and ecological space; the garden as a representational, expressive, intimate, perhaps even divine place – this is the intellectually and philosophically intense and fertile context within which I have developed my idea and conception of the personal garden.

The foundation of my definition of *personal garden* is Mara Miller's broad working definition for *garden*: "any purposeful arrangement of natural objects (such as sand, water, plants, rocks, etc.) with exposure to the sky or open air, in which the form is not fully accounted for by purely practical considerations such as convenience" (Miller 1993, 15). I do not agree entirely with the second part of the definition, "exposure to the sky or open air". Miller states that entirely enclosed gardens are rare, and that in her opinion, they can only be imitations of gardens, not the real thing. Yet I have seen intricate

arrangements of plants and other natural objects indoors, and while they are rare, they can be just as complex and interesting as many outdoor gardens. I hesitate, therefore, to include an outdoor-only criteria to my definition of a personal garden, though all the gardens represented in the books selected for study are outdoor spaces.

I would not, however, hesitate to include the first part of the definition, “natural objects”. This element is important because, as Miller points out, a space arranged like a garden, but composed solely of artificial objects, is a garden in a metaphorical sense only (Miller 1993, 15), and the focus of my study is the literal garden. Canadian poet Patrick Lane, whose recent book *There is a Season: a memoir in a garden* (2004) is among the personal gardening works I am studying, also emphasises the natural, actually biological, aspect of the garden: “A garden is a place where someone spends a few hours each day in a wild place he tries to shape to his desire. It’s a place of harmony, of balance, and it is made from living things” (Lane 2004, 14). It is true that some gardens contain few, if any, plant-like organisms.

“Karensansui”, a dry-landscape form of gardening developed by Zen Buddhist monks in Japan, for example, uses plants minimally, with the focus on stones, along with gravel, pebbles or sand raked carefully into patterns evoking the spirit and feeling of water movement – movement such as waves, ripples or a rough sea (Ketchell 2001, 48-9; Horton 2003, 14-15). Yet most personal gardens contain plants of some sort.

The last part of Miller’s garden definition, “not fully accounted for by purely practical considerations” is also important. Miller explains the phrase as meaning an ‘excess’ of form, more than can be accounted for by physical necessity”, adding that

this form provides some sort of satisfaction in itself, and some sort of ‘meaning’ or ‘significance’ – whether aesthetic, or sensual, or spiritual, or emotional ... This ‘excess’ is not meant to entail quantitatively ‘more’ form – it may mean less, and it would certainly include minimalist types of form. It is ‘more’ only in the sense that more decisions, planning, consideration, perhaps measurement or study, went into it (Miller 1993, 15).

The satisfaction, meaning, sensuality, spirituality and emotionality Miller associates with this excess of form are all highly personal aspects of the garden.

Garden educator and designer Julie Moir Messervy stresses the personal aspect in her definition of a garden. She starts with “To most people, a garden is that portion of their yards that has been planted, tended, or landscaped. It may be a small vegetable patch, a bright flower border, or a carefully landscaped outdoor room”. To this base she adds that

a garden means far more than just a planted place. It is a touchstone; a repository of memories that forms a place of joy in your life. A garden exists not only as part of your backyard landscape, but as a site that resides in your imagination, a collection of personally satisfying images that can be expressed upon your land.... people garden in order to make something grow; to interact with nature; to share, to find sanctuary, to heal, to honor the earth, to leave a mark. Through gardening, we feel whole as we make our personal work of art upon our land (Messervy 1995, 19).

This “repository of memories”, this “place of joy in your life”, this “personal work of art” upon the land which resides as a “site in your imagination” can take a wide variety of forms – vegetable patch, flower border, outdoor room – as Messervy intimates. Lane concurs, elaborating that “It doesn’t have to be some huge display over an acre or two of grounds. It can be a couple of flower beds in a small backyard, a vegetable plot in the heart of a city” (Lane 2004, 87). He also points out that “Some gardens are as small as three containers of red geraniums circled by blue lobelia on a balcony in a high-rise apartment. A garden can be a single petunia in a pot on a windowsill. The smallest I every saw was a thimble planted with moss. Others are hundreds of acres of woodland, lake, and hill” (Lane 2004, 13). The size of the personal garden is not an issue.

What is grown in the personal garden is not an issue either. It can be vegetables, herbs, flowers, grasses, mosses, ferns, sedges or trees. What is important is that it not be a space cultivated for business- or profit-related purposes, such as a market vegetable garden, a commercial tree nursery, a professional flower growing operation. Personal gardens are cultivated for purely personal purposes, even if their

function is as practical as growing vegetables to consume personally or to give away to friends and neighbours, or cultivating herbs to use for cooking and medicine, or for processing into birthday and Christmas gifts. The engagement with these gardens is still personal, not business- or profit-related.

Location is not an issue either. The personal garden can, as is usually the case, be adjacent to the home space: a flower bed beside the house, a collection of planters and pots on a townhouse patio, a planter on an apartment balcony, a jar on the windowsill of a single room. The personal garden can also be located at a distance from the home space: as close as a community garden plot two subway stops away, or as far away as garden beds surrounding a cottage reached by a 4-hour drive, though most personal gardens are situated adjacent, or at least very close, to one's dwelling – hence the frequently used labels 'home garden', 'domestic garden', or 'private garden'. Yet in urban centers personal gardens often take the form of plots in what are variously called 'community', 'allotment' or 'leisure' gardens, depending on the culture. In continental Europe, for example, plots in community gardens "may be devoted to productive forms of fruit and vegetable growing, but many holders take the opportunity to lay out areas of lawn, paving, ornamental flowers and trees and construct summerhouses which may be sufficiently well served to provide an effective weekend retreat" (Williams 1995, 93).

In North America, geographer Paul Groth points out, spaces surrounding houses are still dominated by lawns, with plantings of trees and flowers concentrated along house foundations and lot lines such as fences. He determines that such plantings function more as "adornments of the yard" and cannot really be called gardens. He concludes that "Perhaps true gardens begin when the planting beds leave the fences, lot lines, and house foundations and take on a life of their own ... When a flower bed fills the entire space adjacent to a house ... Or when a neat circular arrangement highlights the center of the yard" (Groth 1990, 34).

What characterises all these garden spaces – large or small, adjacent to or far from the home space, dominated by vegetables, flowers, mosses, stones or other natural materials – is, in the words of Groth, “care, commitment, and watching as well as enjoyment” (Groth 1990, 30), and, in my words, individual, usually intimate, involvement, identity, responsibility, attachment, activity and creativity.

These then, are the foundations for my working definition of the personal garden for the purposes of this study: the purposeful arrangement, in a bounded space or space set apart from the surrounding area, of plants and other natural (e.g. stone, water, wood, sand) and cultural (e.g. gate, bench, path, planter) features, where the form is not fully accounted for by purely practical considerations (e.g. aesthetic, spiritual, emotional), and which involves individual, usually intimate, participation, creativity, activity, identity, responsibility, and attachment on the part of the gardener.

MUSINGS FROM THE GARDEN

I glance out kitchen window. This space surrounding the house, is it a “true garden”, as Paul Groth puts it? Or is it a “yard”?

I know I often call it a yard, an instinctive word used in North America to designate the space around a house. This space never had plantings of any sort before we built the house and moved here. It was, and still is, a piece of a former cow pasture, filled with persistent alien forage plants such as Timothy Grass, Red Clover, and Vetch, as well as with other prolific and stubborn non-native plants which appear, seemingly from nowhere, to colonise the smallest bit of exposed soil – Thistles, Lamb's Quarters, Burdock, Dandelion, Pigweed.

When we first moved here, the farmer who cuts the hay in our fields ploughed up a piece of this former agricultural landscape to the south of the house, where we established a vegetable garden. A couple of years later, we added an ornamental flower bed at the bottom of the vegetable garden, and other aesthetic plantings close by. Then I started digging up more patches to the west, north and east of the house, where I put in native plants – wildflowers, shrubs and trees – I hope will create habitat more suitable for wildlife and for us. The re-planted patches are scattered here and there. Some are stretched along the brush fence I constructed (tree branches and twigs placed between small, regularly spaced posts) to keep the dogs from wandering too far from the house. Others are positioned along the ridge at the top of the gully that drops off to the west of the house. Still other native plant patches are dug into the Wild Area to the north. Another has been raised behind a rock wall not far from the front door. This patchwork gardening approach, I have since read, is not a good idea. So I have been joining the smaller pieces to create larger patches – a successful and rewarding activity.

These patches large and small, these purposeful arrangements of natural objects – mainly plants, but also rocks and pieces of wood in various shapes and sizes, as well as structures to support tomatoes and climbing beans – do they, taken together with the various shrubs and trees planted around the house, constitute a true garden? What would Paul Groth's verdict be?

The space around the house is not dominated by lawn, although we mow certain parts of it to keep the miscellaneous

vegetation from growing too high, especially around the vegetable garden. Planting beds filled with native species are gradually merging, expanding, taking up more and more space, as is the vegetable garden, currently being enlarged to include a Japanese-inspired aesthetic section to one side. The raised area behind the rock wall by the front door is definitely highlighting that part of the yard. The perennials currently blooming along the ridge to the west draw the eye and attention in that direction. And the expanding vegetable garden clearly dominates the south.

Are these spaces taking on a life of their own? Yes. The plants in the various spaces are thriving, multiplying, spreading. I continue to enlarge the native plant patches and fill them with seedlings from the greenhouse and findlings from elsewhere. We plan, we dig, we clear, we plant, we accomplish our goals, and another activity suggests itself from there. The garden is larger than our intentions, greater than the sum of its scattered parts, powerful in its influence on our imaginations, our energies, our time.

1.4 Gardens from a geographical perspective

Gardens and gardening have long been a topic of study for geographers. Sometimes used interchangeably with the term “horticulture”, gardening counts among humankind’s first and most influential uses of the land. Horticulture and its cousin agriculture, in fact, share the same “culture” root in the sense of cultivation or husbandry – areas of activity where, according to cultural anthropologist Sarah Franklin and sociologists Celia Lury and Jackie Stacey, concepts of culture and nature overlap (e.g. ‘seed culture’ or cultures in petri dishes used in biology) and thicken the meaning of culture (Franklin et al., 2000, 78).

These cultures, as in horti-, agri- and human cultures, are all topics of study in geography. According to a recent book on the relations between landscape, culture and environment, “No other single change in human history can have had a greater effect upon the landscape than the domestication and global spread of plants and animals. The discovery of agriculture [we could add ‘horticulture’] was an important development threshold since its associated economies provided the basis for the early stages of civilization [we could add ‘culture’]” (Atkins et al., 1998, 13). Gardens are, in fact, a type of cultural landscape, which the same book describes as “a visible entity ... which integrates in visual form ... the ecology of the natural environment or its altered successor states, the culture of the society which inhabits

or visits it, in all the diversity (economic, social, political, religious) of that culture” (Atkins et al., 1998, xvi). As elements of cultural landscapes, agri- and horticultural spaces have been incorporated into geographical research throughout the history of the discipline, including the regional geography of France’s Vidal de la Blache, based on studies of “genres de vie” (Claval 2001a, 81); the “Wirtschaftsformen”, or rural economies, of Germany’s Otto Eduard Hahn (James and Martin 1981, 171); and the work, inspired by cultural anthropology, of Carl O. Sauer in the United States regarding human impacts on the land (Sauer 1931).

More recently, Edward F. Bergman writes about gardens in the context of diverse cultures ‘improving’ natural landscapes: “Gardens and parks are landscapes that humans have molded according to aesthetic notions. These are based on the assumption that in some ways human designs are superior to nature. Tastes in garden design vary among cultures, and within any culture they change through time. In all cases, however, gardens and parks reflect the prevailing human notions of how best to ‘improve’ on nature (Bergman 1995, 61). Mike Crang looks at gardening in the context of symbolic landscapes. He takes, as an example, English country houses and gardens to show how meanings can be embedded in space, and briefly traces the changing shapes of European gardens as a reflection of changing views of nature through time (Crang 1998, 31-34).

Recent geographically relevant research, published since 1990, related to gardens and gardening has been conducted from a broad range of perspectives: social, cultural, historical, education, health, economic, planning, land use, ecology and physical science. The social and cultural are directly pertinent to my personal garden geography study, yet the other perspectives warrant at least a quick review as illustrations of the wide-ranging geographical significance of garden spaces to both physical and human geographical inquiry.

Physical geography research related to gardens has concentrated mainly on the environmental impacts of gardening. Recent work has been conducted, for example, on the chemical composition of soils in pastures and market-gardens (Larre-Larrouy et al., 2003); the effects of intensive market gardening on the nutrient status of soil (Aweto and Ogurie, 1992); and soil organic matter storage in cultivated soils (Albrecht et al., 1992). More general, ecologically oriented geography work related to gardening includes, for example, an ecological and spatial examination of Vietnamese market gardens in New Orleans, with a focus on the influence of garden location and size on crop diversity, composition and technological input (Airriess and Clawson, 1994); a review of the contribution of different types of “Gartenkunst”, literally translated as “garden art/craft” [my translation], to the practice of ecological restoration in the context of different types of landscapes (Westhoff, 1996); a discussion of the extensive environmental changes made to the Mesopotamian marshlands in Iraq, considered by some to be the physical location of the Garden of Eden (Middleton, 2003); and an examination of the ways peasant farmers in Amazonian Peru build and maintain agrobiodiversity in their home gardens (Ban and Coomes, 2004).

Recent planning and land use research related to gardens covers topics ranging from cultivated plants in farm gardens reflecting cultural history and current rural landscape development (Zerbe and Lee, 2000); to gardens in the context of lot size and local park visitation (Syme et al., 2001); to Japan’s search for a community gardening model, and a review of the United Kingdom’s allotment garden system in light of the local sustainable development agenda (Wiltshire, 2000); to an analysis of collective gardening and associated ‘agro-recreational activities’ as processes contributing to the enhancement of rural-urban integration (Zhikharevich, 1991); to community gardening in relation to community development and planning (Knack, 1994), and with respect to land use and density, especially in medium to high density

urban contexts (DeKay, 1997).

Geographically relevant garden research conducted from an economic perspective includes, for example, a study tracing the increased market specialisation of traditional small-scale commodity producers or family producers in Brazil (De Barros, 1994); a look at the geographies of vegetable production and consumption in Kentucky (Glasscock, 2003); an examination of garden spaces sustaining citizens through poverty and economic transition (Harm et al., 1998); and a discussion of the establishment of new nursery production areas in Japan as a response to increased gardening and landscaping activities during Japan's post-1960s high economic growth period (Urabe, 1996).

Health research related to geography has been conducted on topics such as the therapeutic (social, emotional, physical, spiritual) benefits of communal garden spaces to elderly people (Milligan, 2004); horticultural therapy and the relationship between people and plants from various perspectives, including geography and the environmental sciences (Ferrini, 2003); and the benefits of community gardens for developing communities and improving public health (Armstrong, 2000).

Gardens and education have been written about from the following geographical perspectives: teaching geographical enquiry skills as applied to the urban environment, including houses and gardens (Dove, 2001); the State Botanical Garden of Georgia as a living laboratory supporting interdisciplinary learning in various fields including, among others, environmental design, ecology, science, and geography (Lewis and Affolter, 1999); and teaching about cultural landscapes in introductory geography classes by contrasting the Renaissance gardens of Italy with the Zen gardens of Japan (Purkayastha, 1995).

Historical geography work related to gardens and gardening covers areas as diverse as a reconsideration of plant cultivation by Aboriginal peoples living on North America's Northwest coast

before European contact (Deur 2002a, 2002b); a study tracing the history of crop and garden plant transfers over time, particularly during the period of European imperialism (Beinart and Middleton, 2004); an analysis of the evolution and transformation of late 20th century market gardening in Quebec (Thouez et al., 1998); a new environmental-historical examination of the radical transformations the Acadians made to their natural environment for horticultural and agricultural purposes (Hatvany, 2002); and a discussion of Germany's Sports Movement and Gardening Movement, the latter represented by and a back-to-the-land philosophy, as two of the most powerful post-1918 Revolution reform movements in that country (Henderson, 1995).

The traces of social and cultural geography weaving through some of the preceding work reflects geography's synthesist nature and leads us down the figurative geographical garden path to direct social and cultural directions taken in recent research related to geography and garden(ing). The line between social and cultural geography being fine, at times imperceptible, I will not attempt to classify contemporary research into either the 'social' or 'cultural' category – particularly since some of it has been published in a journal aptly titled *Social & Cultural Geography*. I will, instead, arrange current socially and culturally oriented geography and garden(ing) work along the broader thematic lines which follow.

Gardens have, for example, entered into the *public-private domain* debate. One recent study seeks to contribute to the institutional geographies sub-theme by exploring how the prevailing social order is legitimised through the management and delivery of public rented houses and gardens in the United Kingdom (Saugeres, 2000). Another article discusses formal and more everyday legal geographies, illustrated through individual perceptions of the spatialisation of law with respect to a private garden project placed on public property in a Vancouver neighbourhood (Blomley, 2005).

One model which, in fact, enables private gardening within a public space is the *community garden*. A recent geography M.A. thesis looks at Ottawa's community garden network, a local initiative, as creating spaces of resistance to the dominant global food system and its associated negative social and environmental impacts (Westman, 2000). Another article provides an analytical account of the history and aspirations of a particular community garden in Toronto from a largely socio-economic, and to a lesser extent ecologically restorative, perspective – all within the context of sustainable land use planning (Irvine et al., 1999). Yet another study, based on two case studies conducted in Basel, Switzerland, discusses the conflicts (around values, interests, needs, priorities, orderliness, aesthetics) between traditional gardeners, also known as “Giftspritzer” or poison-sprayers [my translation], and organic gardeners cultivating plots within the same community garden space, sometimes adjacent to each other (Ackermann, 1997) – conflicts which, implied by not stated directly, may have generational and gender origins.

Gender being both a social and cultural preoccupation, it is not surprising to discover it appearing in relation to gardens and gardening. One study analyses the sense of place derived by Mexican women from their house-lot gardens, a gendered space not clearly separated from the kitchen or from the semipublic space of the community (Christie, 2004). Another traces the origins of a localised gender division of commercial vegetable gardening labour in two villages on the edge of a large city in Bourkina Faso, with respect to location, experience of European colonialism, religious change, and market expansion (Freidberg, 2001). A recent article discusses the unique set of gardening expertise and environmental perspectives – based on traditional gardening methods, community knowledge, interpretations of agricultural reforms, and horticultural training – developed by African American women as slaves and later as freedwomen (Glave, 2003). Another article provides a critical reading of

the ways in which the garden in Frances Hodgson Burnett's 1911 children's classic novel *The Secret Garden* is constitutive of and constituted by gender relations, through period discourses on Englishness, gender, class, and nature (Morris, 1996).

Gardens in creative works expressing social and cultural meaning appear in other geography relevant research such as a discussion of Beatrix Potter's classic *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* – a story about a small rabbit who disobeys his mother and visits Mr. McGregor's garden – in terms of entrenched views of property and its geographies, and lessons the story teaches with regard to the ways in which legal forms such as property are materially and spatially enacted (Blomley, 2004). Another paper explores Stanley Spencer's 1955 *Hoe Garden Nursery* painting for the complexity of personal, aesthetic, social and moral values that run through the painter's landscape art, as well as his preoccupation with two main themes: the enclosure of landscape, and the importance of small, intimate spaces like the garden (Bartram, 1999).

Yet gardens do not have to appear in creative works to be expressive. Geographical work has also been conducted on actual *physical gardens revealing social and cultural meaning*. One article discusses backyard gardens as both a product and expression of the immigration experience among three contemporary migrant groups in Australia – gardens as places to maintain cultural identity, and to acculturate to new social and biophysical environments (Head et al., 2004). Another takes a cultural geography informed look at the gardens in the residential squares of London – a unique urban landscape developed during the 17th and 18th centuries, a critical period in the history of European cities – as symbolic statements expressing social values such as the desire for class segregation and domestic isolation (Lawrence, 1993). An interpretation of the 40-hectare Jean-Jacques Rousseau gardens at Ermenonville, so named because the philosopher spent the last months of his life there, reveals the philosophical vision of their creator René-Louis Girardin, who strove to design a unique milieu along the

lines of the English landscape gardens of the late 18th century. The author of the study, Catherine Dumas, writes that “Girardin laissait de côté le jardinage pour se lancer dans une authentique création de paysage, ouvrant ainsi une voie nouvelle dans la relation entre jardin, pays et paysage, qui faisait appel aux différents courants anglais” (Dumas 2001, 62). The gardens – their design, natural features, structures and various inscriptions which Dumas calls “une oeuvre métaphorique” (Dumas 2001, 79) – reveal, in fact, a vision and mission that are both personal and social within

une personnalité complexe où se côtoyaient des références picturales, littéraires, poétiques puisées dans l'Antiquité, dans la philosophie du système de la nature, dans les premières formes du romantisme, en Italie, aux Pays-Bas ou dans l'imaginaire, et réunies dans l'unique but de faire converger l'esprit des visiteurs vers une même interprétation : ramener l'homme à la nature par une régénération de l'espèce, sans dénigrer les sciences et les arts, sans s'adonner au culte de l'ignorance (Dumas 2001, 79).

The metaphorical landscape at Ermenonville was undeniably Girardin's '*personal garden*', as are the gardens Stephen Williams discusses in “No place like home – the role of domestic gardens as recreational spaces”, a book chapter in which he reviews empirical studies conducted in the United Kingdom and Australia focusing on the size, disposition, periodicity, and type of use (maintenance, household, recreation, display), of domestic gardens, and on the garden as a status symbol, personal expression and defensible space. Williams also discusses alternatives to the domestic garden, normally associated with the home space – alternatives such as community or allotment-type gardens (Williams, 1995), garden spaces which qualify as “personal gardens” according to my definition since each individual plot is the creative and intimate expression, action, and responsibility of the gardener assigned to it. Paul Groth's review of the evolving meaning and use of the words “lot”, “yard” and “garden” in the context of American open-space values, history, real-estate industry, and home-ownership culture (Groth, 1990), was helpful as I developed my definition of '*personal garden*'.

Geographer Russell Hitchings' study of the materiality of domestic gardens in North London, in terms of both their symbolism and the ways they are practically lived with – in his words, “the ways in which

people and plants live together there” (Hitchings 2003, 99) – offers *a new perspective on personal gardens* through the lens of actor network theory, which the author proposes as a productive way of attending “to the shifting significance of the material and the symbolic in the social world” (Hitchings 2003, 111). Of particular interest to my study are the sections where Hitchings discusses the roles, performances and relationships between plants and people in the garden, the “shifting locus of power” (Hitchings 2003, 107) between these two groups of garden actors, and the “significance of this particular place within different lives, both human and nonhuman” (Hitchings 2003, 111).

While particular aspects of many of these studies relate to, inspire, and inform parts of my study, the garden-related work of social scientist Mark Bhatti and environmental scholar Andrew Church is, in the totality of the many geographic themes it touches upon, the most relevant to my study of the geographical nature and meaning of the personal garden. In “The Meaning of Gardens in an Age of Risk”, for example, Bhatti links debates on the sociology of the environment with an analysis of the domestic garden through questions such as “Why is there such popular interest in domestic gardening? Is it because we are collectively destroying nature, that we are trying as individuals to get closer to nature? ... By ‘getting closer to nature’ through the garden, could we reformulate our relationship with ‘mother earth’ and live more sustainably? ... What is the role of the garden in mediating and shaping ideas about nature?” (Bhatti 1999, 181-2). His conclusions are not terribly conclusive, but he does finish with the statement “While gardening does not automatically lead to an environmental culture ... it may be that the one place from which to develop the new environmental culture is the garden. The garden may help people to understand the plight of planet earth, but it crucially depends on the specific ‘culture of nature’ within which the ‘garden’ is embedded” (Bhatti 1999, 192-3).

Bhatti, together with Church, explores the importance of contemporary gardens as leisure sites, and

gardening as a leisure activity, “through which a number of social and cultural themes can be explored. As a part of everyday life, gardens, the meanings of gardens, and ways of gardening, convey ideas about the role of leisure in home-making and the role they play in the process of homemaking within which the family, and in particular, gender relations are highly significant” (Bhatti and Church 2000, 183). Combining insights from various sources, particularly sociology and geography, the authors point to close interactions, including tensions and conflicts, between the home, family, gender, leisure and the garden. They conclude that gardens often reveal “hidden (or not so hidden) social relations and can be seen as a negotiated realm that highlights deeper gender relations” (Bhatti and Church 2000, 195), and that gardens have multiple meanings: “a private retreat, a haven from the public world; a setting for creativity; a social place for sharing; a connection to personal history; a reflection of one’s identity; and as a status symbol” (Bhatti and Church 2000, 195); adding in another article a year later, “and as a natural world rendered more comprehensible” (Bhatti and Church 2001, 380-381).

Later articles pick up on many of the same themes, with conclusions adding further insight into the geographical, and other, significance of personal gardens. Bhatti and Church state, for example, that “gardens are not marginal spaces; they are commonplace and as such provide social scientists with a rich source of social interactions, encounters, meanings and cultural exchanges” (Bhatti and Church 2001, 380) and that “Gardens may be imbued with meanings associated with spatial order, leisure and status, but our empirical analysis indicates the garden is also a space where individuals can develop complex, sensual and personalised readings of nature ... a place in which – on a personal level – to engage, confront and understand the changing natural world” (Bhatti and Church 2001, 380), and “both a place in which to hide and a specific space from which to confront and understand increasing uncertainty in the social and natural world” (Bhatti and Church 2004, 49). Repeatedly, in their articles, the authors also

point out that contemporary gardens and gardening, and the ways they relate to wider social, cultural and economic processes, have been neglected areas of study in social science research. They contend that the garden “provides a lens for understanding the creation of micro-social worlds that are an important part of an individual response to tensions and conflicts in wider society” and that “the home garden is one key arena of everyday life that requires further research” (Bhatti and Church 2000, 185).

Garden spaces are such a common part of people's everyday experience that they mostly escape scholarly attention.

(Christie 2004, iii)

It is these highly personal aspects of gardens – these complex and interrelated understandings, meanings, engagements, and confrontations suggested by Bhatti and Church, and other scholars – which attract me to the space of the personal garden, a significant space neglected by social scientific study, and a space portrayed through deep, meditative, and insightful expression in contemporary personal gardening literature, a body of work not yet studied by geographers, or considered to provide geographically relevant information. Both these elements – personal complexity and meaning, and literary bodies of work – point to humanistic geography, a geography conducted in the humanities tradition, as an intellectual escort for my study.

Chapter notes

- ¹ Source: Genesis 2:8 and 2:15, *The Holy Bible* (King James Version)
- ² Source: <http://www.jonimitchell.com/HitsWoodstock70.html>, accessed August 2004.
- ³ Which I have, unfortunately, been unable to acquire.
- ⁴ Source: <http://trumpeter.athabascau.ca/content/v14.2/ditzler.html>, accessed July 2004.

Chapter 2 Gardens and geography in the humanities tradition

The term humanist has several meanings, but we can say in a first approximation that it refers to the doctrines according to which man is the point of departure and the point of reference for human actions. These are "anthropocentric" doctrines, just as others are theocentric, and still others put nature or tradition in this central place.

(Todorov, 2002)

"The humanities encompass the study of human creativity, knowledge, beliefs, ideas, imagination and experience", writes Alison Blunt. "Such work has inspired a wide range of humanistic, cultural and historical geographical research. At the same time, ideas about space, place and imaginative geographies have inspired work across the humanities" (Blunt 2003, 73).

The garden is a creative space, fashioned through a combination of imagination and ideas, knowledge and experience, and physical action motivated by, among other things, values and beliefs. The garden is also, as described in the previous chapter, an idea, action, idyll; a representational, meaningful, expressive, intimate place; a space to experience satisfaction, sensuality, emotionality; a place to engage, confront and understand changing social and natural conditions. These perspectives on the garden reflect key concerns and interests in humanistic geography, an intellectual current which, in addition to the humanities portrayal above, focuses on understanding rather than predicting (Ley and Samuels 1978, 13); on gaining insight into the "richness of human encounter with the environment" (Ley 1996, 195) and "personal experience and understanding of landscape and environment, most clearly expressed in its concept of 'sense of place'" (Ekinsmyth and Shurmer-Smith 2002, 20), particularly the way in which "places and landscapes are made, lived in and thought about" (Relph 1981, preface); on positioning people as "creative, active and intentioned agents" (Ley 1996, 192); and on "explicating the subjectivity of human action and its base in meanings (both individual and shared)" (Johnston 1997, 197).

Humanistic geographers were also among the first geography scholars to engage in serious study of

literature and other creative representations.

2.1 Humanistic geography – an overview

Humanistic geography is not easy to define. It has been described as fragmented and ranging widely over diverse philosophies, methods, substantive studies, and sometimes incompatible intellectual positions (Cloke et al. 1991, 57); as drawing from “a range of epistemologies and methodologies” (Adams et al. 2001b, xvii); and as changing meanings and branching out in different directions over time, and shape-shifting to the extent that “there appears to be a humanism for every persuasion and every personality” (Relph 1981, 127). Since it has no central doctrine or theory, humanistic geography cannot be considered a geographical sub-discipline, specialty group, or theory. Yet humanistic interests and concerns are still pertinent and important to geographers working in the tradition of the humanities today – a tradition rooted in the Latin word “humanus”, which Anne Buttimer describes as meaning literally “earth dweller”, while pointing out that “dwelling” means different things to different civilizations, which have “varied greatly in their modes of understanding and dealing with the rest of the biosphere” (Buttimer 1993, 3). Yi-Fu Tuan makes the distinction between “humanus” and “barbarus”, the former denoting “high cultural and intellectual achievements”, and praises Buttimer for drawing attention, in one of her most recent books, to another aspect of “humanus”, namely human excellence and achievements, geographical and otherwise. Tuan also presents the sense, à la Heidegger, of humanism as the “patient listening to reality, letting it reveal itself rather than forcing it to yield its truth, essence, or value” (Tuan 1993, x).

This “forcing”, as Tuan puts it, is one of the catalysts of humanistic geography, the many directions, shapes and meanings of which can be traced back to common origins in 1970s reactions against the positivistic spatial geometry approach to geography “in which men and women were made to respond

automatically to the dictates of universal spatial structures and abstract spatial logics” (Gregory 1994a, 264), in a “*danse macabre* of materially motivated robots” (Anne Buttimer, as quoted in Jordan et al. 1997, 27) or de-humanised responders to stimuli in some mechanical way (Johnston 1986, 55) – essentially “evicted and replaced by databanks” (Brosseau 1994, 334). Objections to this approach included its denial or suppression of the subjectivity of the researcher and the researched (Ley 1996, Cloke et al. 1991), its “inability to speak usefully about ‘real world’ problems”, its failure to “take seriously the complexity of human beings” (Cloke et al. 1991, 68), its exclusion of the “‘internal’ aspects that make people quintessentially human; namely, intention and will, ideas and symbols” (Tuan 1978, 195); and its “blindness to human agency” (Cloke et al. 1991, 71), evident in the way it reduced people to “little more than dots on a map, statistics on a graph or numbers in an equation” (Cloke et al. 1991, 69). In the humanistic geography tradition there is, in fact, “implicit (and sometimes explicit) rejection of the Cartesian world of objective reality” (Marcus 1995, 328).

It has been said that humanistic geographers “believe in a far more chaotic world than the scientist could tolerate” (Jordan et al. 1997, 28), a world which can be understood only by immersion in issues and their contexts, empathy between researchers and subjects (Ley and Samuels 1978, Johnston 1997) and a focus on what has been called the “fundamental ‘data’ of the humanist inquiry” (Cloke et al. 1991, 59). This fundamental data includes human experiences, intentions, and attitudes, and the creative, intuitive and complex workings of the human mind (Cloke et al. 1991, Johnston 1997, Marcus 1995); it involves “people perceiving, interpreting and shaping the human geography of their surroundings” (Cloke et al. 1991, 58), and “the person as an individual constantly interacting with the environment and with a range of communities, thereby continually changing both self and milieu” (Johnston 1997, 207).

The changing of self and milieu – based on an understanding of the interactions between individuals,

environments and communities – is put forward as one of the main goals of humanistic geography (Johnston 1997, 1986). The understanding is to be communicated and used to reveal people to themselves, increase the depth of their self-knowledge, enable them to develop the interactions in self-fulfilling ways, promote their appreciation by others, improve the quality of their lives, and contribute to much more vital social action and planning than is possible using spatial science and behavioural approaches” (Johnston 1986, 96; 1997, 191 and 207).

Geographers currently interested in humanistic themes do not necessarily all subscribe to this goal, yet they are described as sharing certain similar concerns, including the study of “people in the worlds that they create as thinking beings” (Johnson 1986, 75), the exaltation of diversity and a striving to understand the unique (Jordan et al. 1997, 29), and “an interest in the everyday, a privileging of individuals’ understandings of their physical, social and symbolic contexts, and, most significantly, the theoretical and empirical study of place” (Adams et al. 2001, xvii). With human agency and meaning still at the core of humanistic concern (Gregory 2000a, 361 and Barnes 2000, 335), interest is apparently shifting toward “discovering both distinctive, unexplored ways of perceiving and understanding the world and the incommensurate and divergent nature of people’s realities”, as well as narrative and storytelling (Adams et al. 2001, xviii).

The study of “everyday geographies” and the raising of their profile has been identified as one of humanistic geography’s most important contributions to human geography. These everyday geographies revolve around the places people live and work – places such as houses, streets, factories, offices, schools, fields, parks, cinemas [we could add gardens] where people spend much of their lives and about which they develop deep senses of place. The significance of the contribution has been described as a sensitising of other researchers and scholars to the intimate attachments people have to the everyday

places surrounding them (Cloke et al. 1991, 81).

Criticisms of humanistic geography come from a variety of sources, including history, which reveals that humanism's roots in the European Renaissance implicate it in "the very geometricization of knowledge which, in its modern geographical form, it sought to contest" (Gregory 2000a, 363); positivism which "presents humanistic approaches as subjective and thus unscientific, of general interest perhaps but having little relevance to the creation of better objective conditions in a late capitalist world" (Johnston 1986, 95); feminism, which objects to the "masculinism of humanistic geography that privileges but does not interrogate the primacy of the male subject" (Blunt 2003, 75); and structuralism, which portrays humanistic geography's focus on the individual as a fictional distortion of reality constructed through an ideology which suppresses the multiple ways in which human subjects are constrained and constructed, situations over which they have little control (Gregory 2000a, 363 and Johnston 1986, 95), and which disregards the politics behind the different ways of understanding place and space – "a space one kind of person feels able to dominate is likely to be one where another type of person feels dominated; a place where one category of person feels safe is where another may feel excluded" (Ekinsmyth and Shurmer-Smith 2002, 26). Related criticisms are also levelled at the superficiality of humanistic geography's understanding of human action, resulting from a retention of focus on intention and a drawing back from an engagement with the unconscious even when "conceptual space was made for the unintended consequences of action" (Gregory 2000a, 363-4), as well as the "uninhibited hegemony of consciousness and subjectivity ... as misleading as any reductionism, for notions of pure consciousness are as much an abstraction from human experience as any isotropic plain" (Ley 1996, 209). Ley adds that the realities of everyday living are entrenched in context and concrete time-space relations, and that, "If there is to be geographic synthesis, it will be a synthesis which will

incorporate both the symbolic and the structural, both the realm of constraints and the realm of meanings, where values and consciousness are seen as embedded and grounded in their contexts, and where environments are treated as contingent before emerging forms of human creativity” (Ley 1996, 209-10). These are important considerations for any humanistically informed geographical inquiry, and one of the reasons I have chosen to incorporate the wider context of natural and cultural perspectives on the personal garden into this study.

An idea that is apparently growing increasingly stronger is that of geographical inquiry itself being part of the humanities. Alison Blunt identifies three key themes emerging as geographers study the humanities: (1) an increasingly critical understanding of what she calls the “power-laden production of space and place”, (2) interrogation of the complexities of humanity, in terms of both identity politics and the concept of a humane geography, and (3) cultural and historical geographers engaging theoretically with other research in the humanities, including literature, visual arts, dance, theatre, and music (Blunt 2003, 87). She comes full circle when she points out that scholars working in other humanities disciplines are also writing in more explicitly spatial terms, particularly with respect to mobility, location, borderlands, exile and home (Blunt 2003, 75-6). The humanities, and humanistic inquiry, then, is a fertile and auspicious angle to take on a geographical study of personal garden spaces as they appear in creative expressions of their existence and meaning.

2.2 Key concerns and interests in humanistically informed inquiry

Key concerns and interests that recur in descriptions of humanistic geography – besides the awareness, agency, consciousness and creativity put forward in the *Dictionary of Human Geography* (Gregory 2000a, 361) – include intentionality, subjectivity, and meaning, all of which inform my

interpretation of contemporary personal gardening literature.

Awareness, consciousness, creativity, meaning, and subjectivity are words and concepts widely used in the English language. *Awareness* and *consciousness* both essentially mean cognisance, or a state of perception or knowledge of something, with consciousness bearing the additional nuance of self-awareness, or heightened awareness. *Creativity* means basically the quality of being creative, and the ability to bring something into being, produce something new, or put a new form to something, while *meaning* indicates significance and/or value¹.

Subjectivity, according to literary scholar Richard Freadman, is a widely used and abused term. He likes to use it in the sense of “what it feels like to be me ... how it feels to have *my* experience of the world rather than someone else’s” (Freadman 2001, 328-9), rather than fact. In the humanistic geography tradition, subjectivity is a two-way street, involving one’s experience of the world, appreciated (not explained) by sensitive analysis of that experience (Johnston 1986, 74). In a qualitative research context, subjectivity involves “the insertion of the personal resources, opinions and characteristics of a person into a research project” (Hay 2000, 197).

Agency is in essence “people making their own geographies” (Goodwin 1999, 36). More specifically, it is the “capabilities of human beings” (Gregory 2000b, 349), “the power of human consciousness and human action to redirect the course of events” (Ley 1996, 205), to exert power or produce an effect or change “in the light of complex forms and combinations of reflection, deliberation, and appraisal” (Freadman 2001, 325). The agent, in fact, has a certain freedom to reflect and act as a knowledgeable participant in a cultural system – to act, in fact, upon the values of the system, as well as react to, perhaps eventually changing, the system as a consequence (Freadman 2001, 325 and 328).

Agency is closely related to *intentionality*, itself related to ‘intent’ and ‘intention’, which in a human

geography context means the granting of meaning to something, or something becoming real, in light of its intended use. A example is a football, an “amalgam of leather, plastic and stitching” becoming a football only “when someone intends to kick it or use it for that game” (Crang 1998, 108). In the same vein, the contents of an environment are unique to each individual, “for each of its elements is the result of an act of intentionality – it is given meaning by the individual” (Johnston 1997, 189).

2.3 Humanistic geography and literature

Great literature is simply language charged with meaning to the utmost possible degree.

(Ezra Pound, quoted in Davidoff 1952)

Awareness and understanding; intention and insight; uniqueness and creativity; attitude and meaning; interaction with and experience of landscapes, places and community; contemplation, perception and interpretation of everyday geographies – all this and more, so highly valued by geographers working in the humanistic tradition, has long been represented and expressed in creative endeavours such as visual arts, music and literature. It was the humanistic geographers, “a growing band of geographers seeking alternative perspectives and insights in the study of man-environment relationships” (Pocock 1981, 9), who played a “rôle déterminant dans la popularisation du recours à la littérature au sein des études géographiques” (Brousseau 2003, 17). The humanistic geographers turned to forms of creative expression for, from a broad perspective, either geographical substance or abstraction (Marcus 1995, 332), or, more specifically, for their subjective or symbolic interpretations of landscapes (Noble and Dhussa 1990, 56); for their documentary value, didactic possibilities, and “evocative transcriptions of spatial experience”, particularly sense of place (Brousseau 1994, 333); for their capacity to “entertain, provoke, inspire or move the reader, listener or viewer; in short, to engage the emotions and, indeed, the imagination” (Cloke et al. 2004, 93).

Douglas Pocock, an early geographical explorer of literature, and editor of one of the earliest collections of scholarly work devoted to geography and literature, puts the concept of evocative, emotional transcriptions of place experience into a procedural context when he writes that literature is “the work of the heart as well as the head ... emotion, often recollected later, perhaps ‘in tranquillity’, when an earlier stimulus is reworked and given expression, in the manner perhaps that the painter in his studio may develop his quickly pencilled field sketch”. Pocock adds that the creative process “is not to deny factual reproduction, for literature is often referred to as a mirror, reflection or microcosm of reality” (Pocock 1981, 10). He also points out that literature actually goes beyond what he describes as “mere fact”:

Fictive reality may transcend or contain more truth than the physical or everyday reality. And herein lies the paradox of literature. Although different in essence, and therefore a poor documentary source for material on places, people or organisations, literature yet possesses a peculiar superiority over the reporting of the social scientist. Ionesco, for example, in acknowledging the debt he owed to literature rather than textbooks for the ‘living reality’ of eighteenth-century France, writes that ‘the genuine creator has a mysterious intuition of the concrete and particular truth which historians, sociologists and ideologies do not have’ [quoted by author]. It is the same paradox which induces Flaubert to claim that ‘Poetry is as precise as geometry. Induction is as accurate as deduction’, adding that at that moment, without a doubt, his poor Bovary was suffering and weeping in twenty villages of France [quoted by author] (Pocock 1981, 11).

This creatively rendered reality, Pocock points out, has a universality which evokes a response within “Everyman” and which also draws geographers toward the study of literature. Creatively rendered reality also has a more humanly significant truth, which is what makes fictional characters so real and engaging, and which enables literary authors to reveal more about human nature than other specialised scholars (Pocock 1981, 11-12) – a perception which can be problematic if it overemphasises the author’s communications talent and sensitivity at the expense of the material being considered (Brosseau 1994, 342).

Nevertheless, the comparison of work by creative writers and other scholars is an interesting consideration. Yi-Fu Tuan makes the intriguing observation that “Both art and science abstract from the

total inchoate flow of experience. They segment reality and make pictures of the world. These more-or-less abstract pictures, paradoxically, enable us to grasp the concreteness of experience” (Tuan 1978, 196). Tuan adds that “Actual experience can only be lived. Any attempt to present it – from gossip and novels to the scientific treatise – is an abstraction” (Tuan 1978, 200). The difference between artistic and scientific abstraction, he points out, is that art strives for completeness, while science strives for clarity (Tuan 1978, 196). The completeness of art resides in the observation that the “human reality presented by a talented novelist is much more complex than that of which a social scientist is normally aware”, with the potential for literary works, “often highly venturesome ‘thought experiments’” to inspire social science questions and hypotheses (Tuan 1978, 200). Literary works, Tuan stresses, can be particularly helpful in focussing the attention of scientists on things they might miss, such as the following questions in a study of the nature of neighborhood: “Who are the neighbors? How do they relate to each other? Is talk essential to the social bond or can it be established by common activity with utilitarian gestures that also communicate at a personal level?” Tuan then reproduces part of a poem which illustrates possible responses to these questions (Tuan 1978, 201).

The role of science, like that of art, is to blend exact imagery with more distant meaning, the parts we already understand with those given as new into larger patterns that are coherent enough to be acceptable as truth.

(Wilson, 1984)

Paul Cloke, Chris Philo and David Sadler stress the significance of the cross-fertilisation between the humanities, particularly artistic expression such as literature, and social studies by pointing out that “some of the most recent (and arguably more ‘mature’) engagements between geography and the humanities have revolved not so much around literary sense of place as around the representation of landscapes – and notably of the ‘social relations’ codified in these representations – found in all manner of artistic productions” (Cloke et al. 1991, 82). This recent “social turn”, in a manner of speaking,

counteracts certain criticisms of humanistic perspectives on geographical studies of literature, including, for example, notions regarding literature's supposed universality and capacity to transcend or contain more truth than physical reality (Sharp 2000, 328), and the lack of problematisation of sense of place expressed in literature (Brosseau 2003, 18). Other commentary, such as the reluctance of humanistically oriented inquiry to engage in relevant contemporary theoretical discussions (Brosseau 1994, 342), in particular literary criticism and theory (Brosseau 2003, 19), does not appear to have been addressed by humanistic studies of literature.

2.4 Research in the humanistic geography tradition

The concerns and interests of humanistic geography, including engagement with literature, come out, in varying portions and intensities, in humanistically oriented work conducted since the 1970s.

2.4.1 "*Place and placelessness*"

An early work in the humanist tradition is Edward Relph's "path-breaking" (Cloe et al. 1991, 83) work *Place and Placelessness* (1976), a thorough and intense book which explores the essence of place and the identity of places, place in relation to phenomenology and various forms of space, and sense of place and authentic place-making. The depth and thickness of place experience is a focus of a certain portion of the book where Relph develops a typology of intensity of place experience. This typology takes the form of a scale based on, without going into excessive detail, concepts of outsideness (ranging from existential and objective, to incidental) and insideness (ranging from vicarious, through behavioural and empathetic, to existential).

In *Place and placelessness*, Relph also introduces the concept of placelessness, which he describes as essentially the large-scale "imposition of homogeneity on formerly varied cultures and landscapes"

(Relph 1976a, 79) – homogeneity in the form of shopping malls, super-highways, industrial landscapes, international airports, and large-scale hotels. Acknowledging that cultural and geographical uniformity is not new – that the expansion of Greek civilisation, the Roman Empire, Christianity, and even the diffusion of the idea of the city have contributed to the phenomenon in the past – he makes the point that what is different in our modern world is the “grand scale and virtual absence of adaptation to local conditions of the present placelessness, and everywhere the shallowness of experience which it engenders and with which it is associated”, as well as a certain superficiality and casualness with which people experience and create places, and the ultimate loss of sense of place (Relph 1976a, 79-80).

It struck me, in re-reading Relph, that the personal garden offers its creators and stewards, and others invited to share the space, the potential to retreat and take refuge from the placelessness of the outside world, to restore a sense of personal place, and to create and experience a genuine place intensely.

2.4.2 “*Domicide: the global destruction of home*”

A more recent study in the humanistic tradition is Douglas Porteous and Sandra Smith’s *Domicide: the global destruction of home* (2001), a work which the authors describe as taking a “broadly humanistic, qualitative stance, with an emphasis on the synthesis of materials from a wide range of disciplines” about “how and why powerful people destroy the homes of the less powerful, which happen to be in the way of corporate, political, or bureaucratic projects” (Porteous and Smith 2001, ix-x). This book introduces a new concept, “domicide”, a neologism coined by Porteous, and defined by the authors of the book as “the deliberate destruction of home by human agency in pursuit of specified goals, which causes suffering to the victims”, with the human agency usually being external to the home area, involving some form of planning, and frequently using the rhetoric of public interest or common good (Porteous and Smith 2001, 12). People may, for example, “lose their dwellings through expropriation –

for the common good or in the public interest. Where the loved dwelling – or, more likely, the cherished neighbourhood or landscape – once stood, there is now a park, an airport, a reservoir, or perhaps a rubble-strewn wasteland awaiting development” (Porteous and Smith 2001, 3). A more specific example is the World Bank funded Highlands Water Project in Lesotho, which would supply water to South Africa through the construction of dams and the flooding of scarce agricultural land in Lesotho – an illustration of what the authors describe as “the overwhelming power of detribalized, Western-educated government development ‘experts’ who so often pursue the national interest at the expense of local needs” (Porteous and Smith 2001, 5).

The seriousness and meaningfulness of domicide “resides in the probability that home is central to our lives, and the likelihood that the forcible destruction of it by powerful authorities will result in suffering on the part of the home dweller” – home potentially stretching beyond one’s dwelling to include a homeland or native region (Porteous and Smith 2001, 6). The suffering is based on the often-overlooked fact that “people are not merely attached to other people but also to familiar objects, structures, and environments that nurture the self, support the continuity of life, and act as props to memory and identity” (Porteous and Smith 2001, 6), with home likely being the most meaningful environment of all.

Porteous and Smith devote a lengthy chapter of the book to an inter-disciplinary exploration of ideas and meanings surrounding the concept of home. They start by reviewing definitions of home, establishing the following three major categories, or aspects, of home as being salient in creating a typology of home: the spatial and physical, the symbolic meanings, and the psycho-social (Porteous and Smith 2001, 31-32). The authors then look at home as a place and a symbol, describe the psychosocial meanings of home, discuss home with respect to exiled or homeless people, and cap off the exploration

of the concept of home by listing the possible impacts of its deliberate destruction, *domicide*, as “the destruction of a place of attachment and refuge; loss of security and ownership; restrictions on freedom; partial loss of identity; and a radical de-centring from place, family and community. There may be a loss of historical connection; a weakening of roots; and partial erasure of the sources of memory, dreams, nostalgia, and ideals” (Porteous and Smith 2001, 63). The potential impact of losing home is serious.

Domicide offers an excellent example of the many different lenses through which the meanings of a personal everyday space – such as a house or garden, both closely associated with the notion of home – can be interpreted.

Home is the place where, when you / have to go there, / They have to take you in.
(Robert Frost, quoted in Andrews 1989)

2.4.3 “*Topophilia*” and other works by Yi-Fu Tuan

While these works by Relph, Porteous and Smith relate to *intense experiences* within the space of the personal garden, an ordinary place often attached to and closely associated with *home*, it is the work of singular humanistic geographer Yi-Fu Tuan – described as rarely claiming “allegiance to any particular approach” (Johnston 1997, 190), “as much a psychologist as he is a geographer, concerning himself above all with the way that human beings respond to their physical environment” in work that ties together “ideas from the seemingly unrelated scholastic worlds of philosophy, psychology, urban planning, landscape architecture and anthropology”², essentially the “humanities” which are one root of humanistic geography – which relates most closely to my garden geography study. In typically eclectic style, Tuan writes about the garden not only in relation to myths of Eden and current Utopian ideals, as already mentioned, but also with respect to landscapes, cosmologies, symbolism, cultural tradition, sensory perception, artistic representation, power relations, sacred places, and private spaces – often

drawing on his cosmopolitan background, including his Chinese origins, for examples and illustrations. It comes as no surprise, then, that Tuan's writing and thinking is extremely non-linear, tipping and tilting, turning and soaring, following inexhaustible directions associated sometimes directly, sometimes indirectly, with the topic at hand, usually a complex one. As much as Tuan's various garden connections intrigue me, I will resist the urge to follow him down every path. I will focus instead on the book in which gardens figure most prominently, *Topophilia* (1974), and keep to related garden threads running through later works in an attempt to impose order on Tuan's topophilia-inspired garden musings.

2.4.3.1 Topophilia

In a 1998 lecture to the American Council of Learned Societies, Yi-Fu Tuan describes *Topophilia* as “a systematic study of how people come to be attached to place” – a work which became popular with the growing environmental movement of the period, and which eventually “achieved the respectability of a required text for college courses in landscape architecture”. Since gardens and gardening figure prominently in landscape architecture theory and practise, it is no wonder that the garden connection is strong in *Topophilia*.

References to gardens appear repeatedly, and most often, in chapter 10 of the book, “From cosmos to landscape.” This chapter traces, in the words of Tuan, the “axial transformation in world view from cosmos to landscape” (Tuan 1974, 132). This transformation saw medieval concepts of a vertical, stratified, transcendent cosmos linked with a cyclical conception of time “giving way to a flat nonrotary segment of nature called landscape” (Tuan 1974, 129) – a transformation which takes place only when people “whose lives are ruled by the seasonal rhythms of nature” (Tuan 1974, 131) become aware that their lives are actually governed “not so much by the motion of the sun and moon overhead as by events (reflecting the laws of supply and demand or government policy) in other parts of the country on the

same horizontal plane” (Tuan 1974, 132). This horizontal plane is strongly associated with landscape and vision.

This chapter – which starts with the concept of a stratified *cosmos*, and narrows the scope through *landscape* and scenery, to household spaces, sacred *places*, and secluded corners – provides the pattern which I will follow in my attempt to order Tuan’s garden reflections, which span decades. This chapter also inspires the organisational framework for my interpretive study (see Chapter 4).

2.4.3.2 Tuan: the garden as a microcosm

In *Dominance and Affection* (1984), a book about human domestication of various life forms (including other human beings), Tuan writes that “the garden is a little material *world* [my emphasis] in which people can dwell” (Tuan 1984, 18), as well as an act and manifestation of human will, a space which must be maintained thoughtfully and systematically. One such world, systematically maintained on a grand scale, is the imperial park, or gardens, of the Han emperors in China, which, as Tuan writes in *Topophilia*, are “one of the earliest landscaped enclosures of which we have a descriptive account” (Tuan 1974, 145). Containing mountains, forests, marshes, palaces, and artificial landscapes that reflected Taoist magical beliefs, this park, or these gardens, could “be seen as an idealized Taoist and shamanistic *microcosm* [my emphasis]” (Tuan 1974, 145). In *Passing Strange and Wonderful* (1983), a book about aesthetics, nature and culture, Tuan adds that these imperial gardens, this “ancestor of the garden and of landscape painting ... was a *world* [my emphasis] of natural and supernatural forces and spirits, a world designed to assuage the human longing for immortality” (Tuan 1983, 215). He adds that these gardens, transcendent spaces, were “a *world* [my emphasis] far removed from the human vanity and strife of social life at all levels, from home and marketplace to court” (Tuan 1983, 215). Even the urban gardens of gentry in the Ming dynasty, many less than one acre in size, “had *cosmic* [my

emphasis]” pretensions ... artfully designed to give visitors the impression that they could wander through its intricate paths, among hollows and craggy ‘mountains,’ and pause over arched bridges and in secluded pavilions for days on end without exhausting its wealth of prospects” (Tuan 1983, 131).

The idea of the garden as a little world, a microcosmic refuge from the greater world outside, reappears in Tuan’s *Segmented Worlds and Self* (1982), a book about group life and individual consciousness. In the chapter titled “Self and Reconstituted Wholes” Tuan describes gardens in the context of the individual’s need to withdraw from “Life that has grown too complex in the public sphere”, the challenge being “how to withdraw without withdrawing from life ... how to escape from the world and yet still be in the world – a world, however limited, of one’s own design, or a world over which one has some control” (Tuan 1982, 169). These worlds, he goes on to explain, include houses and gardens.

In *Escapism* (1998), Tuan describes a garden trend starting in Renaissance Italy, then moving to Baroque France, which exaggerated the aspects of design and control. Gardens created during this period were built “to project an air of power and artifice” (Tuan 1998, 26). In these gardens, the “technical prowess that made playful fountains and mechanical animals possible, together with the garden’s traditional link to the phantasms of theater, resulted in the creation of an illusionary *world* [my emphasis] remote indeed from its humble beginnings close to the soil and livelihood” (Tuan 1998, 26-27). These gardens were not intended to exalt supernatural forces and spirits or the awesome power of nature. They were meant for show, and to glorify human endeavour (Tuan 1974, 140).

2.4.3.3 Tuan: the garden as a landscape

In *Topophilia*, Tuan describes a major gardening movement, *landscape* gardening, in the context of changing cosmic values and environmental attitudes. The landscape garden trend, he points out,

“supports the thesis of axial transformation from the vertical to the horizontal” with its “emphasis on privileged views, on the extension of lines of sight to the distant horizon by means of straight paths, rows of trees, and linear ponds” (Tuan 1974, 138). In *Passing Strange and Wonderful*, Tuan reinforces the connection between gardens, landscapes and sight. “Real gardens cater primarily to the eye,” he writes (Tuan 1983, 67), adding that the visual aspect is particularly important in large gardens such as those at Versailles, “designed as symbols of prestige, stages for pageantry, settings for amateur performances and spectacles” (Tuan 1983, 67) – events meant to be viewed by audiences of a certain size, and feasible only at a landscape scale. Since the 18th century, he writes, even Chinese gardens have been regarded as “*landscape* [my emphasis] paintings – visually desirable objects – that one can miraculously enter” (Tuan 1983, 67). Yet sight is not the only sense Tuan associates with the garden landscape. In a section titled “*Landscapes* [my emphasis] of touch”, he writes that landscape designers try to imitate, and improve on, nature’s sensual wealth. Asian gardens are created with visual-tactile qualities in mind. A Chinese garden contains both *yin* (soft) and *yang* (hard) elements – the softness of water and of undulating perforated garden walls, the hardness of craggy limestone rocks. An Islamic garden is a concordance of sight, sounds, and scent, but it is also an oasis of thermal delight – its shades and coolness contrasting vividly with the glare and heat beyond its high walls (Tuan 1983, 44).

In *Escapism* (1998), Tuan links landscape and gardens from a different perspective. In this book, he introduces the concept of the *middle landscape*, essentially a work of culture and a “model human habitat”, that varies with time and geography, and that shows “how humans can escape nature’s rawness without moving so far from it as to appear to deny roots in the organic world” (Tuan 1998, 24-25). Land used for agricultural purposes, he continues, is the most economically important middle landscape (Tuan 1998, 25), with spaces used for the closely related horticulture, or gardening, as “another middle

landscape between wild nature and the city” (Tuan 1998, 26).

The middle landscape concept is one Tuan actually introduces, without labelling it as such, in *Topophilia* when he writes about Chinese gardens, evolving “in antithesis to the city” (Tuan 1974, 138). “Poised against the rectilinear geometry of the city,” he writes, “are the natural lines and spaces of the garden. In the city of man one finds hierarchical order, in the garden the complex informality of nature” (Tuan 1974, 138). He adds that the influence of Buddhism added rich symbolic content to the Chinese garden, where the “numerous symbols complement and enrich each other; in the idealized *landscape* [my emphasis] their overall message is peace and harmony” (Tuan 1974, 146).

At “the frontier of metropolitan expansion” (Tuan 1974, 238) in contemporary North America, the suburbs are another landscape meant to symbolise the peace and harmony associated with, for example, “agrarian ideals that trace back to the Jeffersonian icon of the independent family farm” (Tuan 1974, 237). As such, the suburban yard, with its lawns and gardens, is a middle landscape between the city which represents “corruption and ultimate sterility” and the country which stands for life “as seen in the fruits of the soil, in green growing things, in pure water and clean air, in the healthy human family, and in freedom from arbitrary political and social constraints” (Tuan 1974, 236). “The front lawn and the back garden,” Tuan writes, “take the place of the farm, and pets the place of livestock” (Tuan 1974, 237).

2.4.3.4 Tuan: the garden as a place

This microcosm within the larger world, this visual and horizontal “middle” landscape, this space called “garden”, is also, according to Tuan, a *place* individuals can withdraw to for solitude and quiet reflection. It is a setting where connections can be made, and where interactions can take place – interactions that are unlike, often an escape from, the struggles “for power and vainglory... petty social

conventions” and “arbitrary political and social constraints” (Tuan 1974, 236) outside the garden walls.

Tuan writes that even in the imperial gardens of the Han emperors in China – a microcosm with lakes, mountains and palaces, a landscape where the emperor and his guests “enjoyed both secular and religious activities”, including hunting, feasting and entertainment – the emperor could “climb up one of the great towers which commanded the landscape, and there commune with nature in solitude” (Tuan 1974, 145). It is the influence of Taoism and Buddhism, Tuan points out, which makes a Chinese garden “a place of retirement, repose, and contemplation” where “eyes could turn inward as much as outward [as in the largely visual aspect of landscape]; they could be figuratively and literally half-closed” (Tuan 1983, 67). Tuan adds

With the visual sense thus withdrawn from its position of dominance, the other senses – including smell – could be heightened. The plants in a Chinese garden are valued not only for their shape, color, and symbolic resonance, but also for their distinctive odors; thus pavilions might be located with sources of fragrance in mind – perhaps downwind from a lotus pond or in a pine grove” (Tuan 1983, 67).

It is in small, often enclosed places that individuals or small groups can relax to the point where they feel comfortable about closing their eyes and abandoning themselves to other, often more intimate, senses such as smell, sound, and touch. Even large gardens of the West, which appeal first to the eye, Tuan stresses, often offer small corners or enclosures where individuals or small groups can withdraw and unwind. “In such an enclosed space,” he writes, “in a relaxed mood, seekers after peace are able to enjoy subtleties of sound and odor – the gentle twang of zither and the chirping of birds, the scent of herbs and flowering plants” (Tuan 1983, 68).

The qualities of peace, repose and contemplation associated with the garden support Tuan’s assertion that “The garden is a type of the sacred *place* [my emphasis]” (Tuan 1974, 146). Tuan does not make any further direct associations between gardens and sacredness, but he does write

Every effort to define space [as, for example, in creating a garden, or creating a shrine] is an attempt to create order out of disorder: it shares some of the significance of the primordial act of creation and hence the sacred character of that act. Not only the building of a sanctuary, but the building of a house and of a town [we could add ‘of a garden’] traditionally called for the ritual transformation of profane space” (Tuan 1974, 146).

Gardens, as products of human action and intention, human creativity and ordered design which transforms space, could then be considered sacred places – places that are special to, and in some cases probably also revered and sanctified by, the people who create them and find in those particular spaces solace and peace for quiet meditation.

But gardens are also places for connecting, interacting, and maintaining relationships. One such relationship, Tuan writes, is a power struggle of sorts between the human and nonhuman, between cultural order and natural disorder. A garden, he writes, “unlike a painting or a sculpture, has to be maintained thoughtfully and systematically; otherwise it will revert to nature” (Tuan 1984, 18). Power must, therefore, be exercised over natural forces; they must be held in check for the garden to maintain its character, even in a garden that is supposed to be ‘natural’ (Tuan 1984, 21-22). Gardens, he adds, “with their air of innocent pleasure, aesthetic excellence, and religious import, have successfully hidden their roots in the exercises of power (Tuan 1984, 19).

But connections and interactions taking place in the garden are not all based on power. Tuan offers the example of English gardens of the late Tudor period as “*places* [my emphasis] of retreat as well as sociability” (Tuan 1982, 169). The garden, he continues, “in addition to being a secluded place for receiving favoured guests, was used for strolling in before and after meals, for taking naps in the drowsy hours of the day, for reading and soft music, and for gentle sports” (Tuan 1982, 170). This type of garden, essentially “an environment for the house” (Tuan 1974, 140), was private, yet not separated from the rest of the house, or from the daily affairs and social life of the family and household (Tuan 1982, 170). The garden, as such, is both a private and a social place.

A house, though otherwise beautifull, yet if it hath no Garden belonging to it, is more like a Prison than a House.

(William Coles, quoted in Elliot 1999)

2.5 Geometaphors for the garden

As I mentioned earlier, I have *attempted* to impose order on Tuan's garden-related musings. It is a difficult task, since Tuan's writing and thought patterns are anything but linear, and difficult to follow at the best of times. Yet a pattern – three metaphors for the garden: microcosm, landscape, and place – did emerge upon reading *Topophilia*. I write “emerged” because the pattern was not, at first glance, clear. The lines between Tuan's concepts of ‘world/microcosm’, ‘landscape’, and ‘place’ are blurred in all the books – *Topophilia*, *Segmented Worlds and Self*, *Passing Strange and Wonderful*, *Dominance and Affection*, and *Escapism*. And Tuan interchanges the terms a great deal. Yet the ideas are there, and they are interwoven so seamlessly that microcosms, landscapes and places appear to be the same organic, multi-faceted geographical wholes, as are the gardens which range in size from grand imperial parks or landscapes to tiny urban plots behind houses. This organic geographical wholeness epitomizes the nature of gardens.

It is microcosm, landscape, and place – three organic, and we could say, holistic “geometaphors” – which inspire my geographical interpretation of the personal garden space as portrayed in contemporary personal gardening literature. I have woven these metaphors – representing three different scales of geographical consideration, endeavour and consequence, with their associated characteristics and intricacies – into a wide geometaphorical net, or interpretive framework, which I am casting over the selected personal gardening books with the intention of capturing as much geographical meaning as possible (see Chapter 4 for more detail on the interpretive framework). In capturing and describing this meaning, expressed in a literature not yet studied by geographers, I hope to: (1) add new dimensions to the geographical understanding of gardens and gardening; (2) introduce new literature (garden books) to geographical inquiry, and (3) contribute to interdisciplinary exchange by linking geography and

gardening within the framework of environmental studies, by providing a geographical interpretation of the gardening literary sub-genre, and by offering a geographically informed interpretive structure to the evolving field of “literature and the environment” inquiry.

I wish to emphasise, at this point, that I am not conducting an interpretive study à la Yi-Fu Tuan. Even if I were able to discern exactly how such a study would be conducted (which I am not), I would lack the erudition, cosmopolitanism and eclecticism to be able to carry it out with any degree of success or credibility. Yi-Fu Tuan is, so to speak, a difficult, if not impossible, ‘act to follow’.

And so I am not attempting the impossible, as intriguing a challenge as it may be. I am, instead, applying an interpretive framework based on the wide-reaching geometaphors of cosmos/microcosm, landscape and place, as inspired by Tuan’s writings on garden, to an exploratory study of the geographical nature and meaning of the personal garden as expressed in contemporary personal gardening literature. And I am doing so with Tuan-inspired open-mindedness, and with what I hope will turn out to be sensitivity and insight.

Chapter notes

- ¹ Source: Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary at <http://www.m-w.com>, Cambridge International Dictionary of English at <http://dictionary.cambridge.org> and The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language at <http://www.bartleby.com> (accessed July 2005).
- ² Source: http://www.cwu.edu/~geograph/yi_fu.html, accessed March 2003.

Chapter 3 Personal gardening literature

Some of the most charming garden books are those in which the gardeners write personally about their experiences. The books might convey a lot of information about gardening along the way, but the real pleasure lies in the stories, the personalities, and the passion for growing things that they convey.

(*'Cultivating Canadian Gardens'*, Library and Archives Canada website¹)

If, as geographers Allen Noble and Ramesh Dhussa point out, “Literary creations by writers in the form of novels, short stories, poems, plays, reportages, diaries, memories and essays are viable and rich resources within which are extremely valuable, and sometimes unique, types of information conveying feelings, viewpoints, values, attitudes, and meanings associated with landscape and place, (Noble and Dhussa 1990, 50), then it stands to reason that books written about personal gardens, which I call personal gardening literature, would be valuable sources of information about the garden space. We could, in fact, consider these books as the “field” in which I am conducting my study, or as information sources which offer “subtle and elusive bits of information stored by sensitive, perceptive, and imaginative writers, who may respond to stimuli and landscapes in a different fashion than academically-trained geographers” (Noble and Dhussa 1990, 50). Imaginative creations such as literary works also “provide a window on to the human condition and thereby illuminate issues of interest to geographers, such as human feelings for place”, with form and content relating to “wider social and geographical relations and processes; they both reflect and affect these wider social relations” (Cloke et al. 2004, 94).

The books I have selected for study, described in detail later in this chapter in terms of both the selection process and the books and their authors, contain content that has been carefully chosen, organised, written, and published following long and deep reflection on direct experiences – personal, social, cultural, environmental, etc. – in the personal garden space. As such, they have the potential to express certain geographical meanings – likely more than I can cover within the framework of this study.

Since books of this nature, both personal gardening books and gardening books in general, have not yet been studied by geographers, the potential also exists for this study to introduce a new type of

literature to geographical inquiry, and to introduce a new type of inquiry to the study of literature – both exciting prospects. Geography not yet having engaged with personal gardening literature, it also means that no previous approach has been developed to probe gardening literature for geographic meanings, or to deal with the unique set of characteristics – biological, ecological, environmental, social, cultural, literary, autobiographical – these types of books offer. I have, therefore, decided to take an open and inclusive *interpretive* approach, described in detail in Chapter 4.

3.1 Writing about personal gardens

I have discovered, to my surprise and dismay, that books on gardening number in the thousands and vary over a wide diversity of subjects – for example:

- gardening dictionaries, bibliographies and encyclopaedias
- books on garden structures, ornaments, design, architecture and symbolism
- gardening fiction, poetry and juvenile literature
- books on garden tourism, trade management, and therapeutic use
- books on landscape gardening, garden conservation and restoration, and gardening for wildlife
- gardening histories, biographies and guidebooks
- works on gardens in art, in literature, and in the Bible
- books on religious, social and psychological aspects of gardening
- books on gardening and garden traditions in various parts of the world
- how-to titles related to every imaginable aspect of gardening activity
- and, recently, personal gardening literature exploring and reflecting on, for example:
 - the creation and development of personal gardens
 - observations and experiences in the garden
 - impacts of gardeners on garden spaces, and, reciprocally, garden spaces on gardeners
 - the role of the gardener with respect to the natural world
 - social aspects of gardening
 - healing aspects of gardening, and more.

Gardens remain of fundamental importance to people in the twenty-first century. To illustrate, a recent online search of one major "dot-com" book dealer revealed no fewer than 109,852 books for sale on the topic [of gardening].

(Doolittle 2004, 391)

It is this final type of gardening literature – what I have labelled “personal gardening literature”, but which is sometimes also called “garden memoir” or “garden autobiography” – that is the focus of this study. Through personal gardening literature, people tell the stories of their personal gardens and of themselves – of their individual, usually intimate, participation and creativity in, plans and responsibility

for, ideas and doubts about, intention and emotion toward, reflection and action in, attachment and commitment to, involvement and identity with ... and more ... the space they call a garden.

3.1.1 *Self-reflective garden writing*

Gardening, reading about gardening, and writing about gardening are all one; no one can garden alone.
(Elizabeth Lawrence, quoted in Elliot 1999)

The personal gardening books are intimate and reflective in nature, and essentially autobiographical, though not all the titles selected for study would qualify as bona fide autobiography, a literary form or sub-genre (debate continues to revolve around the appropriate term) defined by contemporary dictionaries as, simply, the biography of a person written or narrated by that person, a book about an individual's life written by that individual, or the area of literature relating to such books². It has been further described as usually narrative written in the first person and in mid-life or old age about the past of the writer, (Folkenflick 1993a, 14-15), in which the writer, playing the dual role of narrator and protagonist (Folkenflick 1993b, 234) constructs an attractive identity for him- or herself (Sturrock 1993b, 25) and tells readers what he or she believes, and thinks, the public should believe, and think, is noteworthy about his or her life (Goodwin 1993, xi). In the words of psychology and law professor Jerome Bruner, autobiography is "life construction through 'text' construction" (Bruner 1993, 55).

If, in fact, we separate the word "autobiography" into its component parts, we end up with "auto" or self/self-caused, "bio" or life, and "graphy" or writing – essentially the self-writing of life. Literary scholar James Goodwin goes a step further with his statement, "By definition then, autobiography brings into direct association self, life, and writing, with each component in dynamic, reflexive relationship to the other two" (Goodwin 1993, 3). This dynamic, reflexive relationship of self, life, and writing characterises the personal gardening literature selected for this study – books which are written in the first person voice – "I" – by authors past middle age, about life and identity both present and past,

attractive and not so attractive, inside and outside the garden, revealing and emphasising aspects of their gardening life and other life they wish readers to know about.

One of the main reasons not all the titles selected for study would qualify as “autobiography” is that the main focus of the books is not necessarily the life of the writer. Certain of the authors focus closely on the space of the *garden* in a sort of garden biography, or “geobiography”³, in which the gardener-writer plays a particular role. Other authors concentrate more on the life of the *writer* in which the garden plays a certain, in all cases important, role. Still other authors vacillate between the two orientations. Yet all the books are characterised by subjectivity, self-reflection and self-portrayal, and by their capacity to, in varying degrees, immerse the reader – specifically this reader, the author of the study, and indirectly perhaps you, the readers of the study about the books – in the experiences and thoughts of the various authors, rouse the reader to self-reflection, create a deep recognition of shared humanity, and contribute, “directly to the wealth of shared experience that comprises human existence” – “a matter of the heart and spirit as well as of the mind” (Goodwin 1993, 23).

3.1.2 *Reflexive writing and geography*

Subjectivity, self-reflection and self-portrayal entwined with, and often in the form of, story or narrative, are being increasingly valued in geographical inquiry for some of these same, and other, reasons. Anne Buttimer, who together with Swedish geographer Torsten Hägerstrand, initiated the “Adventures in Dialogue” project in 1977-78, has been at the forefront of bringing self-reflection and story back into geographical inquiry or, as the title of a recent book edited by Canadian geographer Pamela Moss suggests, of *Placing Autobiography in Geography*. I write “back into”, and the title of Moss’ book could have read *(Re)Placing Autobiography in Geography*, because, as Moss points out, “Autobiography and geography are not strangers. Historically, autobiography has been used to chronicle

geography as a discipline. ... And, to be sure, the history of geographic thought relies heavily on multiple forms of autobiography” (Moss 2001, 7). Buttimer reaches even further back in time when she writes:

If imaginations could fly to the pre-literate, pre-disciplinary eras of Western intellectual history, one would undoubtedly see the origins of historical and geographical curiosities in storytelling.... The tradition of storytelling, for perhaps most of human history, has served no only to sustain human efforts to live poetically – to create and cultivate meaning, rationality, and wisdom in modes of living on the earth – but has also been the catalyst and wellspring for community and cultural identity” (Buttimer 1983, 6).

Vincent Berdoulay and Angelo Turco identify the mythmaking aspect of storytelling as playing a role “pour stimuler la curiosité, l’explication et l’activité géographique” (Berdoulay and Turco 2001, 339). Paul Claval points to myth’s focus on familiar environments, beings and things, along with the manner of conveying or telling the story, as contributing to the power and wide comprehensibility of myths (Claval 2001b, 351). Buttimer echoes Claval’s point about the form of storytelling, adding that it “reaches its highest appeal when someone speaks of his or her own experiences.” She goes on to report that traditions of oral history and autobiography became frequent sources of insight to 19th and 20th century scholars and laments the fact that despite the rich legacy of personal stories left by scholars, including geographers, “the harvest has not been reaped ... Autobiography is still generally regarded as a literary form ... or at least the proper domain of the humanist ... and ‘foreign’ to most fabricators of theory and paradigmatically minded scientists” (Buttimer 1983, 5-7) – a statement which reinforces Berdoulay and Turco’s assertion that the rational discourse of institutional geography pushed myth steadily into the background, increasingly banishing it as systematic scientific description of the planet advanced (Berdoulay and Turco 2001, 340). Yet it is the storied aspect of the planet, and the sharing of the varied stories of civilisations which, according to Buttimer, will contribute to “discovering mutually acceptable bases for rational discourse and wiser ways of dwelling” on the planet (Buttimer 1993, 3).

Buttimer and Hägerstrand’s international interdisciplinary “Adventures in Dialogue” project (1978-1988) – essays, interviews and discussions captured mainly from senior and retired scholars, and from professionals from diverse countries and disciplines – was an attempt to reinstate the validity of story in

the social sciences, to bridge the communication gap between scholars in the sciences and the humanities, to facilitate dialogue around professional expertise and public interest (Buttimer 1986, 5), and to provide an opportunity for personal expression to academics, many of whom, among the project participants,

have published a significant amount and have been recognized leaders within particular fields yet nearly all welcomed the opportunity to reflect on threads of continuity in their own intellectual journeys. Many felt that their published work consisted mostly of responses to short-term demands such as reports on particular pieces of research, and that textbook and journal editors had usually welcomed the fruits of analytical endeavour rather than reflective insight or personal views. Some welcomed the opportunity to question what they considered to be distorted stereotypes and unfair commentary on their writings (Buttimer 1983, 5).

The results of the project – transcripts, video-taped interviews, recordings, together with published reports, articles and books related to the project – have been collected as archival material, potential catalysts for further dialogue, resource bases for research on knowledge and lived experience, and educational material available to libraries and educational institutions, with educational use made as the project was still underway (Buttimer 1986, 5-13). As Buttimer points out after the project has ended its active phase, “Autobiography is surely a powerful catalyst for dialogue” (Buttimer 1993, 11).

One of the most accessible products of the project is a selection, interspersed with reports on certain group discussions, of individual autobiographical accounts by geographers from around the world – including, among others, the USA’s Clarence Glacken, the United Kingdom’s Walter Freeman, Germany’s Wolfgang Hartke, Sweden’s Torsten Hägerstrand, and France’s Jacqueline Beaujeu-Garnier, the Sorbonne’s first female professor. This collection, titled *The Practice of Geography* (1983), and particularly Hägerstrand’s “stunning autobiographical essay”, inspired a recent collection titled *Geographical Voices: fourteen autobiographical essays* (2002), edited by Peter Gould and Forest R. Pitts. The collection contains pieces by geographers who entered the field around the late 1950s and early 1960s – including, among others, David Harvey, Donald Meinig, Gunnar Olsson, Yi-Fu Tuan, and Gilbert White – and may spawn a continuing series (Gould and Pitts 2002, xi-x).

Whereas the previous collections focused on the life and work of senior geographers, Pamela Moss' already-mentioned *Placing Autobiography in Geography* also offers autobiographical accounts by academics new to geography and even by students. Like Buttimer, and unlike Gould and Pitts who seem content to simply collect and present autobiographical essays, Moss engages in critical discussion of autobiography in geography. Not only does she provide autobiographical glimpses into her own life, she also traces the history of reflexivity in the discipline, describes the range of uses of autobiography discovered through her readings, and calls for a self-critical re-thinking of those and other uses in the context of the rise of critical reflexivity and social theory in geography (Moss, 2001). "Self-scrutiny, individual and collective," she writes, "can contribute to a better understanding of and provide clearer insight into who we are and where our world has come from" (Moss 2001, 9). She adds that geography could benefit most from an autoethnographical approach.

Moss defines autoethnography as simply an account of life in the field (Moss 2001, 13). Other social scientists go into more detail. Anthropologists Carolyn Ellis and Arthur P. Bochner define autoethnography as

... an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural.... Usually written in first-person voice, autoethnographic texts appear in a variety of forms – short stories, poetry, fiction, novels, photographic essays, personal essays, journals, fragmented and layered writing, and social science prose. In these texts, concrete action, dialogue, emotion, embodiment, spirituality, and self-consciousness are featured, appearing as relational and institutional stories affected by history, social structure, and culture, which themselves are dialectically revealed through action, feeling, thought and language.

They go on to add that autoethnography is, in fact, like many social science terms, difficult to define and apply because of the evolution of its meanings and functions (Ellis and Bochner 2000, 739-40), which I will not, in the interests of space, list here. Suffice it to state that autoethnography – which, like humanistic geography, is varied, complex, and rich – has a certain potential for enhancing geographic methodology. As geographers Kathryn Besio and David Butz stress, writing about the cautious use of autoethnography in certain contexts and situations, any concern they have about the approach is tempered

by their “growing enthusiasm for the concept, particularly the potential it has to contribute to innovations in geographic field research and representation” (Besio and Butz 2004, 432).

Whatever the term used to denote the idea of a reflexive approach in geography – autobiography, autoethnography, reflexivity, or any of the other descriptors from the aforementioned lists – the results of reflexive work will help “to augment the continued construction of geography as a discipline, especially with regard to the people who build it: scholars, researchers, teachers, students, practitioners; to tell us who we are in the context of our multiple environments; and to give some clues as to where our world comes from” (Moss 2001, 21). Reflexive work will also help to counteract what Trevor Barnes has called a deficiency in a discipline which is “overpresentist, even in its own histories, and not good on biography” (Barnes 2003, 510).

The self-scrutiny, associated with autobiography and autoethnography, which Moss identifies as contributing to insight into ourselves and our world weaves through this study – chiefly in the personal garden books selected for study, written by people who experience the garden space in all its fullness, and, to a lesser extent, in the reflexive elements of my own garden-related experiences added to the text. In threading my own stories and reflections through the thesis, I am following in the footsteps of Louis Dupont, who completed his doctoral dissertation, *Entre sensibilité et discours : structuration et signification de l'Américanité québécoise* (1993), at the University of Ottawa's Department of Geography a little more than a decade ago. Dupont wove into his dissertation what he calls a “récit conceptuel [sic] de la pensée ... constituée par étapes comme subjectivation de la réalité objective” and places it into the context of the larger narrative of “américanité” he is describing in his dissertation (Dupont 1993, 260-261).

3.2 Works selected for study

Since reading my first self-reflexive personal gardening book one long, cold winter many years ago, I had picked up other, similar works and found them highly engaging, intellectually stimulating, and geographically relevant, not to mention inspiring. When I decided that I would study personal gardening literature, I pulled the titles I had read off my bookshelves and set about finding similar books to expand the body of work I would analyse.

3.2.1 *The selection process*

Since my research revolves around the broad and geographically inclusive – incorporating elements from both physical (biological, ecological, environmental) and human (social, cultural, personal) geography – nature and meaning of personal gardens, I decided to choose books which address, in varying proportion depending on the author, both human and nonhuman, physical and conceptual aspects of the garden – from the ecological to the social, the biological to the emotional, the atmospheric to the cultural.

I also decided to limit myself to gardening books published since 1990, this being a period of growing awareness of environmental and ecological issues – important to the inclusively geographical aspect of my study – and a year around which a number of significant, some gardening-related, environmental organisations were established and events held. For example:

- 1984 – North American Native Plant Society (NANPS) created
- 1987 – Society for Ecological Restoration International (SER) founded
- 1990 – The Wild Ones (US group promoting environmental education and advocating natural landscaping, native biodiversity, and the use of native plants) established
- 1992 – Rio Summit (United Nations conference on environment and development) held
- 1993 – Canadian Environmental Education and Communication Network (EECOM) created.

The next step involved identifying those books that met certain basic criteria for inclusion in the corpus – books which

- focus on personal gardens
- reflect the author's own personal gardening involvement and experiences
- focus on the writer's personal garden(s)
- contain reflection on aspects of personal gardening related to elements of both physical geography (biological, ecological, environmental) and human geography (social, cultural, personal)
- are set in North America, an ecological, environmental, social, cultural, and landscape culture familiar to me in the dual role of researcher, author and subject of this study.

That step turned out to be more difficult than I imagined, since this type of gardening book is relatively recent, with no clear and standardised related bibliographical keywords. I scrutinised bibliographies of related gardening literature and conducted searches of digital library catalogues and the Internet with all possible combinations of existing keywords from the titles I already had – keywords such as *garden ecology*, *backyard* or *natural gardens*, and *garden* or *gardening* paired with *philosophy*, *anecdotes*, *natural history*, *memoir*, *autobiography*, *environmental aspects*, and *psychological aspects*.

The results of those searches still yielded hundreds of titles, to which I applied the following filters to narrow the list to a manageable corpus containing titles which were the most geographically evocative, autobiographically deep, and meaningfully “thick” – in short, the works which were the most appropriate and significant to the study. I proceeded to “weed out”, so to speak, the following sorts of books:

- books published outside North America
 - e.g.: *A Gentle Plea for Chaos* (1989) and *A Breath from Elsewhere* (1999), both written by British gardener and writer Mirabel Osler
- books written by more than one author (e.g. collections of essays or articles, exchanges of letters) – I wanted to focus on single authors only, for deeper and more thorough reflection, and for more robust personal expression
 - e.g. *Garden Voices, two centuries of Canadian garden writing* (1995) edited by Edwinna von Baeyer and Plesance Crawford, *The Garden Letters* (1995) by Elspeth Bradbury and Judy Maddocks, and *Chicken Soup for the Gardener's Soul* (2000) edited by Jack Canfield et al.
- practical ecological gardening books with a how-to focus and little or no reflection on personal involvement in and attachment to the personal garden
 - e.g. *Butterfly Gardening, creating summer magic in your garden* (1998) by the Xerces Society, and *Wildlife in the Garden, how to live in harmony with deer, raccoons, rabbits, crows and other pesky creatures* (1999) by Gene Logsdon
- books which focus exclusively on the spiritual or psychological aspects of gardening
 - e.g. *The Garden Sanctuary, creating the outdoor space to soothe the soul* (2000) by Keith Mitchell, and *Cultivating sacred space: gardening for the soul* (1997) by Elizabeth Murray

- books which do not contain self-reflection on the writer's personal garden(s)
 - e.g. *The Naturalist's Garden* (1987) by John Feltwell, and *Transitory Gardens, Uprooted Lives* (1993) by Diana Balmori and Margaret Morton
- books which do not focus almost exclusively on the writer's own personal garden(s) – more specifically, books with at least 50% of their volume devoted to other elements such as photographs, or other topics, themes or gardens
 - e.g. *Our Gardens, Ourselves: reflections on an ancient art* (1994) by Jennifer Bennett, *The Healing Garden* (1996) by Marjorie Harris, *Seeds of another summer: finding the spirit of home in nature* (1996) by Beth Powning, *Stalking the Wild Amaranth: gardening in the age of extinction* (1998) by Janet Marinelli, *My Garden (Book):* (1999) by Jamaica Kincaid, and *The Gardener's Manifesto: changing the world and creating beauty one garden at a time* (2002) by Lorraine Johnson
- books which contain essentially a collection of standalone and loosely related essays (often selections of previously published gardening columns or gardening articles) about the writer's personal garden(s) – as such lacking a narrative thread and offering a less cohesive, integral, and organic perspective on the personal garden
 - e.g. *Second Nature: a gardener's education* (1991) by Michael Pollan, *Groundwork: a gardener's ecology* (1994) by Roger Swain, *Deep in the Green* (1995) by Anne Raver, and *An Ecology of Enchantment* (1998) by Des Kennedy.

3.2.2 Selection results

The result of the selection process, the final list of works for study, numbers seven books, by six authors, offering a surprising, considering their number, degree of diversity in terms of the following:

- author gender – both female (3) and male (3) gardener-writers
- author nationality – both US (3) and Canadian (3) writers
- author background – sciences, humanities, architecture
- geographical location of the garden stories – scattered from the southwestern United States to the northeastern states, and from southwestern to southcentral Canada
- settings – urban, suburban, rural
- bioregions – Great Lakes, southwestern coast, northwestern coastal temperate rainforest
- gardening approaches – from more traditional gardening methods and styles to native plant gardening and ecological restoration ideas and techniques
- autobiographical intensity – from honest and relatively detailed chronicles of processes and procedures, to fiercely intimate recollections and revelations
- publishing dates – 1993, 1995, 1996, 1999, 2001, 2004.

The authors of the books selected for study are all gardeners, who write about their personal garden spaces and gardening experiences in diverse styles and varying proportions and degrees of erudition and eloquence, research and reflection, report and revelation, observation and autobiography. The following Figure provides a quick glance at the works selected for study, as well as certain key characteristics of the books and authors, listed in order of publication date, starting with the most recent.

FIGURE 1 – The corpus at a glance

Author	Nationality	Location / setting	Book title	Year
Lane, Patrick	Canadian	• Victoria, British Columbia • southwestern Canada • suburban	<i>There is a Season: a memoir in a garden</i>	2004
Ackerman, Diane	US	• Ithaca, New York • northeastern United States • suburban	<i>Cultivating Delight: a natural history of my garden</i>	2001
Harris, Marjorie	Canadian	• Toronto, Ontario • southcentral Canada • urban	<i>Seasons of my Garden</i> and <i>In the Garden: thoughts on changing seasons*</i> (combined to tell a more complete garden story)	1999 1996
Chambers, Douglas	Canadian	• Bruce County, Ontario • southcentral Canada • rural	<i>Stony Ground: the making of a Canadian garden</i>	1996
Whiteson, Leon	US	• Hollywood, California • southwestern United States • urban	<i>A Garden Story</i>	1995
Stein, Sara	US	• Pound Ridge, New York • northeastern United States • rural-suburban	<i>Noah's Garden: restoring the ecology of our own backyards</i>	1993

* This book is curious in that it contains no page numbers. Yet each page in the book contains a different, brief, titled meditation on Harris' garden. When I reference this book, I will, therefore, be unable to provide the page number, which is absent, but I will specify the title of the particular meditation referred to.

3.2.3 The books and their authors

3.2.3.1 Patrick Lane's *There is a Season* (2004)

Patrick Lane is an acclaimed Canadian poet, as well as an accomplished gardener and keen naturalist, who has received numerous awards, including the Governor General's Award, the Canadian Authors Association Award, the National Radio Award (USA), and two National Magazine Awards (Canada). *There is a Season* was granted the 2005 British Columbia Award for Canadian Non-Fiction. Lane has over twenty books of poetry to his credit – some published internationally in countries including, among others, England, France, Italy, China, Japan, Chile, Columbia, Yugoslavia, the Netherlands, and Russia –

and poems in every major anthology of English Canadian literature. He has been a writer-in-residence and/or teacher at institutions such as the University of Toronto, University of Victoria, University of Alberta, University of Saskatchewan, and Concordia University. He currently lives and gardens near Victoria, British Columbia, where he is working on a novel⁴.

There is a Season is an intensely personal and fiercely honest memoir of Lane's recent recovery from over 40 years of alcohol addiction and cocaine dependency. The book chronicles the year following his return from a rehabilitation program – a year in which, shaky but alive, he stayed close to home, learning to live without alcohol or drugs, working in his beloved garden, and healing among its resident plants and wildlife. He writes:

The garden has been a sanctuary for me these past months. Inside the high fences I feel safe with the plants and birds, our cats, and my woman whose love for me surpasses understanding. Her tolerance and patience have been remarkable. I know the need to impose solitude on myself will pass, but for now I treasure the peace and quiet it offers. My daily life is a reflection of my need. Birth and death are practised here daily by all living things and I participate in that cycle as I step into the simple round of plants, animals, insects, and birds (Lane 2004, 101).

It is this safe and quiet environment – the garden he experiences daily and intimately – which brings back a flood of memories, particularly of his family and early life in the harsh social and natural environment of British Columbia's interior, and a clues to understanding the origins of his addiction. In the final paragraphs of the book, Lane offers no grand conclusions, but he conveys acceptance and peace:

I began this book in the confusions of clouds and rain. I could ask the old question Job asked, 'Hath the rain a father? Or who hath begotten the drops of dew?' I don't know the answer, but Perhaps it is enough to stand there with Lorna and praise the rain and our lives together. And perhaps it is enough to know I have now begun a life. There are years to come (Lane 2004, 308).

3.2.3.2 Diane Ackerman's *Cultivating Delight* (2001)

Diane Ackerman is a teacher, poet, naturalist and award-winning author – of children's books, poetry, essays and non-fiction books – with a long list of publications to her credit. She has taught at various universities, including Columbia, the University of Richmond, and Cornell. Her articles and essays on nature, both human and nonhuman, have appeared in numerous journals, including *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, and *National Geographic*. And she has published several non-fiction books, including,

among others, *An Alchemy of Mind* (2004), a poetics of the human psyche and brain; *A Slender Thread* (1998), based on experiences as a telephone crisis line counsellor; *The Rarest of the Rare* (1995), a look at the plight and intrigue of endangered animals; the bestselling *A Natural History of the Senses* (1990), a poetic exploration of the five senses based on research and personal experience; and *On Extended Wings* (1987), a memoir of flying.

In *Cultivating Delight* Ackerman turns her keen, inquiring, and quirky mind to the large, lavish garden she cultivates, with the help of garden assistants and a landscape designer, in Ithaca, New York. The book traces the seasonal cycles of the garden over the course of a year, with related reflections and mental meanderings on subjects ranging from the intimate lives of animal neighbours, to the human-nature relationship, to growth and mortality, garden etiquette and extremes, and the thoughts and achievements of eminent gardeners such as Thomas Jefferson and Gertrude Jekyll.

Ackerman's writing and turns of mind are exuberant and rampant – a reflection, perhaps, of her apparently extravagant garden. One reviewer describes the book as a “a generous and jauntily haphazard excursion”⁵ through her garden, an effective description for a book whose narrative thread was the least clear of all the titles I am studying, and whose twists and turns I found difficult to follow. Yet the book contains numerous significant nuggets of reflections from the garden, such as the following musings on the people-plant connection:

I love sitting at the crossroads where nature and human nature meet and each throws light upon the other. So although I don't imagine my plants share human concerns and emotions, I do respond to their unique faces, as well as to their motives, strategies, culture, and health. Do plants have motives and instincts? Absolutely. To the best of my knowledge, they don't have consciousness. But they *are* self-aware. They know when they've been hurt, and they can take stock of their circumstances and adjust their behaviour.
(Ackerman 2001, 100-102).

3.2.3.3 Douglas Chambers' *Stony Ground* (1996)

Douglas Chambers is a Professor Emeritus of English at the University of Toronto. He has written numerous books and essays on subjects ranging from Renaissance literature and contemporary poetry, to,

more recently, gardening – including *Stony Ground* and the earlier *The Planters of the English Landscape Garden: botany, trees and the Georgics* (1993).

In the mid 1980s, Chambers took over a family heritage, a working farm established in the mid 1800s by his great-great-grandfather in southern Ontario's Bruce County. Chambers' intention was not to create extensive gardens around the house, but rather to make "a walk around and through this working farm – a place from which to observe the beauties of the crops in their different seasons, the changing light and colour, the woods seen from different angles, the planted structures of the garden to be looked back at and not simply out from" (Chambers 1996, 9). The walks and gardens ended up evolving together while the author was still teaching full-time in Toronto, and the story of their creation and Chambers' growing gardening addiction is related in loosely chronological fashion in *Stony Ground*.

But the book is much more than simply the story of the creation of the gardens at the Stonyground farm. Chambers weaves through it musings on, among other things, family history, the Bruce County landscape, nature and art, garden design and labour, gardens in literature and myth, gardens here and abroad, fruits and flowers, acquisition and loss, and learnings from the garden, landscape, and people encountered in the process of fashioning the unique garden landscape at Stonyground. He also reflects on why he wrote the book: "I feel somewhat evangelical about what I have been (and am) doing: the ordinariness of it. It is not something that requires a landscape-architecture firm, nor need one own a department store to fund it. More to the point, it's important that the increasing number of urban people who are buying farms recognize that the agricultural cycle is beautiful and invigorating. Agriculture, the landscape that surrounds us, is the rest of the story of the garden" (Chambers 1996, xviii-xix). Near the end of the book he shares his hopes that the Stonyground agricultural and garden landscape will become an educational enterprise, a centre for landscape and garden study (Chambers 1996, 221) – will it, then, still be a personal garden?

3.2.3.4 Marjorie Harris' *In the Garden* (1995) and *Seasons of My Garden* (1999)

Marjorie Harris is the only “gardening writer” in the group. But her writing career didn’t start with gardens. Before starting to write about gardens and gardening in the 1980s, she worked in various capacities – staff writer, various levels of editor (including art editor), radio producer, columnist and freelancer – with Toronto-based media ranging from CBC radio, *Maclean’s Magazine*, *Saturday Night, Chatelaine*, the *Toronto Star*, *Toronto Life*, *Applied Arts Quarterly*, *Financial Post Magazine* and more. In the late 1980s, she started writing regular garden columns, articles, and garden book reviews, as well as making periodic appearances on CBC’s *Metro Morning* show as “The Urban Gardener”. She is currently the Editor-in-Chief of *Gardening Life* magazine, and the *Globe and Mail*’s garden columnist. She has published several gardening books, including, among others, *The Canadian Gardener, a guide to gardening in Canada* (1990), *Ecological Gardening, your path to a healthy garden* (1991), *The Canadian Gardener’s Guide to Foliage and Garden Design* (1993), *The Healing Garden* (1996), *Pocket Gardening, a guide to gardening in impossible places* (1998), and *Botanica North America, rediscovering native plants* (2002)⁶.

Seasons of my Garden is the only book she has written entirely about her own garden in the city of Toronto. Seasonally structured, it is rich in photographs, gardening advice, and reflections on plants and garden design. It also contains certain insightful thoughts such as the following statement regarding gardening as she ages, “I can also see the day when my garden will be only in my imagination, still giving me pleasure, still being a good companion. What the garden has provided in my life is a retrieval of that sense of infinite possibilities and the joy you have as a little kid: being able to relish the most basic physical play and allow your imagination to soar” (Harris 1999, 138).

Yet such insights are relatively few, and so thinly scattered, that I decided I should, to be fair to this author and bolster her contributions to the study, add another of her personal gardening titles, *In the*

Garden, thoughts on changing seasons, published four years earlier. I had originally selected out this book because it is essentially a collection of standalone mini-essays. Yet it meets all the other selection criteria, and it reflects *Seasons of my Garden* through its seasonal structure. I thought it would be an appropriate and effective reinforcing choice.

3.2.3.5 Leon Whiteson's *A Garden Story* (1995)

Architect and novelist Leon Whiteson was born in Zimbabwe, and has lived in England, Spain, South Africa, Greece, Canada, and currently the United States. He has published both fiction and non-fiction, including novels, magazine articles, criticism and books on architecture, and, more recently, *A place called Waco: a survivor's story* (1999), co-authored with David Thibodeau, and *A terrible beauty: an exploration of the positive role of violence in life, culture & society* (2000). Whiteson currently lives and gardens in Hollywood, California.

A Garden Story is an intensely personal account of Whiteson's gardening obsession, starting in the late 1980s with his decision to take a break from writing a novel and make his backyard more presentable. "In truth," he writes, "I'd never really wanted to be a gardener. I had a typical writer's preference for working with my head rather than my hands; words and ideas excited my interest, not plants and soils. All the countries I'd lived in before arriving in Los Angeles ... were, to me, landscapes of the mind. Vivid landscapes to be sure, often charged with emotion, but never to be considered as grounds I might directly dig into and cultivate" (Whiteson 1995, 3). When a retreat into the coolness of the garden centre adjacent to the local hardware store brings him a fragrance reminiscent of gloried days in Spain, he ends up with a car full of plants – the result of his fruitless search for the source of the scent – and the beginnings of an eventual, initially reluctant, garden.

The rest of the book is an eloquent account tracing the development of Whiteson's garden, conceived as a "green novel" created alongside his "white" work on paper. He weaves into his garden story

memories of his childhood in Africa and sojourns in Europe; contemplation of his sad father, a failed gardener; reflections on ecology, history, culture, and horticulture; and observations and musings on the character and tensions of his neighbourhood, which he engages with as he gardens in front of the house.

3.2.3.6 Sara Stein's *Noah's Garden* (1993)

Sara Stein is an award-winning science writer recognised for her thorough research and dynamic writing style. She has published several science books for children, including *The Evolution Book* (1986) and *The Science Book* (1979), as well as *My Weeds* (1988) which describes her earlier experiences gardening in the traditional North American style. She currently lives, writes and gardens in Pound Ridge, New York.

Noah's Garden: restoring the ecology of our own backyards, published to rave reviews in 1993, was one of the first of the recent wave of ecological gardening books published in North America. It remains one of the “bibles” of the environmental gardening movement today. The book’s power comes from its honesty and insight, and from the structure of its content: Stein’s personal gardening story interwoven with descriptions of garden ecology, an ecological history of suburbia, environmental gardening tips, and a convincing argument for good stewardship of the land stolen from prairies and forests and transformed into our back yards.

The book begins with a brief account of how the author and her husband “cleaned up” and shaped their suburban property in the traditional manner, transforming the original overgrown farmland into expansive lawns and gardens that seemed like Eden. Then it struck them that most of the birds were gone. So was other wildlife like foxes, weasels, snakes, toads, and fireflies. “I realized in an instant the full extent of what we had done,” Stein writes, “we had banished the animals from this paradise of ours” (Stein, 1993, 9). The rest of the book chronicles their experiences undoing their careful landscaping,

helping the land restore itself by planting certain areas and letting others grow back in, and learning every step of the way.

Stein has since published two sequels, so to speak: *Planting Noah's Garden: further adventures in backyard ecology* (1997) and *Noah's Children: restoring the ecology of childhood* (2001). She has also become a popular spokesperson for the ecological gardening movement⁷.

MUSINGS FROM THE GARDEN

It began with stories. In a book. About gardens. And plants. And stories of people, in their gardens, with specific plants, in particular places. It was the middle of winter, five years ago, the beginning of the new millennium and, unbeknownst to me, the beginning of a new phase in my life – the garden phase which, if the books I have read and stories I have heard since then, may never end.

But back then, curled up on the sofa, with snow tapping the window behind me, I heard only the stories. I saw only the photographs of gardens shadowed or bright, shaded in subtle greens or bursting with colour, filled with mosses and ferns or stretches of vivid flowers. I felt, through the author's carefully chosen words and skilfully crafted descriptions, the enthusiasm of the gardeners, their commitment, their excitement, their care, their concern.

It drew me in. It held my attention. It made me smile, sigh, and draw in sharp breaths of wonder and admiration. The book, the stories, the gardens, places, people, and plants together engaged, inspired, and motivated me, though I was unaware of it at the time.

In the background the snow kept tapping, beneath my fingers the pages kept turning, and somewhere deep inside, where such things happen, seeds of gardening fever were planted.

Chapter notes

- ¹ Source: <http://www.collectionscanada.ca/garden/h11-2040-e.html>, accessed June 2005.
- ² Source: Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary at <http://www.m-w.com>, Cambridge International Dictionary of English at <http://dictionary.cambridge.org> and The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language at <http://www.bartleby.com> (accessed July 2005).
- ³ A word currently in use and circulation, lacking focus and definition, and used in varying senses.
- ⁴ Source of biographical information: <http://www.patricklane.ca>, accessed July 2005.
- ⁵ Source of biographical information and quote: www.dianeackerman.com, accessed July 2005.
- ⁶ Source of biographical information: <http://www.marjorieharris.com>.
- ⁷ Source for biographical and book information: covers of the two books mentioned in this paragraph.

Chapter 4 Interpretive approach

In the social sciences there is only interpretation. Nothing speaks for itself.

(Denzin 2004, 447)

4.1 Interpretive orientations

If interpretation is, at its most basic, the finding of meaning, or the explanation or opinion of what something means¹, then in this study I am finding the geographical meaning, or expressing my opinion of the geographical meaning, in contemporary personal gardening literature. Yet, as I have discovered upon looking into interpretation and qualitative research, there is more to interpretation, or the finding of meaning, than first meets the eye. Interpretation is a way of “making sense” of something experienced, an activity which does not involve the simple absorption of meaning that is there, but, in the words of geographer Pamela Shurmer-Smith, “rather, staking out a meaning one can understand for oneself” (Shurmer-Smith 2002b, 124). Communications scholar Norman Denzin adds, “Interpretation is an art; it is not formulaic or mechanical” (Denzin 2004, 450). It is

... a productive process that sets forth the multiple meanings of an event, object, experience, or text. Interpretation is transformative. It illuminates, throws light on experience. It brings out, and refines, as when butter is clarified, the meanings that can be sifted from a text, and object, or a slice of experience. So conceived, meaning is not in a text, nor does interpretation precede experience, or its representation. Meaning, interpretation, and representation are deeply intertwined in one another” (Denzin 2004, 453).

If interpretation is as flexible a concept as this passage suggests, then it may be more accurate to speak of finding ‘meanings’ through interpretation, or ‘a meaning’. Meanings, since there is no single interpretive truth (Denzin and Lincoln 2000, 23), contribute to *understanding* what is being studied, understanding being the most fundamental concept for qualitative research (Huberman and Miles 2002, 39). “True understanding” [perhaps it would be more accurate to speak of “understandings”] as geographers Keith Hoggart, Loretta Lees and Anna Davies emphasize in the context of what they call “creative interpretation” involves active involvement of the researcher, and ongoing dialogue and

engagement between the researcher and what is being researched (Hoggart et al. 2002, 24-5). These understandings are shaped by a wide variety of factors, including, among others, the researcher's personal history, biography, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity (Denzin and Lincoln 2000, 6), as well as his or her "personal and social clutter", ideological and cultural baggage (Ley and Mountz 2001, 235). This conglomerate and pliant view of interpretation makes the whole business appear rather unclear and disorderly, messy and uncertain (Denzin and Lincoln 2000, 23), at first glance. Yet upon further reflection, it is also rich in potential for disciplinary significance and meaning, and in possibility for rejuvenation and growth in qualitative research practise.

Interpretation is a complex and dynamic craft, with as much creative artistry as technical exactitude, and it requires an abundance of patient plodding, fortitude and discipline. There are many changing rhythms; multiple steps; moments of jubilation, revelation, and exasperation; and, always, like high school prom night, the process is a sweaty, physical, experienced one.

(Miller and Crabtree 1999, 128)

4.1.2 Qualitative research in evolution

These new perspectives, and many of the current and ongoing developments in qualitative research, can be understood within the context of postmodern thought, which, broadly speaking, questions everything, including what is known (the information), the knower/storyteller, and the reader/receiver of the information (Aitken 1997, 211). More specifically, postmodernism attacks the mimetic (striving to produce as accurate a reflection of the world as possible) theory of representation and search for truth (Duncan and Ley 1993, 3), doubting that "any method or theory, discourse or genre, tradition or novelty, has a universal and general claim as the 'right' or the privileged form of authoritative knowledge" (Richardson 2000, 928), and rejecting the notion of a "single 'conventional' paradigm to which all social scientists might ascribe in some common terms and with mutual understanding" (Lincoln and Guba 2000, 185). Particular postmodern strategies seek, in fact, to de-centre the privileged sites which produce

knowledge according to the conventional paradigm, and to “undermine the tropes of representation known as the Enlightenment project, or modernism” (Duncan and Ley 1993, 7), a project characterised by what has been described as a “God’s-eye view” or “voice from nowhere” or “voice from everywhere” (Lincoln and Denzin 2000, 1059).

Of particular resonance within geography is the postmodern phenomenon of the ‘cultural turn’, concerned with, among other things, the “interpretation of meaning” (Hoggart et al. 2002, 22) and the implication that the “accumulations of ways of seeing, means of communicating, constructions of value, senses of identity should be taken as important in their own right, rather than just a by-product of economic formations” (Shurmer-Smith 2002, 1). As such, the cultural turn brought to the discipline of geography a wide range of concepts and concerns – identity and difference, embodiment and knowledge, language and discourse, texts and images, value and ways of seeing, power relations and resistance, and much more (Cloke et al. 2004, 180). Paul Cloke et al. make the point that the cultural turn in geography was also an ethnographic turn because it brought social and cultural geography closer together, thanks to influences such as feminism, anthropology and sociology, which discussed the relationships between theory, politics, poetics and research design and practice in substantial critical detail (Cloke et al. 2004, 181).

4.1.3 Qualitative research today

Denzin and Lincoln point out that “we are in a moment of discovery and rediscovery, as new ways of looking, interpreting, arguing, and writing are debated and discussed” (Denzin and Lincoln 2000, 18) – “a new age where messy, uncertain, multivoiced texts, cultural criticism, and new experimental works will become more common, as will more reflexive forms of fieldwork, analysis and intertextual representation” (Denzin and Lincoln 2000, 23-4).

How is one to navigate such an uneven landscape without stumbling? Several authors offer broad guidelines in the form of key characteristics or common commitments of qualitative research. These include the focus on understanding meanings people have constructed about their world and their experiences (Merriam et al. 2002, 4-5); the notion that meaning cannot be understood through approaches based on logical empiricism/positivism (Schwandt 2000, 201); the idea that the world of human experience must be studied from the perspective of a historically and culturally situated individual, complete with acknowledged subjectivities (Denzin 2004, 467; Merriam et al. 2002, 5); the conviction that qualitative researchers should work outward from their own biographies to the worlds of experience that surround them (Denzin 2004, 467) through inductive processes (Merriam et al. 2002, 5); and the faith that scholars will increasingly value and seek to produce works that speak clearly and powerfully about those worlds” (Denzin 2004, 467) through richly descriptive language (Merriam et al. 2002, 5).

4.1.3.1 New qualitative research approaches and methods

Denzin and Lincoln write about a *multi-method* qualitative research approach which seeks in-depth understanding, and which “adds rigor, breadth, complexity, richness and depth to any inquiry” (Denzin and Lincoln 2000, 5). One of the methods widely used among researchers taking this approach is *reflexivity*, which can be understood as simply “writing self into the text” (Berg and Mansvelt 2000, 173), or as “Self-critical introspection and a self-conscious scrutiny of oneself as a researcher” (Hay 2000, 195).

Or it can be elaborated on as

a conscious experiencing of the self as both inquirer and respondent, as teacher and learner, as the one coming to know the self within the processes of research itself. Reflexivity forces us to come to terms not only with our choice of research problem and with those with whom we engage in the research process, but with our selves and with the multiple identities that represent the fluid self in the research setting (Lincoln and Guba 2000, 183).

Gergen and Gergen add that reflexive investigators

seek ways of demonstrating to their audiences their historical and geographic situatedness, their personal investments in the research, various biases they bring to the work, their surprises and ‘undoings’ in the process of

the research endeavor, the ways in which their choices of literary tropes lend rhetorical force to the research report, and/or the ways in which they have avoided or suppressed certain points of view. ... In all these reflexive moves, the investigator relinquishes the 'Gods-eye view' and reveals his or her work as historically, culturally, and personally situated (Gergen and Gergen 2000, 1027-28).

Geographers are concurring with the significance of the investigator's self. Cloke et al. assert that the presence of the creative and reflexive researcher "who is not erased as a non-issue ... or cloaked behind a veil of claimed objectivity" is as important to human geographical inquiry as theories, data and methods (Cloke et al. 2004, 24). Pamela Moss, in the context of autobiographical geographical writing, points out benefits of a reflexive approach, including the capacity for reflecting on where the researcher is situated in the web of society's power relations, and for using the related positioning as a mediating relation for interpreting research results (Moss 2001, 15). Katy Bennett and Pamela Shurmer-Smith add that readers need to know the researcher's position, where he or she is coming from, and how information was gathered, stressing that this sort of information is becoming an essential part of contemporary research texts (Bennett and Shurmer-Smith 2002, 213).

Only with many stories will we get a good picture, since we each can speak only of our own experience, and often we do this timidly, afraid of the outside world's tendency to deny us.

(Krieger 1991, 166)

As essential as it is to acknowledge the researcher's self, it is also important to open the door to other voices. Known variously as *polyvocality*, *multiple voicing*, or *polyphony of voices*, this qualitative research strategy contributes to undermining the myth of mimesis (Duncan and Ley 1993, 8) and overturning the dominance of the single omniscient voice (Gergen and Gergen 2000, 1028; Hay 2000, 191). The inclusion of other voices serves, in fact, to revitalize the voice of the single author and to offer a rich diversity of perspectives and interpretations (Gergen and Gergen 2000, 1028), thereby adding depth to the understanding of the subject matter. Geographer Susan Smith points out that interest has expanded beyond what landscapes, scenes and events represent to how they represent different things to different people, and to why not all viewpoints are represented. She writes, "Hence the transition from single

authorial interpretations to dialogism and polyphony, from one person interpreting a text to lots of people talking about it, and creating ever more texts and representations” (Smith 2001, 30) in an ongoing round of interpretation and (re)presentation.

New qualitative texts and representations are also become increasingly ‘thick’ in their description.

Thick description is an expression coined by anthropologist Clifford Geertz to signify descriptions which are “rich in detail, observation and description ... as opposed to the ‘thin’ variety associated with numbers, and aggregate summaries” (Robinson 1998, 421). Thick description characteristically takes the reader “to the centre of an experience, event or action, providing an in-depth study of the context and the reasons, intentions, understandings and motivations that surround that experience or occurrence” (Berg and Mansvelt 2000, 177), thereby doing more than recording what a person is doing:

It goes beyond mere fact and surface appearances. It presents detail, context, emotion, and the webs of social relationships that join persons to one another. Thick description evokes emotionality and self-feelings. It inserts history into experience. It establishes the significance of the experience, or the sequence of events, for the person or persons in question. In thick description, the voices, feelings, actions, and meanings of interacting individuals are heard (Denzin, quoted in Patton 2002, 503).

Patton goes so far as to assert that qualitative analysis is rooted in thick description, which makes interpretation possible by providing enough description for the reader to understand the basis for interpretation, and enough interpretation for the reader to appreciate the description (Patton 2002, 503).

Thick description, along with a number of other writing methods or techniques, is an important aspect of what has been called *evocative representation* (Richardson 2000, 931) or “evocative forms of inquiry” (Patton 2002, 84), meaning writing which uses literary devices such as poetry and dialogue to re-evolve emotional responses (Richardson 2000, 931), meanings and understandings (Bennett and Shurmer-Smith 2001, 255). Poetry is one evocative element which geographers have been including in their writings. Bennett and Shurmer-Smith, for example, incorporate poem excerpts into “Representation of research: creating a text” (Bennett and Shurmer-Smith 2002, 211-221), a chapter of *Doing Cultural Geography*.

Gunnar Olsson inserts excerpts from poetry and music lyrics, another form of poetry, into his autobiographical piece, “Glimpses” (Olsson 2002, 237-268), in *Geographical Voices*. A recent collection of writings about literature and geography includes a chapter by Jean Morisset, in which the author incorporates poems written by others and himself, as well as an evocative passage about poetry,

que le parcours géopoétique prend plaisir à humer, à courtiser, à débusquer par quelque voie, quelque piste restant sans cesse à découvrir, afin de lire l'écriture, toute l'écriture de la planète avec l'instrument du corps, tout le corps. Faut-il parler alors de déambulation entre les racines de l'air et la chevelure des vieux socles géologiques de la planète, là où circuleraient toujours rêve, invocation, raison et inspiration, dans un heureux mariage, ayant toujours fait frémir les monastères de l'utopie? (Morisset 2003, 97-98).

Effective poetry, anthropologist Ivan Brady writes, “stirs something up in you – an emotion or passion that reaches beyond the shallow, that gravitates to deeper experiences and the sublime” (Brady 2000, 958). Marc Brosseau points out that evocative forms of writing can help to “mieux servir ce que l'on cherche à communiquer” (Brosseau 1997, 296).

Despite these and other creative innovations, Bennett writes in one of her letters to Shurmer-Smith that she doesn't know many geographers who have attempted experimental writing (Bennett and Shurmer-Smith 2001, 256), naming two individuals, Gunnar Olsson and Allan Pred as most often cited in references to more experimental re-presentation. Alan Latham, writing two years later, points out that “There are human geographers doing methodologically innovative research which is pushing at the boundaries of established convention” and creating “innovative, insightful methodological hybrids”, listing Linda McDowell, Gerry Pratt and Allan Pred as examples (Latham 2003, 1993). Yet later in the same article, he states that the calls for new ways of writing coming out of the cultural turn have had only a marginal impact on the way geographers write (Latham 2003, 2007). Seeming contradictions such as these stem, perhaps, from the fact that new qualitative inquiry approaches are relatively new to geography, and that their multi-theme, multivocal, multifaceted and multi-just-about-anything-else nature is difficult to grasp.

I would add the observation that geographers are missing as contributors from the recent interdisciplinary collections of works on qualitative research I consulted. Among contributors to those works are psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, communications scholars and education researchers ... but no voice speaking from a geographical perspective, with its unique environmental and spatial insights. That said, recent collections of work on qualitative research within human geography or human geography research in general (e.g. Hay 2000, Kitchin and Tate 2000, Limb and Dwyer 2001, Hoggart et al. 2002, Cloke et al. 2004), include content related to new qualitative research approaches. Perhaps work by geographers will, in the future, begin to appear in general collections about qualitative research as well.

4.2 Understanding through metaphor

Metaphor, a literary device, is the backbone of social science writing. Like the spine, it bears weight, permits movement, is buried beneath the surface, and links parts together into a functional, coherent whole. As this metaphor about metaphor suggests, the essence of metaphor is experiencing and understanding one thing in terms of another.

(Richardson 2000, 926)

One creative approach geographers have traditionally taken is the use of metaphor to communicate geographical knowledge. Metaphor is, in fact, a common and powerful communication device throughout social science discourse. It is described as a *powerful tool* for making something intelligible to an audience by equating it with something else (Cloke et al. 2004, 360); as having at its essence the *experiencing* and *understanding* of one thing in terms of another (Richardson 2000, 926); as exemplifying *creative thought*, the power to see similarities and connections among things that are different (Tuan 1978, 198); as *persuasive* by showing us that things we thought were beyond our grasp, and therefore unsettling, are actually very like other things we know well (Barnes and Duncan 1992, 11); as an important way of *communicating meaning* (Aitken 1997, 206); as touching a *deeper level of*

understanding than ‘model’ or ‘theory’; as pointing to the very process of *learning* and *discovery*; as rallying the *imagination*, *emotion*, and *intellect*; as unlocking a *treasure of insight* (Buttimer 1993, 78). Powerful, creative, persuasive, valuable ... communicating meaning based on experience, understanding and a deep level of learning, discovery and insight ... engaging the imagination, emotion and intellect – no wonder metaphor is used so widely, in so many different ways, to great effect.

4.2.1 *Metaphor and geography*

Geographical language, writes Buttimer, “is thoroughly metaphorical”:

The sur-‘face’ of the earth has been described in terms of eyes, nose, mouth, cheek and profile; it has been named and claimed with terms derived from human anatomy and society. Regions and hamlets have been likened to organisms; roadways and canals, to arteries of circulation. Industrial complexes have been described in terms of mechanical processes steered by growth poles as generators of economic development. Place names, too, whether real or imaginary, such as El Dorado, Mecca, Waterloo, and Eden, symbolize particular kinds of experience.... Many geographical terms, such as *drumlin*, *arrête*, *kame*, *cirque*, and *chaparral*, were derived from particular localities and everyday experience (Buttimer 1993, 77).

What attracts the geographer to metaphor, she adds, is its capacity to “facilitate better understanding of the human experience of world, and culturally diverse perceptions of nature, space, time, and social life” (Buttimer 1993, 77-79). Metaphors also take “new angles on the world”, in the words of Barnes and Duncan (Buttimer 1992, 11), as illustrated by the following examples of geography-related garden metaphors.

In the context of musings on social science theory, Y.Y. Papageorgiu, for instance, uses the metaphor of a Zen dry garden, with features arranged so that not all are visible at once, to explore concepts of divergence and convergence, comprehensiveness and pluralism, within the discipline of geography (Papageorgiu, 1982). John Allen examines the metaphors of the great plains as either a garden, symbolic of the geography of hope, or a desert, symbolic of the geography of reality, in his historical exploration of competing views of the great plains in the 19th century (Allen, 1985). K. Williams, in his examination of

the metaphorical expression, in a play with four acts, of sense of place in terms of gender and geography, includes considerations of the garden as a metaphor for home (Williams, 2001).

A metaphor being increasingly used in geographical inquiry is one of research as dialogue, a demonstration of which is a recent article published as an interdisciplinary “dialogue épistolaire sur les rencontres de la géographie et de la littérature” by geographer Marc Brosseau and literary scholar Micheline Cambron (Brosseau and Cambron 2003, 526). David Demeritt and Sarah Dyer point out that geographical research as metaphorical dialogue goes beyond literal dialogue with research subjects to embrace ideas such as dialogue between a researcher’s preconceptions of the object of study and the way in which it actually appears following further examination. They add that the dialogue metaphor

suggests that research is not a self-evident process of passive observation and subsequent mimetic representation of pre-existing objects; instead research is active and involves a form of interpersonal communication, either with oneself and one’s preconceptions or with one’s object of study, in which the researcher and her preconceptions are necessarily present in and have effects upon the resulting representations.... To this way of thinking, dialogue is not simply one research technique among many but fundamental to the process of interpretation that lies at the heart of all research. Far from invalidating interpretation as a potential source of bias ... the active involvement of the researcher becomes the pre-condition for any valid understanding, which is imagined here as the outcome of an ongoing interpretive engagement or dialogue with an object of study (Demeritt and Dyer 2002, 234).

The notion of an ongoing interpretive engagement of dialogue with an object of study brings me full circle to the beginning of the chapter, where I wrote of exploring contemporary personal gardening literature for geographical meaning. The following section outlines my interpretive approach in light of new, postmodern qualitative research approaches and geographical metaphors.

4.3 A geometaphorical interpretation

My geographical interpretation of the personal gardening literature selected for study is grounded in the three metaphors – cosmos/microcosm, landscape, cosmos – inspired by my reading of Tuan’s *Topophilia*, as described in Chapter 2. The *garden as microcosm*, *garden as landscape*, and *garden as*

place metaphors are reminiscent of work such as sociologist Peter Langer's four metaphors for the city, representing the most important images of the city found in sociological research since the 19th century: (1) the *city as bazaar*, a "place of astonishing richness of activity and diversity ... a place of almost infinite exploration and opportunity, a center of exchange"; (2) the *city as jungle*, a "densely packed, intricately intertwined, potentially dangerous place" where diverse species "crowd each other, search for their own place in the sun, and battle each other for room to develop and reproduce"²; (3) the *city as organism*, which sees "the diversity of the city as a system of specialized organs functioning for the common good of the corporate body" with each part having an important and beneficial role to play; and (4) the *city as machine*, which views the city's complex parts as functioning as smoothly as a machine, as smoothly as the organism, in fact, but with a focus on the advantages to some instead of benefit to the whole organism (Langer 1984).

A broad exploration of the geographical meanings of personal gardens not yet having been conducted by geographers, I have had no traditional metaphors to draw from, as Langer did. I have, therefore, selected three geographical metaphors, or "geometaphors", for understanding the nature of the garden – metaphors which cover as wide a geographical spectrum as possible. Cosmos/microcosm, landscape and place represent three different scales of geographical consideration, endeavour and consequence, with their associated characteristics and intricacies, as such allowing for a wide range of interpretive potential. These three metaphors offer appropriate and meaningful links from the personal garden to relevant human geography concepts, as well as to applicable aspects of general physical geography knowledge. I foresee that elements of these metaphors will overlap – inevitable considering the holistic and organic nature of the garden space – with the resulting interconnections providing additional interpretive possibility.

4.3.1 Geometaphorical interpretive framework

My interpretative framework is a geometaphorical net woven from (1) characteristics connected with the geometaphors, and (2) concepts related to humanistic geography. The interpretation itself will involve these two elements in metaphorical dialogue (a) with each other, (b) with the personal gardening books selected for study, as outlined in the following frames, and (c) with myself, the reader and interpreter of the books, and the author of the study.

FIGURE 1 – Geometaphorical frame: COSMOS

COSMOS	DOMINANT HUMANISTIC GEOGRAPHY CONCEPTS	METAPHORIC DIALOGUE REVOLVING AROUND
Garden as • microcosm	• awareness • consciousness	Awareness and consciousness of • natural processes affecting the personal garden • greater human activities impacting the personal garden • the garden as a mini-world reflecting the greater whole

FIGURE 2 – Geometaphorical frame: LANDSCAPE

LANDSCAPE	DOMINANT HUMANISTIC GEOGRAPHY CONCEPTS	METAPHORIC DIALOGUE REVOLVING AROUND
Garden as • visual construct • non-human landscape • cultural landscape	• agency • intentionality • creativity	Agency, intentionality, creativity based on • the garden as a visually perceived construct – a scene to be viewed • the garden as a cultural landscape designed and managed by the gardener • the garden as a nonhuman landscape • the garden as an interface between the natural and the cultural

FIGURE 3 – Geometaphorical frame: PLACE

PLACE	DOMINANT HUMANISTIC GEOGRAPHY CONCEPTS	METAPHORIC DIALOGUE REVOLVING AROUND
Garden as • locale / setting • “sense of place”	• subjectivity • meaning • sense of place	Subjectivity, meaning, and sense of place based on • the garden as a setting for action and interaction (both human-human, and human-nonhuman) • personal meaning and sense of place in the garden space – identity, memory, attachment, responsibility, attitudes, values, beliefs, etc.

4.3.2 *The personal garden as a microcosm*

The garden as a *microcosm* is a relatively abstract, intellectual dimension which places the personal garden in a general human and physical geography context. This metaphor allows for a broad, philosophical perspective on the geography of the personal gardens as reflecting the greater human and non-human whole.

4.3.2.1 Geography and the cosmos

Geography has roots in the study of the universe and the whole earth – from the calculations of earthly dimensions and the creation of world maps by the Greeks and Romans, to the travels of European explorers, and to the earth-describing work of two of the discipline of geography’s founders, Alexander von Humboldt and Carl Ritter (Claval 2001a, Holt-Jensen 1999). Von Humboldt was, in fact, regarded by some as more of a cosmographer than a geographer (Penck, referenced in Holt-Jensen 1999, 25), cosmography being “the descriptive science of the globe and its relation to the universe” (Holt-Jensen 1999, 21) and incorporating cartography, geography, biology, geophysics and anthropology (Holt-Jensen 1999, 217). Von Humboldt’s best-known work, an ambitious tome published in five volumes, is

appropriately titled *Kosmos* (German), or *Cosmos* (English).

Cosmography has, since those early days, fallen generally out of favour in geographical research – it does not even appear as an entry in *The Dictionary of Human Geography* – yet the concept may attract attention again in the context of globalisation. In the meantime, it appears now and again in contemporary geographical work, sometimes as an indirect reference only, sometimes, to distinguish it from *cosmology*, which is more of a philosophy or belief about the world and the universe.

Jean Morisset, for example, in his lyrical and evocative description/definition of geography, writes of its roots in a grandiose

mémoire *cosmique* [my emphasis] à jamais fondue dans l'archéologie de l'infini ... de la dérive des continents, celle des grandes mouvances migratrices en marge des isostasies postglaciaires, celle de la Béringie, de la Laurasie, de la Patagonie, de la Transe Pacifique ... ou tout simplement, celle du message de la mousse sur la pierre (Morisset 2003, 95).

This “cosmic memory” inspired and sparked by natural events great and small, as well as by greater cosmic reality, rhythm and mythology, is also evoked by Paul Claval in one of his descriptions of the spaces of cultural geography:

L'espace dans lequel évoluent les hommes, tout aussi réel qu'il soit, est pensé à travers les catégories imaginée par les groupes. Il n'est pas le cadre géométrique de la géographie mathématique, mais lie les axes d'orientation au relief, privilégie les littoraux, les alignements de montagnes ou les grandes vallées. Il privilégie les localisations centrales, parce que c'est par elle que passe l'axe du monde, celui qui permet de gagner le ciel ou les domaines souterrains où résident les dieux et les puissances maléfiques. La conception de l'espace est intimement liée au rythme des saisons, ce qui conduit à privilégier les directions du lever et du coucher du soleil à l'équinoxe, et la hauteur du soleil aux solstices (Claval 1997b, 127-8).

In a recent examination of Hindu geographical thought, Rana Singh looks at cosmic belief revolving around the harmonious integrity of humanity, nature and space. The study includes a review of the organic and cosmic elements of nature – water, air, fire, earth and sky – and looks at humanity and the cosmic mandala, where the human body is viewed as the cosmos, with the head representing heaven, the naval the atmosphere, and the feet the earth (Singh, 1999). Yi-Fu Tuan also writes about cosmic belief. In *Topophilia*, he discusses cosmological schemata bringing human and nonhuman worlds into a coherent

system (Tuan 1974, 18-24), cosmological world views of the ancients reflecting their environments and reflected in their structures (Tuan 1974, 81-91), cities as symbols of the cosmos (Tuan 1974, 153-172), and the transformation from belief systems founded on vertical, stratified cosmologies and cyclical perspectives of time, to a world view based on a flat segment of land, or landscape (Tuan 1974, 129-132). In *Space and Place* (1977) Tuan addresses microcosmic theory in relation to mythical space and place. In response to the question “How is the human being related to the earth and the cosmos?” Tuan explores two schemata widely known in scattered parts of the world. The first, without going into detail, views the human body as an image of the cosmos – an echo of the cosmic mandala described by Singh – while the second perceives human beings as the centre of a cosmic framework oriented along the vertical axis and the cardinal points. Both these schemata, he points out, result from a desire for a sense of security in the universe (Tuan 1977, 88-100); their symbolism has been powerful through time.

Cosmic belief also informs Mike Crang’s description of the housing of the Kabyle people of Algeria studied by Bourdieu as symbolic of that culture’s view of the order and shape of the world and universe (Crang 1998, 29-30), and his portrayal of the ancient Chinese summer palace of Chengde as a landscape purposefully shaped to reflect visions of the cosmos and to write power on the land (Crang 1998, 36-7). Both of these spaces are microcosms, or mini-worlds, reflecting the wider world and heavens. Yet microcosms as mini-worlds need not necessarily reflect cosmic beliefs, as these examples suggest. Microcosms can be simply spaces which reflect, and are connected to, the greater world outside the boundaries of their specific spaces – mini-environments of sorts.

4.3.2.2 Microcosm and the personal garden

Since geography as a discipline does not offer any particular framework for studies of places as microcosms, I am pleased to find the writings of certain geographers paralleling cosmos-related points in my interpretive framework. The personal garden as a microcosm *affected by natural processes*, for example, echoes Rana Singh's review of the organic and cosmic elements of nature, Claval's reference to topography and seasons, and Jean Morriset's lyrical description of geography as rooted in a cosmic memory of greater natural processes and smaller, symbolic natural elements. The personal garden as a microcosm *impacted by greater human activities* is not connected directly to any geographer's cosmos-related writing, yet could be suggested in the schemata Tuan describes of human relations to the cosmos – in particular the one which perceives human beings as the centre of a cosmic framework, a position from which they would, conceivably, have an impact on the greater world. And the personal garden as a *mini-world reflecting the greater whole* connects to descriptions by Crang and Tuan of structures created by people around the world to reflect the wider world and heavens, though this reflection is not a necessary element of the garden as a microcosm, and one which does not come through strongly in the literature selected for study.

4.3.3 The personal garden as a landscape

The garden as a *landscape* is an intermediate dimension between the abstract *cosmos* and the concrete, particular *place*. The landscape metaphor includes ideas of the garden as a visual entity; as a non-human landscape affected by natural processes and supporting various life forms; and as a cultural landscape imagined, designed, created and managed through human effort by a gardener and/or garden helpers. This metaphor enables a view of the gardens in the books through an abstract visual lens, and allows for

them to be considered as interfaces between the human and non-human, between the cultural and the ecological, between human design and natural processes.

4.3.3.1 Geography and landscape

Any landscape is so dense with evidence and so complex and cryptic that we can never be assured that we have read it all or read it aright. The landscape lies all around us, ever accessible and inexhaustible. Anyone can look, but we all need help to see that it is at once a panorama, a composition, a palimpsest, a microcosm; that in every prospect there can be more and more that meets the eye.

(Meinig 1979b, 6)

The preceding quote effectively suggests the intricacy of the concept of landscape, and implies the difficulty, even impossibility, of defining it in any definitive manner. Even description is difficult considering the long and complex history of the concept. Edward Relph writes that “in its four-hundred year history the idea of landscape has taken on many meanings but left few behind, so that while there is some continuity in its sense it has acquired a cumbersome baggage of artistic, popular, technical and academic associations”; he adds that the overlap and interpenetration of the many ideas of landscape leave little wonder at the ambiguity of the term (Relph 1981, 58). Douglas Porteous points out that “The literature of landscape is enormous, and cannot be summarized here” (Porteous 1990, 3).

To complicate matters even more, the word “landscape” is used very loosely today, as in political landscapes, landscapes of dreams, landscapes of the heart, and landscapes of thought (Porteous 1990, Jackson 1996). The suffix ‘scape’ is, furthermore, being attached to “a whole pack of disparate nouns” (Porteous 1990, 4) “as if the syllable *scape* meant a space, which it does not” (Jackson 1996, 318), resulting in words such as townscape, seascape, roadscape, cityscape, dreamscape (Porteous 1990, Jackson 1996), which add to the ambivalence of the landscape concept.

One apparent area of consensus for geographers regarding landscape is the difficulty of definition. The concept of landscape has been portrayed most often in terms of *ambiguity* (Relph 1981, Cosgrove

1984, Barnes and Duncan 1992, Rowntree 1996) and *imprecision* (Cosgrove 1984, Larkin and Peters 1983, Relph 1976b). It has also been described with reference to *confusion* (Norton 2000), *elusiveness* (Tuan 1979), *complexity* (Robertson and Richards 2003), *debate* (Duncan 2000a) and *disagreement* (Relph 1981, Larkin and Peters 1983). On the more positive side, it has been characterised as *nuanced* (Muir 1999) and *polysemic* (Robertson and Richards 2003, Duncan 2000a, Muir 1999, Rowntree 1996, Relph 1981).

Donald Meinig, in his introduction to *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes* (1979), takes the somewhat contrary, yet effective, approach of pointing out what landscape is *not*. He stresses, for example, that (1) landscape is related to *nature*, but not identical to it because virtually all landscapes have felt the impact of humans and therefore include both nature and culture; that (2) landscape is a scene, but not exactly *scenery* because landscape embraces more than just the aesthetic; that (3) landscape is connected with, but not the same as *environment*, because landscape, detached from our organic being, displays us as cultures, while environment sustains us as living beings; that (4) landscape is interrelated with, but different from, *place* (a concept with ambiguities of its own, as discussed later in this chapter), some essential distinctions being that landscape is a continuous surface and place a point or locality, that landscape is a public concept and place a more private notion, that place is experiential in a way landscape cannot be, and that landscape tends to be more external and objective, less individual and discrete than place and our personal sense of it; and (5) that landscape, as a portion of the planet's surface, is related to, but not the equivalent of *region*, *area*, or *geography* (Meinig 1979a, 2-4).

Geographers have also offered simple definitions of landscape through the years. Carl O. Sauer, for example – credited with introducing the concept of landscape into North America – wrote, in his groundbreaking *The Morphology of Landscape* (first published in 1925) that landscape is “a land shape, in

which the process of shaping is by no means thought of as simply physical. It may be defined, therefore, as an area made up of a distinct association of forms, both physical and cultural” (Sauer 1929, 26). More recent brief definitions echo and build on Sauer’s. In *Qualitative Research Methods in Human Geography* (2000), Iain Hay, for example writes in the ‘landscape’ entry of the glossary, that “Landscape is used broadly to mean a built, cultural or physical environment (and even human body) which can be ‘read’ and interpreted” (Hay 2000, 190). James Duncan, in the first sentence of the *Dictionary of Human Geography* (2000) ‘landscape’ entry, writes that landscape is “A polysemic term referring to the appearance of an area, the assemblage of objects used to produce that appearance, and the area itself” (Duncan 2000a, 429).

These definitions, considered together along with Meinigs’s description of what landscape is *not*, cover most of the landscape-related points in my interpretive framework: (1) the garden as a visually perceived construct, a scene to be viewed (“appearance”, “scene”); (2) the garden as a cultural landscape designed and managed by the gardener (“shaping”, “cultural and built environment”, “cultural forms”, “impact of humans”); (3) the garden as a nonhuman landscape (“physical environment”, “physical form”, “nature”); (4) the garden as an interface between the natural and the cultural (where the “association of forms, both physical and cultural” occurs, where these forms are “shaped”).

Why is it, I wonder, that we have trouble agreeing on the meaning of landscape? The word is simple enough, and it refers to something which we think we understand; and yet to each of us it seems to mean something different.

(Jackson 1996, 316)

Landscape and vision

The visual aspect of landscape is reflected in the common and often-quoted, yet old, definition of landscape as a portion of land which the eye can comprehend at a glance (Morin 2003, 320; Duncan 2000a, 429; Jackson 1996, 316; Goodall 1987, 262). Douglas Porteous makes the interesting point that

landscape – be it the physical space or a visual representation of it – does not exist without an observer. “Mentally or physically”, he writes, “we frame the view, and our appreciation depends on our frame of mind (Porteous 1990, 4). That visual appreciation is essentially aesthetic; landscape in this sense is a scene, as Meinig points out.

Landscape and culture

Mike Crang, in a description of the meaning of landscape and the role it plays in cultural geography, makes the point that

Landscape above all implies a collective shaping of the earth over time. Landscapes are not individual property; they reflect a society's – a culture's – beliefs, practices and technologies. Landscapes reflect the coming together of all these elements just as cultures do, since cultures are also not individual property and can only exist socially. Much research has looked at how the landscape shapes and is shaped by that particular social organisation (Crang 1998, 14-15).

This description of landscape effectively conveys the notion of “cultural landscape”, defined by Carl Sauer, who is recognised as the founder of cultural geography in North America, as follows:

The cultural landscape is fashioned out of a natural landscape by a culture group. Culture is the agent, the natural area is the medium, the cultural landscape the result. Under the influence of a given culture, itself changing through time, the landscape undergoes development, passing through phases, and probably reaching ultimately the end of its cycle of development. With the introduction of a different, that is, alien culture, a rejuvenation of the cultural landscape sets in, or a new landscape is superimposed on remnants of an older one. The natural landscape is of course of fundamental importance, for it supplies the materials out of which the cultural landscape is formed. The shaping force, however, lies in the culture itself (Sauer 1929, 46).

This definition conveys a few key points regarding cultural landscapes: (1) human cultures interact with the physical environment; (2) the interaction has an impact on the physical environment; (3) the interaction and impact are ongoing, with landscapes changing as a result. Sauer adds, regarding the studies which grew out of this definition, that they were concerned with both the importance of the physical environment to humans, and its transformation (Sauer 1929, 53).

Another influential figure in the evolution of landscape studies in North America was John Brinckerhoff Jackson. A Harvard graduate of history and literature, Jackson was a self-professed lay

geographer (Norton 2000, 99) who founded, and over a period of seventeen years, financed, published, edited, and contributed much material to the magazine *Landscape* (Norton 2000, 101). One of Jackson's most important contributions to landscape study was his focus on the vernacular American landscape (Duncan 2000a, 430), and on understanding how ordinary people shape their lived-in surroundings (Rowntree 1996, 135) in settings where they live and struggle to earn their livings (Muir 2000, 22). Jackson, like Sauer, also stressed that landscapes are in constant evolution, with no such thing as a fixed or finished landscape (Norton 2000, 101).

While Sauer's definition and vision of landscape have been criticised by many contemporary geographers (Robertson and Richards 2003, 2; Demeritt 1994, 167; Cosgrove and Jackson, quoted in Demeritt 1994, 167;), it is still referred to by many, including William Norton who, in the "Landscape, identity, symbol" chapter of his recent book on cultural geography, points out that the original Sauerian interest has been both modified and complemented by additional concerns, including the development of new understandings of landscape through metaphors such as landscape as text, as outcome of discourse, as theatre, spectacle, and carnival, as well as the acknowledgement of the important role played by social power relations in relation to landscape (Norton 2000, 288). David Demeritt adds metaphors of landscape as icon or way of seeing – all contributing to the inclination of human geographers to "set aside the hiking boots preferred by Sauer for the patent leather shoes more appropriate for fieldwork in the cafés and art museums now of empirical interest to cultural geographers" (Cosgrove and Daniels, quoted in Demeritt 1994, 167), thereby drawing attention to the primacy of the urban environment in contemporary cultural geography research.

"Reading" new meanings from landscape has been an important development in cultural geography (Norton 2000, 295) since the 1980s and early 1990s when many cultural geographers, influenced by the

cultural turn in geography, became increasingly concerned with socio-cultural and political landscape-shaping forces, and with landscape's role in those socio-cultural and political processes (Duncan 2000a, 430). Much current landscape analysis in relation to social theory revolves around a triad of phenomena: social structure and ideologies, the creation of landscapes as a reflection of those ideologies, and the development of discourses, systems of language, and written works which contribute to producing, representing and interpreting those landscapes (Morin 2003, 325). During the 1990s, landscape was increasingly studied in relation to politics, feminism, and marxism (Morin 2003, 326-331; Duncan 2000a, 430-431), and to cultural production and cultural process (Robertson and Richards 2003, 2-8).

But not all geographers have taken those directions. Some are expressing concern that the recent stresses on representational aspects of cultural landscape may lead to the disappearance of the functional role of the environment (Forbes 2000, 140), and of landscape's more substantive aspects – of “its materialities and roots in the lifeworlds of communities whose local attachments and territorialities are regularly expressed in activities and rituals and given distinct expression” (Cosgrove 2000a, 140).

'Landscape' is a basic organizing concept in Anglophone cultural geography.

(Morin 2003, 319)

Landscape and the physical environment

To start to make sense of the historical geography of landscape as an idea is to take a significant step towards an understanding of the development of physical geography in its entirety.

(Spedding 2003, 299)

One of the substantive aspects of landscape is its physical forms and processes, which play functional and essential environmental roles – a fact physical geographers have always been aware of, as are certain human geographers. Paul Claval, for example, in tracing the evolution of the concept of landscape through history, incorporates elements of the non-human landscape, elements which were particularly important at certain points in time. It was through landscapes, he writes, that nature manifested itself to

those who read it from a naturalistic perspective in the 18th century, with geographers of the time appreciating landscape because it revealed the profound harmony of life. Later periods linked meteorological phenomena, vegetation and ecology to landscape (Claval 1997a, 95-112). Carl Sauer's work on the interaction between human culture and the physical environment fits into the history of geography at a time when non-human elements were still important to all aspects of the discipline. Yet with the march of time, non-human elements quietly faded from the scene of landscape study.

Recently, however, non-human aspects of landscape have reappeared in work by human geographers who are addressing, for example, human modification of the physical landscape in the context of contemporary agriculture, energy acquisition, and industrialisation (Atkins et al. 1998, 165-196); as well as major changes in material relations between humans and the landscape in the context of hunting and gathering, preindustrial agriculture, industrialisation, the post-industrial world, and technology (Simmons 2003, 305-317). Environmental scientist Lesley Head, working in the physical sciences, tackles related topics in *Cultural Landscapes and Environmental Change* (2000), where she addresses environmental change in the context of cultural landscapes, cultural attitudes toward the environment, and management of the environment.

Physical geographer Nick Spedding traces the evolution and significance of the landscape concept within physical geography inquiry. He starts with a description of landscape from the perspective of the physical sciences – “Physical geography primarily studies the ‘natural’ elements of the landscape: landforms, soils, vegetation cover, animal life and the visible aspects of weather and climate” – then goes on to outline two key points of argument regarding the use of landscape as a theoretical tool: (1) the *holistic* perspective which views landscape as an assemblage of parts and places special importance on how the parts relate to one another; and (2) the opposite view which rejects the importance of relations,

insisting instead that it is preferable to study individual forms in isolation.

Spedding also writes that landscapes are large, complex systems that change over time as different biophysical processes act within and upon them, and that our mental representations we have of the landscapes also change. Landscape studies within physical geography experienced a revival within physical geography in the 1990s, he points out, with the environmental and conservation movements acting as catalysts for a new type of landscape study for physical geographers. “The study of landscape and environment”, he writes as a sort of conclusion, “even for physical geography, is increasingly not just a problem of natural processes. It must grapple with cultural, ethical and political considerations too” (Spedding 2003, 281-303).

4.3.3.2 Landscape and the personal garden

The recent developments in geographical landscape studies which focus primarily on urban settings; which are informed by social, cultural and literary theory; and which tend to overlook nonhuman aspects of the environment, are not, therefore, particularly applicable to this exploratory study seeking the broad, geographical inclusive meanings of the personal garden. More appropriate are the older, and no less relevant despite their maturity, perspectives that consider both human and nonhuman aspects of the landscape.

Carl O. Sauer’s notion of landscape as an association of physical and cultural forms, and of ongoing interaction between human culture and the physical environment – both the case in the personal garden – is pertinent. So is Jackson’s focus on ordinary landscapes – personal gardens being so ordinary that they have largely escaped serious geographical study – and his emphasis on landscape as a *unity* of community and environment, of human and non-human, of city and countryside (Meinig 1979c, 228-229; Cosgrove 1984, 35). Pierce Lewis, in his seven axioms for reading the American landscape, points out that cultural

landscapes make the most sense when they are studied within their geographic context, and that the understanding of cultural landscapes, most being intimately linked to the physical environment, necessitates some basic knowledge of the physical landscape (Lewis 1979, 24-26) – which the gardener-writers under study demonstrate awareness of. Donald Meinig in his ten-part, metaphorical view of landscape, includes both the nonhuman and human elements: landscape as nature, landscape as habitat, landscape as artifact, landscape as system, landscape as problem, landscape as wealth, landscape as ideology, landscape as history, landscape as place, landscape as aesthetic (Meinig, 1979b) – many of which are addressed in this study. These then, are the main intellectual threads which, along with certain relevant elements of more recent cultural landscape study, weave through the landscape chapters of the study – both this chapter, with its cultural focus, and the following chapters, with their focus on both human and nonhuman elements of the personal garden.

4.3.4 *The personal garden as a place*

Cultural, ethical and political considerations are elements of the conceptualisation of the garden as a *place* – a metaphor which offers a specific, individual dimension, and casts a down-to-earth, personal and intimate light on the gardens portrayed in the books.

4.3.4.1 Geography and place

... places are both concrete and symbolic. They are literally and metaphorically made up: of buildings, field systems, roads and railways as well as of myths and legends, statues and ceremonies that link people to a place.

(McDowell 1997, 2)

There are many dimensions to meanings ascribed to place: symbolic, emotional, cultural, political, and biological. People have not only intellectual, imaginary, and symbolic conceptions of place, but also personal and social associations with place-based networks of interaction and affiliation.

(Buttimer 1980, 167)

As the preceding quotes suggest, place, like landscape, is an expansive and complex term and concept.

Like landscape, place is difficult, if not impossible, to define. Noel Castree makes the observation that his *Concise Oxford Dictionary* lists twenty meanings for the term (Castree 2003, 167), while John Agnew and James Duncan note that the *Oxford English Dictionary* devotes over three and one-half pages to 'place' (Agnew and Duncan 1989, 1). David Harvey adds

There are all sorts of words such as milieu, locality, location, locale, neighbourhood, region, territory and the like, which refer to the generic qualities of place. There are other terms such as city, village, town, megalopolis and state, which designate particular kinds of places. There are still others, such as home, hearth, 'turf', community, nation and landscape, which have such strong connotations of place that it would be hard to talk about one without the other. 'Place' also has an extraordinary range of metaphorical meanings. We talk about the place of art in social life, the place of women in society, our place in the cosmos, and we internalize such notions psychologically in terms of knowing our place, or feeling we have a place in the affections of esteem of others. We express norms by putting people, events and things in their proper place and seek to subvert norms by struggling to define a new place from which the oppressed can freely speak. Place has to be one of the most multi-layered and multi-purpose words in our language (Harvey 1993, 4).

Tim Cresswell concurs, pointing out that place is a word which eludes easy definition, one which has been used in many different ways throughout the history of geography as an academic term, and one which is frequently used in everyday life (Cresswell 1999, 226). Doreen Massey adds that place has "entered the English language in phrases such as 'a sense of place', 'no place like home' and – perhaps most tellingly of all – the notion of things being on occasion 'out of place', meaning that they do not fit in with some pre-given coherence of character" (Massey 1995, 46). The frequent use of place, along with its multiple layers and consequent unavoidable disparities, are factors which contribute to what Kenneth Olwig describes as "tension" in the use of the place concept. "On the one hand", he writes, "it can be reduced to mere location and subsumed under the 'geographer's' concept of space. On the other hand, it is not as insubstantial as location because it is also a special ensemble, with a history and meaning, incarnating the experiences and aspirations of a people" (Olwig 2001, 93).

No wonder geographers tend to portray place, additionally, in terms of *complexity* (Castree 2003), *contestation* (Duncan 2000b, Agnew 1993), *difficulty* (Agnew and Duncan 1989a), *intractability* (Smith et al. 1998), *dispute* (Agnew 1993), *suspicion* (Smith et al. 1998), *diversity* (Johnston 1991),

in corrigibility (Smith et al. 1998), and *multiple facets* (Johnston 1991, 253). Philosopher Jeff Malpas laments the lack of investigation of the concept of place itself, calling, in graphic geographical terms, for “a topography of place as such” (Malpas 1998, 21).

According to *The Dictionary of Human Geography* (2000), place is a “portion of geographic space. Space is organized into places often thought of as bounded settings in which social relations and identity are constituted ... Such places may be officially recognized geographical entities or more informally organized sites of intersecting social relations, meanings and collective memory” (Duncan 2000b, 582). R.J. Johnston adds the following three components to the definition of a place: what he terms “the physical environment”, “the built environment”, and “the people” (Johnston 1991, 97). John Agnew states that place is one of geography’s defining elements, in addition to being a “key idea for social science as a whole” (Agnew 1989, 9).

Place – a conceptual framework

Despite the complexities and twists and turns of place meaning within geography, one geographer, John Agnew, managed to come up with a relatively straightforward geographic conceptualisation of place in the 1980s – a conceptual framework of sorts:

1. place as *location* – “a specific point on the earth’s surface” (Castree 2003, 167) where social relations take place (Agnew 1993, 262)
2. place as *locale* – “a setting for activity and social interaction” (Agnew 1993, 262)
3. place as a *sense of place* – “the local ‘structure of feeling’” (Agnew 1993, 262); the “subjective feelings associated with a place” (Cresswell 1999, 226).

This *location / locale / sense of place* conceptualisation is based on meanings which, as Noel Castree writes in 2003, “arguably remain in force today” (Castree 2003, 167), as evidenced by the use made of the

conceptualisation by other geographers, either directly through clear reference to Agnew (Castree 2003, Duncan 2000b, Cresswell 1999), or indirectly as in Arild Holt-Jensen's statement that the identity of place contains three essential elements: "*physical setting, human activity and meaning*" (Holt-Jensen 1999).

Locale is a term and notion proposed by sociologist Anthony Giddens in his development of structuration theory (Painter 2000, 454), and so closely associated with him that the *Dictionary of Human Geography* entry revolves mainly around Giddens' sociological formulations, making only slight reference to the use of the term by geographers. In geographical literature, locale is put forth as the focus of microsociologists and humanistic geographers concerned with place as "the settings for everyday routine social interaction" (Agnew and Duncan 1989, 2), and of other social scientists who "see place as an arena for social relations" (Holt-Jensen 1999, 159). As Agnew puts it, "The reproduction and transformation of social relations must take *place* somewhere" (Agnew 1993, 262).

Sense of place, in terms of "subjective feelings associated with a place" (Cresswell 1999, 226), is probably the most complex of the three place meanings in Agnew's conceptualisation of place. The first sentences in Denis Cosgrove's *The Dictionary of Human Geography* 'sense of place' entry, for example, reads

Originating in studies of the physical characteristics and qualities of geographical locations as appropriated in human experience and imagination, sense of place has increasingly been examined in human geography as an outcome of interconnected psychoanalytic, social and environmental processes, creating and manipulating quite flexible relations with physical space. Geographers have thus examined both the character intrinsic to a place as a localized, bounded and material geographical entity, and the sentiments of attachment and detachment that human beings experience, express and contest in relation to specific places (Cosgrove 2000b, 731).

This passage is an echo of Cosgrove's briefer 'sense of place' entry in the 1994 edition of *The Dictionary of Human Geography*, where he identifies two essential, "distinct and interlocking" characteristics of the sense of place concept. The first, the "character intrinsic to a place itself" (Cosgrove 1994b, 548-9), is

4.4 What the geometaphors reveal

The cosmos, landscape and place geometaphors, along with their varied characteristics, opened windows which, in combination, offered a panoramic view of the personal garden and helped me gain valuable geographical insight into the garden spaces portrayed in the selected personal gardening books. Of these geometaphors, landscape resonates with the most geographical meaning. More than both microcosm and place, it allows for a look at the essential duality at the core of the personal garden: its human nature on the one hand, and its nonhuman nature on the other. The personal garden is, in essence, both a human, cultural landscape and a nonhuman, natural landscape.

This duality, along with other complexities, makes the personal garden difficult to subdivide into its microcosm-, landscape-, and place-related qualities. Components of the personal garden as a microcosm relate closely to aspects of the personal garden as a landscape, and elements of the personal garden as a landscape cannot easily be dissociated from aspects of the personal garden as a place. There is, simply, too much overlap between the metaphors – not surprising, considering the complexity, ambiguity, confusion, diversity, and elusiveness associated with these concepts, particularly landscape and place – for neat subdivision and categorisation.

It would, therefore, I decided, be counterproductive – particularly in light of my “open” interpretation – to force the gardens portrayed in the selected personal gardening literature into the microcosm, landscape and place boxes. It could do them an injustice. It could misrepresent what the writers are saying about their personal gardens. It could result in lost meaning. And so, as instrumental as the geometaphors were in helping me gain insight into the geographical nature of personal gardens, I decided not to let them dominate the dialogue with the personal gardening literature, or the writing of this thesis. The result is a different pattern of geographical meaning – one which flows more naturally than

microcosm-landscape-place, which incorporates key characteristics of those metaphors, and which blends them in the following sequence covered in the chapters to come:

- Chapter 5 – The personal garden as a cultured space
- Chapter 6 – The personal garden as a natural space
- Chapter 7 – The personal garden as an interface between the cultural and the natural.

Chapter notes

- ¹ Source: Cambridge International Dictionary of English at <http://dictionary.cambridge.org>, accessed August 2005
- ² Unfortunately, he leaves out the aspect of mutually beneficial, sometimes symbiotic relationships in habitats such as the jungle.

Chapter 5 The personal garden as a cultured space

The ‘cultured’ and ‘humanised’ aspects of the personal gardens portrayed in the books under study are revealed through the landscape and place metaphors. The *landscape* metaphor shows these gardens to be visual entities; cultural landscapes imagined, designed, shaped and maintained by gardeners through individual creativity, intentionality and agency; and spaces which reflect other cultural meanings. The *place* metaphor reveals the personal gardens to be both social spaces and personal spaces, with the *locale* component of place emphasising the gardens in the books as spaces shared with family, friends, neighbours and the greater community. The *sense of place* element of the place metaphor highlights the intensely personal and intimate aspects of the gardens, with each individual gardener-author developing a unique attachment to the space, and each space carrying particular meaning for the gardener-author.

5.1 The personal garden as a social space

The personal gardens in the books under study are all *locales*, settings for interaction. The books reveal in fact, a wide spectrum of contact possible within the personal garden space – interactions ranging from personal and intimate, to friendly and neighbourly, to professional and economic, among family, friends and neighbours, as well as garden-related professionals, the wider neighbourhood community, and members of other abstract communities.

Diane Ackerman is one of the gardener-authors whose garden-related interactions cover a relatively wide range. She introduces the personal garden’s locale role quite neatly when she writes,

I experience my garden as personal and private, but it also extends into the lives of many others. Somehow its jigsaw puzzle grows, piece by piece, and everyone must be content: the stone mason; the tree surgeon, the drainage man rerouting an underground creek; the landscape architect; Chrys and Bill [gardeners who work for her]; my Paul, otherwise known as Paul West, author of forty-some smart and stylish books, primarily novels. Paul functions mainly as statuary in the garden, surveying things from a chair on the patio while listening to classical music and dreaming up a beautiful new book (Ackerman, 17).

5.1.1 *Interaction with family members*

Since none of the gardener-authors lives alone, all interact, personally and intimately, with family members in the garden space. The most frequent interaction is with the spouse or life partner, some of whom, like Ackerman's Paul, are scarcely mentioned presences in the garden, individuals who essentially join the gardener-authors in enjoying the garden space. Other life partners, such as Sara Stein's frequently mentioned Marty, Patrick Lane's Lorna, and Douglas Chambers' Brian, also join in the work of the garden, particularly Stein's husband, who is named in connection with practically all the outdoor work described in the book. These interactions are all intimate and personal; even the work comes across as friendly and affectionate, as suggested by Lane who calls Lorna his "assistant gardener" in "careful jest" and "with deep affection" (Lane 23-4).

Other family members also enter the garden space. None of the gardener-authors appears to have children living at home, but two of them mention grandchildren. "I look longingly at the next generation", Harris writes, "wondering how I can plant the seeds of future passion there" (Harris 1995, "Children in the garden") – which she does in the grandchildren who explore her garden through their various senses, poking their noses into plants, crushing flowers in their hands, naming the colours – thereby teaching Harris to let the garden delight her senses (Harris 1995, "Relearning the senses"). Stein's granddaughter also delights in her grandmother's garden, where "She quite expects frogs to hop into her hands, bunnies to come to her for carrots, robins to lay their eggs in nests she makes of grass" – unrealistic notions, Stein admits (Stein, 238-9), yet a good base of wonder for the care the author hopes future generations will take of the nonhuman world (Stein, 190).

5.1.2 *Interaction with friends and neighbours*

Friends appear now and again in the authors' gardens, usually with casual reference made to them in the books. The exception is *Stonyground*, whose gardens were built largely with help from, as Chambers writes, "several devoted friends who seem to think that nothing is better than a weekend slaving with a shovel in the country" (Chambers, 182). These friends assist in creating new garden beds (Chambers, 183), building garden constructions (Chambers, 200), laying out the vegetable garden (Chambers, 27), constructing steps (Chambers, 38), digging up undesirable plants (Chambers, 16), and more, including making contributions to "an inextricable web of suggestion and modification" in which Chambers' admits his own ideas play only a part (Chambers, xvi). It was friends also, who accompany Chambers on the tour of English gardens, and who help him translate what they saw during the visits into the unique "vocabulary" of *Stonyground*. (Chambers, 37-8). "For all that *Stonyground* is my garden", Chambers writes, "I am greatly indebted to friends for interventions small and large" (Chambers, 38).

Neighbours are similarly mentioned here and there by the gardener-authors, with the exception of Harris, who writes about particularly good neighbours on both sides of her garden. On the south live people who love plants, and who install a stone wall to keep their small children contained in one part of the yard, leaving Harris to plant the rest (Harris 1999, 78). On the north side lives a couple with whom Harris undertakes a project to replace one section of the existing brown slab fence with an airier lattice construction, and the rest with a living fence of shrubs; Harris chose the plants, and the two households split the cost (Harris 1999, 95-6). "You can't always choose neighbors", Harris writes, "but if you are as lucky as I am, you'll find some who are cooperative and love plants too" (Harris 1999, 78).

These interactions with friends and neighbours range from personal and intimate, in the case of Chambers' friends, who join him for not only work in the garden, but also talk and music (Chambers, 54), to friendly and neighbourly, with personal overtones, in the case of Harris' neighbours.

5.1.3 *Interaction with neighbourhood and the greater community*

Interaction in the personal garden can reach beyond immediate neighbours to the neighbourhood, with social implications in relation to the community at large, as Whiteson discusses in *A Garden Story*. He observes that working in his front garden puts him in contact with the life of the street and people walking by, including joggers, dogwalkers, homeless men and women, and other passersby whom he gets to know and looks forward to seeing and greeting (Whiteson, 52-6). Yet his presence in the front garden also, he points out, connects him with what he calls "a current of ugliness underlying the more amiable aspects of the neighborhood" (Whiteson, 60), specifically controversy regarding the conversion of a local house into a hospice for AIDS patients, an initiative which people either support or oppose, passionately sharing their opinions when they stop to chat with him as he works in his garden space (Whiteson, 61-3).

Whiteson also relates wider social tensions to his personal garden space. In the context of mounting tensions preceding the Los Angeles riots of 1992, Whiteson realises that in the vast sprawl of Los Angeles, many residents are concerned about defining their communities and protecting a sense of identity in the anonymity of the metropolis. "Since modern cities have burst their bounds", he writes,

and have become shapeless regional metropolises covering hundreds of square miles, no single citizen can hope to comprehend their enormity. Complex and confusing, these urban regions offer little sense of coherence when contemplated as a whole. The only way to cope with such vast social and geographic entities is to be rooted in your own defined, defended ground (Whiteson, 63-4).

Whiteson goes on to acknowledge his own rootedness in the "good green place" of the garden, a space

crucial to his survival (Whiteson, 155), and defined and protected by high, overgrown walls which which mark the boundary between assured safety and likely danger from the world outside (Whiteson, 64-5). When the riots do break out in the city, Whiteson feels, in his words, that “only the stoutness of my green walls stood between me and the orgy of rampant violence ruling the streets”. He adds the confession that had he possessed a firearm, he would have shot anyone who entered his garden, and that he actually kept a large, club-like avocado branch by the back gate for defence (Whiteson, 152).

Whiteson also writes that in the process of creating his garden, he begins to grasp a vital paradox: that “Only the safety and identity of an intensely personal private place within a clear community can encourage each citizen to reach out for a genuine connection with the city at large” (Whiteson, 68) – an interesting statement on privacy and cooperation, personal place and community. Whiteson’s garden is definitely intensely personal, and he feels a strong need to defend it and assure its safety in the face of threat. The clarity of his community is something he does not address directly, yet it is something which appears to become defined as he interacts with people passing by his garden and engages in local issues as a result. Genuine connection with the city at large comes out in bits and pieces throughout the book, as in his delight in the “jumbled cityscape” and “superb craziness” of Los Angeles (Whiteson, 19-20). Whiteson is the only gardener-author to reflect beyond the friendliness and amiability of neighbourhood and community interaction in and around the garden space to the ways in which garden-related connections and perceptions relate to the wider community.

5.1.4 *Interaction with members of other communities*

Other communities, more abstract, also enter into the picture of the personal garden as portrayed in the literature under study. The first is the *community of gardeners*, which certain of the gardener-authors associate with their personal garden spaces. Stein (232), Chambers (124), and Harris (1995,

“The garden party”), for example, all open their personal gardens to visits from gardening-related groups. Chambers also describes the joy of meeting and exchanging plants and ideas with other gardeners, people who have been smitten by the gardening virus (Chambers, 151-2), while Harris writes about a gardening network resulting in friendships (Harris 1995, “A garden epiphany”), and a gardening sorority resulting in dozens of new friends (Harris 1995, “A garden epiphany”). The interactions range from friendly and amiable in the case of the garden tours, to personal and intimate in the case of the friendships resulting from interacting with people who have similar gardening passions.

The *community of garden-related professionals*, paid by the gardener-authors to carry out work, or to provide services or products related to their personal gardens – though in some cases the professionals appear to offer their services as friends – is well represented in certain of the books under study. Collectively, these professionals cover a wide range of occupations, including mail order growers (Stein, 226), landscape architects (Ackerman, 78), carpenters (Chambers, 184), dredgers (Stein, 118), wood carvers (Chambers, 87), tree specialists (Stein, 114), metal workers (Chambers, 144), lighting designers and other designers (Harris 1999, 105 and 122), stone masons, drainage men, and gardeners (Ackerman, 17). The interactions portrayed in the books range from friendly and amiable, to professional and economically transactional.

The *research community* also enters the personal garden in the context of squirrel studies. Ackerman participates in, with squirrels from her garden trapped, sexed, weighed, measured and tagged on-site by a team of researchers (Ackerman, 201, 50). This example of research-related interaction in the personal garden is an exception in the books under study, yet it is worth mentioning as yet another type of interaction. An additional interaction, within the *community of life forms*

sharing the garden space, will be discussed in a chapter to come.

The personal garden as a social space is not particularly well developed by the gardener-authors under study. Most of the gardens are actually portrayed as private spaces, with social aspects an afterthought, the exception being Whiteson's reflections on the connections between his garden and the greater community. Harris, in fact, stresses that her garden is exclusive, rather than inclusive, pointing out that people have to enter two gates to reach her garden – two gates which together “fend off the outside world” (Harris 1995, “Garden images”). In the case of most of the gardener-authors, the most frequent interaction is, in reality, between the gardeners and the natural elements of the personal garden space. Nevertheless, the diversity of social interaction represented in the books under study adds an additional element of ‘humanisation’ to the personal garden space. The variety of social relations also indicates potential for further geographical inquiry into social aspects of gardens, some of which are already being explored, as mentioned in Chapter 1.

5.2 The personal garden as a personal space

Since most of the gardens in the books come across as private and personal spaces rather than social spaces, *sense of place* is proving to be the most significant aspect of place for the authors under study. As with locale, the personal gardening books under study reveal a rich diversity of personal meanings, emotions, connections, and values people invest in and receive from their personal garden spaces. Each individual gardener-author's relationship with his or her personal garden being highly complex, I will not, in the interests of space, discuss all the aspects in detail. I will, instead, focus on the particular subjective meaning which makes each individual gardener-author's relation to his or her garden stand out from the rest, in an attempt to cover as wide a range as possible of personal garden

senses of place within the limits of this chapter section.

Gardens are metaphors for who we were, are, and will be.

(Lane, 202)

5.2.1 *The personal garden as a responsibility*

The personal meaning which comes out most powerfully in Stein's *Noah's Garden* is an intense responsibility for the land, and accompanying stewardship of it. Stein's sense of responsibility and stewardship is strong with respect to reversing the ecological damage she wrought on her garden space when she landscaped it according to the clean and spare suburban gardening tradition, and to enhancing the land with a view to sharing it with wildlife. This sense of responsibility is so powerful that she works continuously to improve the habitat value of her land, even writing a book about it and touring the continent to speak about her vision for a new suburban landscape, a vision which she hopes will be translated into a new set of land-related values. "I want us as a culture to depart from the old tradition of evaluating land according to what can be extracted from it as commodity or abstracted from it as social asset", she writes, "and turn instead toward a new tradition of valuing land by the life it harbors" (Stein, 244).

It is a turn in values which brings Stein personal reward and meaning. When a garden comes alive ecologically, she states, "Significance expands. Meanings multiply" (Stein, 245). She gives the example of a screen of white pines planted for privacy as offering a refuge for overwintering cardinals, and brick paving laid in sand instead of concrete as providing space for ants to make their constructions, and food for flickers who feed on the ants (Stein, 246) – both expansions of intended use, increases in significance, multiplications in meaning. Similar expanded and multiple significances throughout Stein's garden have made the space particularly meaningful and valuable to her.

5.2.2 *The personal garden as a heritage*

The value and significance of the Stonyground gardens for Douglas Chambers stems in part from the personal and individual meaning he writes onto the land through his particular garden arrangements, literary inscriptions and monuments. Yet a large part of Stonyground's meaning also arises from its association with his personal identity, his family history, his material heritage. Unlike Whiteson and Lane, who look out on neglected garden spaces when they move into their new homes, Chambers is not faced with an empty landscape, as he puts it, but with one "charged with powerful stories" he heard around the kitchen table when he visited the farm as a boy from the city. These stories – his great-great-grandfather walking into the wilderness with a sickle, which Chambers still has (Chambers, 13), his great-grandfather walking 100 miles to Buffalo to purchase medicine for his brother (Chambers, 5); his great-uncle, at the age of fifteen, taking over the farm from his ailing father (Chambers, 6) – inevitably led further back to the emigration from Scotland (Chambers, 5) and reinforce Chambers' love for the place, which, Chambers writes, is rooted in gratitude for these past struggles, for all that was done for him "against terrific odds".

This heritage – the struggles, the stories – is written into the fields of the farm, into the stone piles at the margins of the property (Chambers, 4), into the rubbish heap Chambers uncovers near the barn during gardening work, including long-forgotten tools and bits of china now "the stuff of treasured memory" (Chambers, 7), and into his own memories of the gardens at the farm when he used to visit (Chambers, 6). "Everything I do now", he writes, "these gardens, these walks, are what they [his ancestors] might have done had they had my time and the leisure; indeed, I am what they became, and the garden and the landscape are in that sense theirs" (Chambers, 13). So strong is that sense that he often has the feeling of being watched while at work by an ancestor, such as the time he had the

intense feeling, while picking wild cherries, that a woman in a “long print dress and large bonnet”, perhaps his grandmother, was looking up at him, “curious at what she had become” (Chambers, 13-14) – a whimsical echo of family relations previously discussed.

5.2.3 *The personal garden as a sanctuary*

Family connections, not reaching as far into the past, are also a part of the meaning the personal garden holds for Lane, a gardener-author who turns to this highly personal space as a refuge when he steps “back into the world after an absence of forty-five years of addiction” (Lane, 43), and after two months at a treatment centre for alcohol and drug addiction (Lane, 4). In the garden, he feels like “some delicate creature come newly” to a space he must learn again (Lane, 5) with new eyes as he searches it for renewal, endurance, patience, knowing, and acceptance (Lane, 43).

That learning, knowing and acceptance are all part of the healing process he embarks on inside the high fences of the garden where, he writes, he feels safe with the plants, birds, cats, and Lorna, and where he treasures the silence and peace it offers (Lane, 101) – a peace which brings family-related memories from childhood through to adulthood, fragments which “come unbidden” (Lane, 47) as his soul struggles to find clues to understanding and accepting the sources of his addiction. In this quiet, safe garden sanctuary, he writes, he feels for the first time in years, that he is alive (Lane, 5). There his body starts to heal (Lane, 67), as well as his soul, which is pestered by confusions and daily doubts. “When in doubt,” he writes, “I go into the garden and the garden heals me” (Lane, 176).

At the end of the book, Lane is not certain that he has answers for his questions, or resolutions for his confusions. But, he writes, “I have stood beside the apple tree in my garden and lifted my face into the rain and felt its many small hands on my skin. Perhaps it is enough just to know that” (Lane, 307-8). Even if he has not found answers or resolutions, those last lines speak, at least of acceptance,

and future endurance, which he finds in the sanctuary of the garden.

5.2.4 *The personal garden as a site for personal improvement*

Harris' active, searching mind touches upon a wide array of subjective meanings in connection with her personal garden – from the garden as a site for artistic expression and personal ritual, to the garden as both an outlet for energy and a source of energy, and the garden as a highly private place with secrets. What comes up most frequently and consistently, however, are references to the garden as a teacher, to the garden as a site providing opportunity for learning.

When Harris starts to garden in the city, for example, she realises, with a shock, that urban living has desensitised her to the natural environment. She recognises, at the same time, that she must learn more about her garden space, that she must allow it to become her teacher. “At the garden’s urging”, she adds, she starts recording observations such as weather patterns and plant blooming periods (Harris 1999, x). She goes on to write, in both books, about other, varied learning experiences and opportunities in the garden: learning from her planting mistakes and the deaths of dozens of plants (Harris 1999, 44); the “instructive” look at the soil profile of her garden when she is forced to dig a deep hole for a dry well (Harris 1999, 5); an old lilac bush teaching her about gardening and nurturing (Harris 1995, “The old lilac”); the “learning experience” of consulting with a lighting designer when she decides to install lights to brighten her garden in winter (Harris 1999, 105); plants teaching about their interdependency and, ultimately, our dependence on plants (Harris 1995, “Points of view”); and learning to let the garden delight her senses by following her grandson’s sensory explorations of the garden space (Harris 1995, “Relearning the senses”). “My garden” she writes in the piece concluding *In the Garden*, “is my library, my teacher and guide” (Harris 1995, “Finale”) – a powerful statement on the significant role the personal garden plays in her life.

5.2.5 *The personal garden as a source of multi-sensory stimulation*

Ackerman's keen, inquiring mind flits around as wide a variety of personal, garden-related associations as Harris', if not more. One passage, in particular, illustrates the many-sided and intricately interwoven meanings held and roles played by the personal garden in Ackerman's life:

Garden of growth, garden of green blood, garden where dappled lights and water mix in the trees, crow garden, beetle garden, garden of dreams, garden on the oasis of a life-drenched planet, garden where desire finds form, garden of floral architecture and speckled fawns, garden where wonder is incised on a pebble millions of years old, garden visibly and invisibly teeming, garden of beds and seed parlors, garden of dew and overdue, garden where we plight our troth and ply our trade, garden that tilts the mind into the sacred, fleeting garden, memorial garden, garden abuzz and atwitter, garden where toxins and tonics both thrive, pool garden, cloud garden, garden that's an urn for the soul, garden of roll calls and lists where life tests different recipes, garden where rain falls like manna, garden whose perennial borders are infinite, garden whose customs and taboos make mischief in the mind, garden of snow, mind garden, garden of quartz crystal and siren light (Ackerman, 246).

Interesting to note is that in the many elements of this wide-ranging, complexly entwined quotation, a certain important garden-related meaning comes through only slightly and indirectly – the garden as stimulating the senses, all the senses, including, as Ackerman points out, “the kinesthetic sense of moving through space” (Ackerman, 71).

The importance of the garden's sensory stimulation role has already been indicated in relation to the author's visual enjoyment of the garden, in particular her beloved roses, in the last chapter. In another part of the book, Ackerman adds the sense of smell when she describes the intense experience of sniffing a peony's blossoms until the nose “quits from the sheer abundance of the scent. In that moment, the universe – from the dirt below one's feet clear out to the farthest stars and beyond that in time back to the Big Bang – all of it vanishes. Nothing exists but the citrusy smell of one peony” (Ackerman, 71). Similarly, nothing exists but the scent of her favourite rose, as she tries desperately to recall the sensation in winter, acknowledging the difficulty of capturing smells in words, particularly scents as complex as “the individual scent cloud of a rose” (Ackerman, 223-4).

Ackerman also addresses the sense of touch in relation to the peony when she writes of the skin “singing with touch” and the fingers “handling the silky damp petals of the peony” as well as a round, polished pebble at the base of the peony, an object she picks up and gently rubs “like a prayer bead” (Ackerman, 71). She writes, in an echo of the book’s title, that this is one way she cultivates delight – I would add ‘meaning’ – by abandoning herself to individual sensations and relishing them until they fade away (Ackerman, 71).

5.2.6 *The personal garden as a integral part of one’s self*

Whiteson more than any of the other gardener-authors develops the notion of the garden as an integral part of himself; Lane writes about the garden starting with his body (Lane, 5) and about breathing with the garden (Lane, 182), while Ackerman describes mutual nourishment with the garden (Ackerman, 171). It starts, for Whiteson, with the nurturing intimacy he establishes with his plants (Whiteson, 39), followed by a reciprocal flow of creative energy and mutual imprinting (Whiteson, 132-133); it continues with his recognition that the garden is crucial to his own survival (Whiteson, 155), and that his continuing care is critical to the garden’s distinctive shape and definition (Whiteson, 132). The garden has an increasingly powerful impact on the author, seeping deep into his bones, as he writes near the end of the book, smoothing out his short-term mood swings, soothing him in a “new intimacy with the cyclical life of the natural sphere”, and giving him an overall sense of balance (Whiteson, 168) in return for his care and nurturing.

So synergetic does the relationship become that Whiteson even sees his own burial in the garden:

I see myself planted in the warm soil of my garden, wrapped in a shroud of giant banana leaves. Yet, lying in my grave, I feel more alive than ever.

The earth is active around me, dense with roots pushing through the ground, busy with earthworms chewing up rich grains of black clay, thick with nutrients to feed the foliage pushing toward the light above my buried body. Through the porous membrane of the banana skins I feel the earth’s good energies (Whiteson, 162).

The vision is fleeting, broken when a hummingbird flits by, but the earth's good energies remain, connecting his head with his hands, rooting both sensibilities in a shared ground, and, as he writes, "cultivating a quietness I never knew could flourish in the agitated soil of my temperament". In these ways, he adds, the garden has made him, even as he has made it (Whiteson, 168) – a powerful statement of symbiosis and meaning.

Gardens are refuges. In search of replenishment we retreat to them as to a safe haven. They have none of the threatening attributes to be found in more dramatic escapes: lone voyages, wilderness, deserts – or drugs. There is no need to pit your endurance against the elements, to feel challenged or to prove yourself to yourself. Gardens act as a solace and a panacea. With their innumerable qualities we use them in a variety of ways, for inspiration or freedom, for discovery or surrender.

(Osler, 1997)

These various subjective attachments and meanings related to the personal garden space do not cover the full spectrum of *sense of place* – the complex mix of identity, memory, emotions, convictions, connections, values, etc. – the gardener-authors have of their gardens. Yet the meanings illustrated in this section – the garden as responsibility, heritage, sanctuary, site for self-improvement, source of multi-sensory stimulation, integral part of one's self – give a good indication of the diversity of significance the personal garden space can hold for individual gardeners. Some of the meanings are highly inwardly focused, deeply introspective, as in Whiteson's symbiotic relationship with his garden, and Lane's dependence on his garden for sanctuary during the critical and vulnerable months following his return from the addiction treatment centre. Other meanings are more externally oriented, such as Stein's strong feelings of responsibility to the other life forms which share her garden space, and Chambers' sense of family heritage and gratitude for the hard work and accomplishments of previous generations, which make his own garden dreams possible. All these personal meanings show the potential for more in-depth geographical examination of personal garden senses of place, as expressed through representations such as personal gardening literature, of the

personal garden, or as revealed through other sources.

MUSINGS FROM THE GARDEN

Green Dreams

It happens sometimes, on these snowy, gusty days, that I will stand at the window and gaze outside. Now and again, when I am coming back from a walk, I linger just inside the fence and stare. Every so often, while driving up the road toward the house, I slow down and look intently at the yard. And I dream ...

It's the remains of flowers that capture my imagination at those times. "Winter weeds," some people would call those dried stems and seed heads left over from summer and fall-blooming Black-eyed Susans, Blue Vervains, Joe-Pye Weeds, New England Asters, Bonesets, Evening Primroses, Fireweeds, and others whose names escape me right now.

The thought of their shapes and colours fills my mind at those times when I stare. And the image of the birds, bees, and butterflies that fed among the flowers not so many months ago. And the memory of other flowers, more delicate – Violets, Anemones, Cinqfoils – whose remains lie buried beneath the snow.

Strongest, those blustery winter days, is the hope that all the plants will survive the winter, that they will shoot up again in the spring, grow and thrive, spread and bloom, to provide food and shelter to increasing numbers of wild creatures.

It is a dream. A garden which attracts bees and moths, wasps and butterflies, spiders and crickets, birds and toads, and other wildlife, large and small. A garden filled with plants – wildflowers and grasses, trees and shrubs – native to Canada, with as many as possible indigenous to this region. A garden which almost takes care of itself, flourishing without fertilizer and watering, weeding and fussing.

It is unrealistic, I know, to expect to garden without doing these things. Goodness knows I've done plenty of digging and pulling, tugging and cursing, sifting and sorting, scooping and hauling, watering and fussing, aching and waiting these past few years in my efforts to get the garden established. It's all part of the dream, part of the journey, part of the process of converting a yard filled with introduced hay and pasture grasses, and plenty of other tenacious alien plant species, into a native meadow.

And the little bits of progress make it worthwhile. The many vivid colours of the flowers where before there was only green grass, yellow dandelions and mauve thistles. The diversity – shapes, textures, shades of green – of the new plant foliage. The increasing numbers of birds and insects in the yard. The variety of flower fragrances. The plants that feel instantly at home, that flourish, reproduce and spread with unexpected gusto.

Over the past couple of weeks, I've ordered different seeds from new sources. I've made contact with people looking to pass on surplus plants from their more established native wildflower gardens. I've picked up more books ...

It's a bit of an obsession. Why? Some people understand perfectly when they find out. Others look puzzled. Still others, who have followed me through many a crazy initiative over the years, don't even bother to ask.

If they did, what would I tell them? That's another story ...

– originally published on January 30, 2004 in the *West Quebec Post's* "Wild Tracks" column, written under my nature writing pseudonym Robin Stone

5.3 The personal garden as a cultural space

The personal garden as a cultural space, revealed through the *cultural landscape* component of the landscape metaphor, is constructed first through visual appreciation of the space, followed by critical visual appraisal, imagination and design, and shaping and managing by a gardener. This ongoing activity, mental and physical, of gardeners perceiving, imagining and acting upon their garden spaces echoes Carl Sauer's vision of the cultural landscape as land shaped and fashioned through ongoing interaction between cultures and the physical environment (Sauer, 1929). The active sequence of garden design, arrangement and maintenance also engages each individual gardener-author's creativity, intentionality, and agency.

5.3.1 *Visual perception in the garden*

Our human landscape is our unwitting autobiography, reflecting our tastes, our values, our aspirations, and even our fears, in tangible, visible form.

(Lewis 1979, 12)

The gardener-authors of the books selected for study appear to enter into the spirit of the common definition of landscape as perceived at a glance, as well as Meinig's portrayal of landscape as a "scene" (Meinig 1979a, 2-4) and an "aesthetic" (Meinig 1979b, 46). Vision plays an important role in each gardener-author's aesthetic appreciation of the garden 'scene', and, to varying degrees, in the critical appraisal of each garden space with a view to its design.

Despite Douglas Porteous' caution that the dominance of the sense of sight results in landscape as "something we stand back to view" (Porteous 1990, xiv) and distance ourselves from, the 'views' the gardener-authors have of their gardens do not prevent them from enjoying those spaces through other, non-visual senses, from becoming intimately involved in their garden landscapes, or from finding deeper meaning in the garden – aspects of landscape experience Porteous considers extremely

important (Porteous 1990, xiv), and ones which are discussed in subsequent sections and chapters.

5.3.1.1 The personal garden as a 'scene'

For some of the gardener-authors, the aesthetic aspect of the garden is more important than for others, yet all derive a certain amount of enjoyment and satisfaction from looking at their gardens, even in the winter season. Marjorie Harris points out that in the winter she spends less time working in the garden, and more time looking at it (Harris 1999, 120) in appreciation of garden elements such as evergreen trees. "Some hold the snow gently in thick branches and make fascinating shadows on the ground" she writes. "Others form voluptuous shapes under the snow. Put together, they create the choreography of the winter garden" (Harris 1995, 'Evergreens'). The choreography of Diane Ackerman's winter garden lies in its "bare bones", in the "skeleton on which its lusheries rely" – a skeleton with bones such as rose canes (Ackerman, 233-4) which carry the flowers Ackerman is particularly passionate about, and enjoys with unbridled visual ardour in other seasons:

Along one fence, four climbing rosebushes rearrange their blankets of color each day, as some blooms wither and others open. Reine de Violette, an old-fashioned bushy purple rose that unfolds into a shallow ruffle the color of grape juice, has become an avid climber for some reason, and begun streaming over the fence. Next to it a pool of deep pink roses, then a spread of orange-red roses, then an explosion of small, pale pink roses, and finally a huge flight of blue-red roses growing in bunches of five to ten buds. Behind them, a rose the darkest red I've ever seen climbs a tall black obelisk. What a display (Ackerman, 102).

The aesthetic display of the roses, a visual extravaganza, is something Ackerman cannot live without.

It is so important that she is constantly cutting roses to make indoor bouquets, which she enjoys with equal passion:

A bowl of roses sits on the marble tabletop. Sunlight shines through their petals as if through stained glass. The Othello is luminous, a deep, saturated magenta that radiates color like heat. The apricot Polkas are delicate as tissue paper. Because light shines through the flared petals of the red roses, but not through the tightly wrapped buds, they appear to have halos around their heads. The red-and-white Scentimental isn't just striped; some of the white petals look splattered with red. The splatter pattern carries one's eye outward and gives a sense of explosion to each flower. Ruffled red-and-white explosions (Ackerman, 128-9).

The strong need to bring the beauty of the garden indoors is unique to Ackerman. None of the other

gardener-writers writes about bringing flowers indoors. Harris, in fact, is passionate about *not* bringing plants indoors, about letting them live outside where they belong and enjoying them there (Harris 1995, “Picking a bouquet of flowers”).

Douglas Chambers, for his part, is intent on extending the appreciation of beauty beyond his house at Stonyground and the immediate gardens gracing it, to the wider cultivated landscape of his farm, where great fields are planted with barley, alfalfa, corn, wheat, and soybeans, and the crops and views change from year to year, field to field, and season to season in an ongoing palette of colour: “the early-spring dusting of vivid green to the giant dark green of the cornfields or the tawny luxuriance of the grains” (Chambers, 3). Later in the book he stresses that the rolling farmland of southern Ontario, where Stonyground is situated, needs to be *looked* at again. “It is where we are”, he writes, “where this garden is, and its gentle undulations are what the poet Alexander Pope called the ‘borrowed landscape’ of the garden”. These gentle undulations, of his own farmland and that of his neighbours, he stresses, are as much a part of the garden’s visual pleasures as the beauty of its interior spaces (Chambers, 8) – one of the reasons he establishes walks and paths around and through the farm from which to enjoy the variations of light and colour, different views of the woodlands, and the splendour of the crops in the different seasons (Chambers, 9).

5.3.1.2 The garden scene in terms of critical visual appraisal and design

Vision and the garden scene also play a role in critical appraisal and design of the garden space, a process Harris calls “creative staring” (Harris 1999, x and 122), and one Patrick Lane practises, although he does not call it by that name, when he squats in the driveway on the day he moves into his new house, and looks out on a neglected garden, a space he ends up studying the “bones” of for a year before he begins to plant. When he does plant, he points out, he makes an effort to avoid architectural

rigidity and to follow what he calls a “natural flow” and “natural rhythm” which, since he does not explain it, I interpret as a visual flow and visual rhythm based on the references to the eye which accompany his description. “Space is never empty in a garden” he writes. “There is always something beyond for the eye to rest upon. The eyes shift from foreground to background. They take pleasure in the variation of depth, in the levels varying heights offer. A natural rhythm” (Lane, 202-3) – actually a *visual* rhythm.

Leon Whiteson also casts his appraising gaze over on a neglected garden space (Whiteson, 3-4). Yet he does so with an acknowledged “trained architect’s eye” (Whiteson, 6) which registers a lack of “intermediate scale of plants to mediate between them and the plane of bare earth”, along with gangly fruit trees, oranges splattered over the deck, and a revolting white fungus on the lemon tree (Whiteson, 7) – not a positive first impression. But later, when he decides to design and create a garden, Whiteson takes another look:

Certain features were given, I saw. The linked branches of a stunted orange tree and the lower limbs of the tall avocado formed a natural arch dividing the back area of the yard from the middle. The deck steps made an easy transition down to the ground, acting as a curtain raiser opening the inside to the outside.

A pathway of stepping stones from the deck steps would make a graceful curve toward the archway between the orange and avocado trees, echoing the line of the trellis separating the yard from the guest house patio. Along its length a series of individual enclaves seemed to suggest themselves (Whiteson, 33-4).

The outcome of his gaze revealing more architectural potential for establishing a garden, he starts playing with ideas for laying out the garden, and begins to prepare for its actual creation.

And so it goes; one thing leads to another, usually quite logically if I do a little creative staring.

(Harris 1999, 122)

These visual perspectives on the personal garden – as a space to be appreciated aesthetically, and to be assessed through an appraising gaze – represent, for the most part, the somewhat more superficial meaning of landscape as ‘scene’ and ‘aesthetic’, which Meinig cautions is only a small part of landscape’s complexity (1979a, 2-4). The following sections discuss additional, related cultural

aspects of the personal garden as a landscape, such as its purposeful design, which often begins with the visually appraising gaze just discussed.

5.3.2 *Design in the personal garden*

But gardens are more than plans, and in any case, one puts one plan into place only in order to see that there are others waiting in the wings. And so it has gone on.

(Chambers, 58-9)

Aside from the visual perspective just discussed, certain of the gardener-authors take additional particular approaches to designing and planning the arrangement of natural and cultural features in their garden spaces. In doing so, they are exercising not only creativity, but also intentionality since the resulting designs and arrangements bestow meaning on the garden in light of the use and purpose the gardeners have intended for the space.

Harris' approach, seeking undulations of colour "artfully interwoven" and an overall "vibrant and sensual picture", is artistically inspired, in a reflection of the many years she worked in an art gallery (Harris 1999, xxii). Chambers' design is inspired in its ensemble, by tradition and history – particularly by Philip Southcote's notion of a 'ferme ornée' – a farm "around and through which went walks planted with trees and shrubs and flowers, so that one could stroll through a farm in a garden and enjoy the beauties of horticulture and agriculture together" (Chambers, 8) in the appreciative interchange between the garden and the surrounding agricultural landscape already mentioned.

Whiteson's garden, on the other hand, does not appear to have a particular purpose, yet it becomes increasingly meaningful as a welcome physical counterpoint to his writing work, and as a source of creativity. In designing the space, Whiteson, in fact, exchanges his trained architect's eye for his novelist's creative imagination one spring morning when, after sitting down to draw a plan of the garden, he suddenly realises that it could be conceptualised as a sort of green novel, spatially

arranged:

The various zones suggested by the shape of the yard and the placement of the existing trees could be chapters organizing a green plot.... Excited by the idea, I saw that my yard easily fell into visual chapters. One chapter opened directly off the main deck. Beyond it, at the back of the yard, separated by the avocado and an orange tree, was another smaller chapter in this potential verdant tale. Yet another began beside the outdoor dining deck beside the kitchen. The two decks, back and side, offered further narrative sequences.

The plants, shrubs and trees, he adds, could be placed to weave a host of themes into “a vivid horticultural narrative” (Whiteson, 11-13). This concept of the green novel is highly creative.

Sara Stein’s garden design, on the other hand, has a clear purpose from the outset – to provide a variety of habitats to as wide a spectrum of wildlife as possible within the space of her garden. Stein’s inspiration comes not from her creative self, but from the natural environment and ecological relationships, the intricacies of which she spends months studying, “goggle-eyed and boggle-minded”, and subsequently translating into garden plans involving scale drawings on graph paper, with multiple tissue-paper overlays revealing various natural phenomena such as temporal blooming sequences, and species pollinated by particular insects. While the drawings are impressive, Stein doesn’t recommend her system (Stein, 73). In her opinion, there is only one plan which works – what she calls a “Master Plan out there” to which neither her drawings nor their reality conform (Stein, 55), a plan too complicated to draw up, write out, or even comprehend fully (Stein, 74). Yet despite the difficulty of comprehension, Stein follows the ‘Master Plan’ – essentially the ecosystems in the surrounding landscape – to the best of her abilities in designing and planting her ecologically oriented garden.

In doing so, Stein observes that the plan may actually not be terribly difficult to follow. “The general outlines”, she writes

are before us in the woodlands, thickets, meadows, marshes, and other ecosystems still to be found, if not in our own back yards, then in nature centers, sanctuaries, and preserves. As to the bold brush strokes of the Plan, we can certainly draw up lists of plant species that grow in these habitats. As for the fine details, I think we needn’t worry. This is a picture that, well started, will fill in itself (Stein, 74).

The picture will fill itself in, she continues, if we plant a reasonable facsimile of a natural ecosystem,

particularly a generous diversity of plant species adapted to the habitat, which should be sufficient to attract communities of animals (Stein, 74). By supplying an assortment of parts, she adds, a gardener can then step out of the way and let the timepieces of the plan's clockwork assemble itself (Stein, 62).

Yet the very idea of design is questioned by Ackerman, whose garden does not appear to be shaped according to any particular vision – likely one of the reasons she hires a professional landscape architect to draw up plans. The notion of designing a garden, she writes, “feels a little uncomfortable”:

Did our ancient ancestors design their gardens? No, they lived inside them, like cells in an artery, acted upon, prey to weather and predator, feeding opportunistically. Would they have designed their vast garden if they could have? That's a different question. Humans have always been creative and control freaks, and indeed planting gardens is exactly what we ultimately did, millennia ago, in the agrarian revolution that made civilization possible. How decorative were those gardens? Were they simple and efficient? Did form follow function...? Or did people also plant flowers merely to delight the senses, leaving space for the luxury of ornamental gardens? Labor was precious. Would they have spent it on the extravagance of beauty? I think so. Gardens don't just please the senses, they satisfy one's need for calm, privacy, balance, and stability; they allow one, no matter how weak or disenfranchised, to impose an order on the chaos and govern living things (Ackerman, 82-3).

In this wide-ranging intellectual meandering characteristic of Ackerman's writing, it is worth noting that she touches upon several notions of significance to understanding the garden as a cultural landscape: creativity on the part of the gardener, control over the design and maintenance of the space, appreciation with vision and other senses, imposition of order on living things.

5.3.3 *Action in the personal garden*

The imposition of order on living things is a strong act of agency on the part of the gardener, and one of the main driving forces behind activity in the personal garden space, where certain desired effects – visual, ecological, artistic/creative, traditional/historical – along with their attendant purposes and meanings, have been planned for and must be maintained. All the gardener-authors write about the work involved in managing and maintaining their gardens, in what Chambers calls an “endless

round” (Chambers, 73) of activity. Tasks include, in different combinations and degrees for each author, digging, planting, cutting, weeding, hoeing, fertilising, dividing, shovelling, pruning, watering, manuring, raking, deadheading, transplanting, and mulching to keep the garden ‘cultured’, so to speak. Despite the fact that certain of the authors may not perform all these tasks, one thing is for certain: they all spend a lot of time working in the garden and maintaining the space.

Stein’s gardening activities, carried out for the purpose of restoring habitat, occur on a relatively large scale. They involve plantings to join isolated garden patches, adding hedgerows and thickets to link the joined garden patches to the woodlands (Stein, 17), replanting the pond with native species (Stein, 179-188), planting a prairie patch and burning it periodically (Stein, 161-171), and weaving the whole lot together with native grasses and wildflowers (Stein, 17). Harris, in her small urban garden space, works at a smaller scale, where she is particularly energetic, verging on hyperactive, as she constantly moves plants around to maintain the desired effect of bold arrangements of shape and colour (Harris 1995, “Ripeness”), and to have fun (Harris 1999, 31).

Whiteson also has fun working in his garden, which he describes as a “delightfully childlike form of adult play, a chance for grown-ups to mess about in the mud without seeming silly” (Whiteson, 35). Yet he also finds a deeper satisfaction in physical gardening activities. While writing his paper novel, a project which starts at approximately the same time as his “green novel” garden undertaking, he finds digging in the garden to be a relief from the tension of writing and typing. “Words were airy ghosts”, he writes, “but the soil had a brute concreteness, and all the stress of wrestling with verbal abstractions was soaked by the honest sweat generated by hacking at the earth” (Whiteson, 35). Writing and gardening soon become a regular, balanced rhythm for him, what he calls a “pleasing back-and-forth” between the mental tension of writing and the physical exertion of garden work

(Whiteson, 35).

Whiteson, more than any of the other gardener-authors, communicates the necessity of ongoing garden maintenance to maintain control. “Like me”, he writes, “it’s a living thing requiring constant care to sustain and order its redemptive powers”.

If I neglect my garden for more than a day or two, I see the forces of entropy at work: wilting leaves sap many a plant’s strength, and the unchecked morning glory strangles the trumpet vine; I find bushes deprived of sunlight by their overgrown neighbors, shrubs wilting for lack of water, and fountains clogged by algae. I see the residue of snails and slugs and the stifling webs of spiders, plants that need nursing to help them back to health, and others that have yet to root themselves firmly” (Whiteson, 155).

After one particularly furious and excessive pruning, chopping and uprooting episode following a period of garden neglect (Whiteson, 118-119), Whiteson admits to a need to “make amends, to restore and nurture, to tend the plants with affection” (Whiteson, 129-130) – the start of a nurturing intimacy he establishes with his plants (Whiteson, 39), which makes his garden space even more meaningful.

Nurturing intimacy is implicit in the responsibility Ackerman takes for, and the joy she finds in, repetitive daily tasks she calls “preening and tending”, including deadheading, fertilizing, and removing pests by hand (Ackerman, 15). She takes responsibility for heavier work such as planting trees, clearing thickets, and spreading mulch by hiring a pair of gardeners to perform the chores (Ackerman, 14-15). The thicket clearing and pest removal are the sorts of tasks Ackerman likely has in mind when she makes the following connection between gardening activities and the desire to triumph over chaos:

A creeping obsession that afflicts many gardeners is the desire to triumph over the forces of chaos and disorder, battle the unruliness of growing things, cage beauty, impose a firm bridle on the natural world. This urge for order steals into a gardener’s sensibility, and soon one is lamenting the frustrations of staking, mowing, uprooting, deadheading, pinching back, weeding, training, trimming, watering. Gardeners wage a secret war against nature’s teeming jungle, which threatens to suffocate them.

On the other hand, she goes on to point out, not all gardeners are petty tyrants. “Learning to live with compromise, uncertainty, and failure”, she writes, “is one useful goal of gardening” (Ackerman, 68-

9). Later in the book she even acknowledges that her garden is a “*landscape* [my emphasis] where anarchy rules” and that any order she achieves is temporary, “a flash of control in a wilderness of thieves” (Ackerman, 245).

War and compromise, control and uncertainty, order and anarchy. These are the ongoing dualities of work in a space where the gardener wishes to maintain a desired effect – as well as uphold any related purpose or preserve associated meaning – among both cultural, and mainly natural, features. It is the natural, or nonhuman, elements, in fact, which are unruly and disorderly, as Ackerman points out, and which threaten to counter the ‘cultured’ effect of the garden space and undermine the gardener’s control – a control which is actually a delusion, as Ackerman implies when she writes of temporary flashes of control (Ackerman, 245). Lane agrees when he writes of gardeners working with living things, particularly plants, which “don’t always obey even if the space, the light, and the earth and water are exactly right. What is propitious to the gardener is not always so for the plant” (Lane, 204). He adds that plants never behave as he expects them to, “nor should they”, he stresses. “Who am I to insist that they grow in a certain spot and stay there?” (Lane, 100). Yet both he and Ackerman, who acknowledge the delusion of control, and the other gardeners who do not recognise it discernibly in their books – although Stein’s approach is to provide a variety of habitats in accordance with surrounding ecosystems, then step out of the way and let them take care of themselves itself (Stein, 62) – continue to put plants in certain spots, and move them if they have to, because that is what gardeners do in the spaces they design and manage. Compromise, as both Lane and Ackerman imply, is a necessary management approach in the face of nonhuman forces gardeners cannot control.

5.3.4 *Artefact and construction in the personal garden*

Garden elements which can be controlled more effectively are the cultural ones evoked by

Meinig's "landscape as artifact" metaphor (Meinig, 1979b). Although natural elements are predominant in the gardens cultivated by the gardener-authors under study, all the spaces contain some cultural elements in the form of artefacts and structures – cultural 'imprints', so to speak – which play more important roles in certain of the gardens than in others.

Artefacts and structures common to many of the gardens portrayed in the books include benches and paths; some also contain arbours, trellises and fountains. Harris also adds a wide variety of plant containers to her garden space. "Containers are the backbone of the summer garden", she writes, "I started out with one or two and now have dozens", adding that she wants as many as possible, planted with annual or perennial flowers, so that she can move them around to add colour to places which have become dull (Harris 1999, 69), thereby maintaining the desired artistic effect of the "living picture – in vivid colour" (Harris 1995, "A garden epiphany").

Whiteson is another gardener-author who adds plant containers – in his case quirky ones – to his garden. He takes a little wooden train engine and carriages, for example, fills it with violets, petunias, and a clay goat, then nails it to the deck along with a green-painted wooden frog tapping a red drum (Whiteson, 77). He also develops the habit of scavenging for garden artefacts:

... I gathered up fallen branches and seedpods from the camphor trees that line my street and stole stop signs and municipal parking notices that had been knocked over by careless cars. I retrieved an old wrought-iron chandelier from one neighbour's garbage and a white pedestal washbasin from another's. I frequented local yard sales, and found such treasures as a dressmaker's cane dummy, a yellow ten-gallon milk can, a pair of white ceramic lions, a cement gargoyle with a ferocious maw, and a couple of plaited straw shrimp traps from Malaysia (Whiteson, 88-9).

Some of these artefacts, and others, eventually find their way into two unique garden construction – totem poles – one of which is capped by the cane dressmaker's dummy and the curlicued wrought-iron chandelier, draped with a spray of bougainvillea. "The effect was slightly sinister", Whiteson observes, "resembling a cannibal's stake topped by a torso and a shrunken head" (Whiteson, 96).

Another notable, and unique, construction is a five-foot-high jagged red brick wall resembling a ruin and intended to symbolise the “cycle of decline and renewal in all human *landscapes* [my emphasis]”, as well as the author’s own recent depressive decline and subsequent recovery (Whiteson, 132).

Symbolism is actually the speciality of Chambers who adds a variety of unique installations to his gardens, including a sundial inscribed with a literary quote (Chambers, 164-5), and sundry other monuments and literary inscriptions placed in meaningful locations throughout the farm. One such inscription – the Latin word “Attende”, meaning ‘wait’ and suggesting that the reader be attentive “to a place where secrets will be yielded up only to the inquiring and attentive eye” is carved into stone piece set into the curved wall of the car park (Chambers, 101). Another series of inscriptions, each made in enamel on steel, is placed into boxes that look like bird houses, behind doors labelled with the name of the inscription’s author. The door labelled ‘Clare’, for example, opens onto the following line from one of Romantic poet John Clare’s works: “I found my poems in the fields and only wrote them down” (Chambers, 105).

Other installations include a monument to Diana in the form of a deltoid boulder carved with a Greek bow (Chambers, 87-8), and an accompanying monument to Apollo which takes the shape of a ten-foot-tall rejected limestone column, discovered at a local quarry, capped with a large iron circle surrounded by what looks like giant arrowheads suggesting the sun, Apollo’s symbol (Chambers, 187-9). Chambers also adds family memorial monuments to Stonyground installations, including one to his mother, Margaret, who was denied the opportunity to live at the farm which she loved. Through the monument – a large erratic granite boulder carved with a spray of marguerites to suggest the name ‘Margaret’ and placed in a grove of elms – his mother now dwells at Stonyground (Chambers, 133).

All these artefacts, constructions, and installations are further exercises of creativity and

intentionality on the part of the gardener-authors. They add to the arrangement and order of the garden, and add meaning to the space in light of the use and purpose intended for it. And since they are material human fabrications, they are also, intentional or not, ways of leaving cultural imprints – in the case of Chambers’ inscriptions, literal cultural imprints – on the garden spaces.

5.3.5 *Textuality in the personal garden*

Every stone in my garden is a story, every tree a poem.... What I know is that I live in this place where words are made. What we are is a garden. I believe that.

(Lane, 304)

Chambers’ literary inscriptions illustrate a more contemporary aspect of landscape study – landscape as text – which I did not, quite frankly, expect to find directly demonstrated in the gardening literature selected for study. This landscape as text metaphor, though it experienced somewhat of a renaissance when geography took its cultural turn (Norton 2000, 295-7), is actually not completely new to geography. Sauer and Jackson, for example, ‘read’ the landscapes they studied. As early as 1979, Lewis put forward seven axioms, still referenced today (Forbes 2000, 126; Atkins et al. 1998, 277), for reading the American landscape. Today the landscapes ‘read’ most closely by geographers are urban spaces, with their complex webs of symbols and messages.

Yet ordinary, little landscapes such as personal gardens also have messages to send – a fact recognised by the gardener-authors, who all make some sort of textual or narrative reference with respect to their gardens and gardening activities, either in the sense of a landscape to be read, or a landscape to be written, or both. Some of the references are relatively cursory, mere snippets, while others are longer metaphorical threads weaving through the entire personal gardening book.

5.3.5.1 “Reading” the garden

Lane, for example, considers each tree in his garden to be a poem, each stone to be a story (Lane, 304), each piece of wood from the woodpile to be a story (Lane, 72). The whole earth, he points out, has a story to tell if we but stop, listen, and reflect (Lane, 301). Ackerman similarly writes about different sorts of stories told by nature (Ackerman, 176-7), about flowers as poems to be consulted for delight (Ackerman, 94), as whispering “some of life’s oldest secrets” (Ackerman, 95). She mentions “reading” the commerce in the garden through vole tunnels, deer droppings, and bird, squirrel and rabbit tracks (Ackerman, 237) during the winter when she searches for “eye-catching phenomena, scraps of life, or remains that tell a *story* [my emphasis]” (Ackerman, 233).

Both Lane and Stein also ‘read’ woodpiles in their gardens. Stein’s woodpile *records*, in her words, an archaeology of clearing from the time when she and her husband gardened in the typical “clean, spare” (Stein, 9) suburban gardening tradition and removed trees for the wrong reasons (because the tree was fallen and dead or because the tree was undesirable), to recent years when trees have been removed for what she now considers to be the right reasons, such as the thinning out of common species from the woodland to allow light needed by a less common species to thrive (Stein, 196-7). Lane’s reading is less complex because he views his woodpile as simply a history of his time there, in the garden space. “It’s like digging down through layers of my life,” he writes. “Each chunk I pick up is a story” (Lane, 72).

Chambers, for his part, wonders what the agricultural landscape reveals about the human inhabitants who used to live there. He asks what he can read with respect to questions such as “What is it that they wanted, the people who founded this place? What do their evidences suggest: their trees and their plants and what is left of their flowerbeds?” (Chambers, 38). The past, he points out later, is

a part of Stonyground's text, including his text, the text of his mother's generation, and of a "much longer generation going back as far as naming and memory" (Chambers, 118) – all the texts and stories part of his heritage with respect to the farm.

Our human landscape is our unwitting autobiography, reflecting our tastes, our values, our aspirations, and even our fears, in tangible, visible form.

(Lewis, 12)

5.3.5.2 "Writing" the garden ... writing oneself ... onto the land

Chambers, with the literary inscriptions already mentioned, is writing himself into the landscape (Chambers, 220), and possibly also, in the words of Mike Crang, "writing power on the land" (Crang 1998, 36). Whether or not his inscriptions are expressions of power, Chambers is making his presence known on the land and can therefore, as Whiteson puts it, "assume the authority of an author" (Whiteson, 37).

Whiteson, in fact, assumes almost literal authorship of the garden and authority over it through his "green novel" concept which, as mentioned earlier, casts the garden in terms of a plot, chapters, and narrative sequences (Whiteson, 11-13); it also includes the idea of plant clusters as paragraphs, and of single plants as sentences or phrases that keep the garden story moving (Whiteson, 12). Throughout the book, Whiteson makes textual references to his garden. He writes, for example, about the "narrative character" (Whiteson, 74) of the garden, of the "narrative layers" of his evolving garden story (Whiteson, 94), of the "narrative detail" contributed by the various artefacts he adds to the garden landscape. "Like vivid words or phrases", he writes, "the stones, driftwood, and other scavenged and collected items enriched the garden's texture" (Whiteson, 89).

The green novel metaphor is so strong in *A Garden Story*, that the lines between Whiteson's gardening and writing activities end up becoming blurred. At some point along the way, he begins to

see the two as interchangeable metaphors. “If a garden could be thought of as a green novel”, he writes, “a novel might be imagined as a white garden, words planted on the page”, a word-garden (Whiteson, 104). His creative energy ends up flowing both ways when he starts a new novel following his recovery from the depression caused by the ‘death’ of the first one. The garden’s tremendous energy, he writes, inspires him to “sprout words”, with thoughts of gardening and thoughts of writing becoming entwined, he writes, “like twin vines flourishing day and night in my head”, imprinting the garden on his spirit, and his spirit on the garden (Whiteson, 132-133) in a symbiotic sort of relationship.

Chambers is also imprinting his spirit, literally, onto the Stonyground gardens with his literary inscriptions. He writes:

Probably these inscriptions seem the most bewildering (and perhaps infuriating) aspect of the garden to most visitors. Their largely private significance (they’re primarily for my enjoyment) seems exclusive to those who aren’t in the know, but then the same would be true of a hockey game to a Tibetan. The simplest explanation is that they’re my writing back into the landscape the texts that arose from it and that, in turn, inspired me in the first place (Chambers, 88).

Some of the inscriptions are inspired by gardening writers, others by literati associated with Chambers’ alter-ego as an English professor, yet with all of the inscriptions, installations and monuments he is ‘writing’ into the Stonyground landscape, Chambers is leaving signs of his inhabitation of the farm and of the meanings he attributes to it, as did previous generations who left evidences such as trees, plants and what remains of flowerbeds (Chambers, 38). All these evidences left at Stonyground through the years and decades – botanical, literary, memorial – leave a mix of cultural traces which are open to interpretation by those who encounter them and read meaning into them.

A further cultural trace, Chambers’ book, *Stonyground*, adds another textual element to the mix of cultural traces just mentioned, which are, as the author points out, in themselves texts. There is, he

writes, “no one text in its [the book’s] writing”,

any more than in the making of the garden itself; all the texts interweave with one another. Somewhere in the centre of this book is the chronology of it all, but the structure of the book as a whole is almost as obscure as the origin of the spider’s web. Many texts are here – cultural, personal, historical, botanical – all of them leaking into the discourse of one another and creating something that even I will not understand, probably, until years from now ... if then (Chambers, 84).

This intriguing statement makes an implicit reference to intertextuality – essentially the construction of a new text by reference to other texts, a cultural practice widely practised in the western world (Forbes 2000, 124) and increasingly discussed in cultural geography – as regards both gardening and writing. The intertextuality, the mutual referencing, of Chambers’ *Stonyground* garden and his book of the same name, can be viewed fairly straightforwardly as the garden influencing what is written in the book, and what is written in the book influencing how the garden is perceived and esteemed. Yet the intertextuality could also extend to the texts of the inscriptions, which are woven into the spirit of the gardener, into the creativity behind the garden/garden-text, and into the book about the garden (which contains numerous additional literary quotes), and which are physically inscribed into the garden. Not only that, the story of the garden is interwoven, as Chambers points out, with other cultural, personal, historical, and botanical texts. One text missing from that list, however, is the social text, which is curious, because the interactive aspect of *Stonyground* is important to Chambers, as will be discussed later in this chapter.

Chambers’ *Stonyground*, both the book and the garden of the same name, are particularly interesting in terms of the garden as text, for the reasons just mentioned, and because some of the garden’s most prevalent artefacts are literary inscriptions physically engraved into the landscape of the garden, and represented in the book both textually through descriptions and visually through photographs. Yet each of the books under study can be understood in terms of their textuality, with respect to both writability and readability. They could also be further discussed with respect to their

garden-book intertextuality – the garden, in each case, as an inspiration for the book; the book as a representation of a particular ‘reading’, or interpretation, of that garden space, sometimes with direct garden-as-text metaphors; and each book now contributing to informing this thesis, another reading and interpretation, and another text, this time of the books which portray the gardens, which adds yet another intertextual layer to the ongoing consideration and study of the personal garden space.

5.3.6 *Reflecting and fitting into the gardener’s culture*

Modern culture is a garden culture. It defines itself as a perfect arrangement for human conditions. It constructs its own identity out of distrust of nature. In fact it defines itself and nature, through its endemic distrust of spontaneity and its longing for a better and necessarily artificial, order. The order, first conceived of as a design, determines what is a tool, what is raw material, what is a weed or pest ...
(Zygmunt Bauman, quoted in Szabo 2002)

Another way to understand the personal garden as a cultural landscape – as a visual construct, as a physical space created and maintained by the gardener, or as a text read and written by the gardener – is within the gardener’s cultural context, both the conceptual context of a gardening approach or tradition, and the physical context of the greater cultural landscape.

5.3.6.1 **Reflecting cultural influences**

In the books under study, the gardener-authors all acknowledge a cultural influence of some sort on their garden vision, design and physical arrangement. Ackerman (39-42 and 224-226), Harris (1999, 38 and 1995, “A seminal book”), and Chambers (49), for example, all identify particular individuals, representing both North American and European gardening cultures, as influencing them as gardeners.

Chambers acknowledges additional distinct cultural influences – principally the English landscape gardening tradition, which he makes reference to at various points in the book. He writes, for example, of the tour of English gardens which provides him with ideas to translate into his own garden space (Chambers, 37-8), and of the interchange 18th-century gardeners saw between the garden

and the landscape, specifically of Philip Southcote's concept of a 'ferme ornée' (Chambers, 8). Chambers seems pleased that his gardens appear to be acquiring the "twin aspects of surprise and variety" which he identifies as the hallmark of the early eighteenth-century English landscape (Chambers, 50). Yet other parts of the Stonyground gardens are shaped according to additional historical inspirations. The vegetable garden, for example, which Chambers calls the 'Potager', is a "poor-man's imitation of the most elegant French vegetable garden ... on the Loire at Villandry", as well as a re-creation of the earliest Canadian vegetable gardens at Nova Scotia's Fortress of Louisbourg (Chambers, 25-6). All these historical influences steep Stonyground in a sense of permanence – due, in part, to its link with family heritage, as well as the illusion the gardens create that they have been there all the time – a false impression which gives Chambers great pleasure (Chambers, xxii).

While Chambers is inspired by certain gardening traditions, other gardener-authors rebel against them. Whiteson, for example, expresses his dislike for the "boring rose beds, bland lawns" and "emblematic yuccas" that characterise gardens in his neighbourhood, as well as the smugness of formal roses, tulips and irises. His own front garden contains an atypical "wild assortment of vegetation" (Whiteson, 57). Harris also writes about her aversion to conventional foundation plantings (Harris 1999, 100), to standard garden design based on the principle of "big plants at the back and little ones in front" (Harris 1999, 52), and particularly to the North American lawn tradition which she resents for the resources which go into keeping it mowed, fed, dethatched, and weeded; for the water used to keep it green during summer droughts; and for the chemicals used to fertilize it and keep it immaculate (Harris 1995, "Grass"). Harris' garden, in contrast, is all flowers, trees and shrubs.

Rebellion against the conventional gardening culture and lawns implied by Whiteson and Harris

actually constitutes the approach Stein takes to establishing the gardens she describes in *Noah's Garden*. It is a rebellion against the gardening approach she originally took when she 'cleaned up' her brushy, multi-acre suburban property which was re-growing from pasture to forest, and which provided productive habitat for a variety of wildlife. The result of the 'cleaning up' – the rock hauling, vine pulling, ground breaking, brush clearing and garden bed digging – was landscaped grounds and gardens typical of the spare North American landscaping and gardening tradition (Stein, 9). The standards which guide this gardening tradition, Stein points out, arose from the dictates of a gardening style historically based on class distinctions and an emphasis on symbols – symbols of status in the form of, for example, North America's little lawns, descended from the great lawns that demonstrated the extent of a landowner's holdings, or the "shorn foundation plantings around our houses" which have their roots in the topiary and grand hedges that required maintenance by a team of gardeners (Stein, 16).

The current North American translation of the tradition, she writes, has resulted in a landscape that is "Yards and gardens patched with grass and stitched with hedges all across America ... a vast, nearly continuous, and terribly impoverished ecosystem" (Stein, 18) which has devastated rural ecology, reduced habitat to dangerously low levels, wiped out entire communities of plants and insects, and caused both local extinctions and the almost total extinctions of fragile species (Stein, 9-10). Recognising her role in adding to this ecological impoverishment on her own land, Stein embarks on 'unbecoming' a traditional suburban gardener and undoing the ecological devastation wrought in her garden in an attempt to bring back "some portion of the missing animals list" (Stein, 13) – the animals which had been present on the land when she first moved in, but which had been "banished" (Stein, 9) when the grounds were cleaned up.

This reversal of habitat destruction, with the goal of reconnecting plant and animal species and rebuilding “intelligent suburban ecosystems”, characterises the new North American gardening culture Stein calls for, a culture which involves a new kind of garden, new gardening techniques, and, she stresses, a new kind of gardener (Stein, 16). She adds that gardeners own a big chunk of the country (Stein, 16), and that if all would set aside a portion of the yard to plant, “if not altogether naturally, then at least in a way not alien to the theoretic ecosystem in which one lives”, the suburban landscape could eventually perform its own pest control, conserve its own water, maintain its own soil, and support its own animal associates (Stein, 44–45), functioning according to the ecological Master Plan she mentions elsewhere in the book. Stein adds, as a final statement:

... how quickly we could grow this land, spangle it with blazing stars [a species of native wildflower], stripe it with red winterberries and white summersweet, let it wave again with grass!
 Grow America!
 Sounds like a bumper sticker.
 Join the club (Stein, 19).

5.3.6.2 Fitting into the greater cultural landscape context

It is clear that Stein’s garden does not fit into the contemporary greater suburban landscape ideologically. Yet it may not, ironically, stand out too much physically. Stein points out that the changes she and her husband have made are not terribly apparent in the context of the surrounding cultural landscape. “The lot is still landscaped, the gardens are intact” she writes, “but less is mowed, the choice of plants is different, and thickets have replaced some open beds. Although we have fewer flower borders, there are flowers everywhere all year except in the winter, when there are berries, holly red and inky black, and grasses, bronze and gold” (Stein, 18).). The changes to the land, insignificant from a visual viewpoint, are significant from an ecological perspective, judging by the increase in wildlife to the garden (Stein, 18 and 57). Yet because of its subtlety, Stein’s ecological format could also work on a smaller scale, in keeping with her new suburban landscape vision.

“While our property is large”, she states, “the plantings would fit anywhere – hedgerows instead of hedge (no trimming required); beds of prairie flowers (put away your hose, your pesticide sprayers); inkberries under oak trees (feed the birds for free): abundance” (Stein, 18). Perhaps the format could even work in an urban setting.

Whiteson’s garden is the opposite of Stein’s in the sense that it doesn’t fit into its cultural landscape context physically. The gardens of Hollywood’s gentrified Spaulding Square neighbourhood where the author lives display a uniformity resulting from the region’s particular gardening approach: maintenance of the “boring rose beds” and “bland lawns” (Whiteson, 57). Whiteson rebels against by hired Latinos who, “Armed with noisy, polluting leaf blowers and sputtering, rusty lawn mowers” create what Whiteson describes as “a landscape of gardens well kept but unstroked by hands-on affection like pampered kids whose parents were too busy to cuddle them” (Whiteson, 56-7). In that context, Whiteson’s personally tended front garden – with its “wild assortment of vegetation” including large and small trees, as well as an unusual combination of grasses and flowers – sticks out in the street, attracting the attention of passers-by, as well as the suspicion of individuals who, “astonished that a homeowner would be doing his own gardening, especially the back-breaking work of digging and planting”, stop to question his intentions (Whiteson, 56-7). People in that neighbourhood may be even more suspicious, and alarmed, were they to see the varied and eccentric artefacts in Whiteson’s back garden, particularly the totem poles his wife finds verge on voodoo (Whiteson, 97). Yet, considered within the wider context of Los Angeles – a city the author describes as both mad and bland, wacky and smug, with a “jumbled cityscape” (Whiteson, 19) – Whiteson’s quirky and fantastic back garden may fit right conceptually.

The personal gardens portrayed in the literature selected for study are all affected by a cultural

context of some sort – either positively as a reflection of the culture identified by the gardener-author, or negatively as a rebellion against the recognised culture. The extent to which the gardens fit into their physical cultural landscape context is also polarised; the gardens either fit in, or they stick out. Both these polarisations can be understood with respect to each gardener's agency, his or her freedom and capacity to shape their garden space with a view to creating a certain effect, to fulfilling a certain purpose, to preserving a certain meaning – in some cases in accordance with, in other cases in rebellion against the prevailing culture.

A true garden is never apart from its landscape. It arises from it like Eve from Adam's rib; it makes love to the fields in the language of botany. What I am doing in the gardens of Stonyground speaks back to the landscape what I have learned from it.

(Chambers xiii)

As spaces viewed, designed, shaped, and maintained by gardeners through their individual creativity, intentionality and agency for effect and meaning ranging from visual to ecological, creative to traditional/historical, the personal gardens portrayed in the literature selected for study certainly qualify as cultural landscapes. 'Humanised' and 'cultured', they reflect, on an individual scale, Sauer's vision of the cultural landscape as land shaped and fashioned through ongoing interaction between cultures and the physical environment (Sauer, 1929). Even Stein's ecologically oriented gardens, which, in following the general outlines of surrounding ecosystems (Stein, 74) ideally require less maintenance – though she does write about having to continuously 'weed out' out seedling of invasive non-native buckthorn trees (Stein, 199) – are reconstructions of natural habits imagined and planned, installed and planted, arranged and positioned through deliberate human design and effort for the desired effect, even if that effect models as closely as possible the habitats Stein observes in the surrounding landscape.

Stein, along with the other gardener-authors, must impose order on the nonhuman, living things of

the garden to achieve and maintain certain effects and purposes – essentially to maintain the garden's cultural landscape, which is reinforced through artefacts and constructions which add meaning to the space and leave a tangible cultural imprint. Yet control is uncertain, even illusory, as implied by Ackerman (245) and Lane (100) in a space subjected to natural processes and shared with other life forms beyond the gardener's control, as will be discussed in the following chapters. Order and uncertainty, culture and nature. These are two of the dualities which contribute to the essential duality at the core of the personal garden.

Further dualities revealed by the author-gardeners with respect to their personal gardens add additional geographical meaning to the space, specifically in terms of cultural geography. The personal garden as either reflecting or repelling cultural influences, and the personal garden space as either blending in with or sticking out from the physical cultural landscape context is one example. The personal garden as a text to be either read or written, is another, although texts could be both written and read. The fact, furthermore, that the personal gardening books under study are cultural representations of the physical space, and that in writing this thesis I am producing a representation of representations of physical spaces – and within it offering glimpses of my own personal garden space in another strand of representation – adds to the cultural and intertextual complexity of personal gardens as they are portrayed in this study.

Chapter 6 The personal garden as a natural space

...however precise the planning, gardening is always about change, dynamic, shifting change – sometimes fortuitous, sometimes heartbreaking, always revealing. Every success and every failure tell us something about the garden, about the appropriateness of our inclinations, about the insistence of nature's imperatives. We can fiddle around at the edges, pushing zones, testing tolerance, but the essential fact is that nature calls the shots.

(Johnson 1998, "Introduction")

As much as the personal gardens in the literature selected for study are 'cultured' and 'humanised' spaces, they are also natural spaces – the other side of the personal garden's essential duality. It is the natural component of the *landscape* metaphor – reflecting Sauer's vision of human-nonhuman interaction in the landscape (Sauer 1929, 46), Jackson's human-nonhuman, community-environment, city-countryside landscape unity perspective (Meinig 1979c, 228-229; Cosgrove 1984, 35), and Meinig's landscape as nature, habitat, and system metaphors (Meinig 1979b 34-39) – which reveals personal gardens to be micro-environments connecting with the greater physical landscape, containing abiotic features which play interesting roles in the space, and attracting a variety of biological organisms which carry out activities and interactions according to an agency all their own. The *microcosm* metaphor, for its part, fills in the environmental background of the personal gardens in the books as spaces rooted in the soil, exposed to the air, and generally affected by both greater natural forces and wider human activities.

In a twist on the words of physical geographer Nick Spedding, who writes that as much as landscape and environment study is a problem of natural processes, it also involves political, ethical and cultural issues (Spedding 2003, 303) – the domain, traditionally, of human geography – I, a geographer working from the human perspective, am exploring the cultural phenomenon of the personal garden as a problem not just of human processes, but also in light of nonhuman and environmental (atmospheric, ecological, biological, etc.) considerations in an effort to find as much

geographical meaning as possible in the space as it is portrayed in personal gardening literature. What I am considering specifically in this study, in the spirit of Lewis, who stresses that the understanding of cultural landscapes necessitates some basic knowledge of the physical landscape (Lewis 1979, 24-26), is *awareness* demonstrated by the gardener-authors of nonhuman phenomena in the personal garden. The goal is not to evaluate the soundness of the information the authors use and communicate, but rather to gain a sense of the importance of physical-geography-related notions to their perception of their own personal gardens, and the place and significance of the nonhuman within that space.

6.1 The personal garden and the greater whole

The *microcosm* metaphor shows the personal gardens portrayed in the literature selected for study to be mini-worlds affected by wider natural processes, impacted by greater human activities, and generally reflecting the greater whole beyond the garden's boundaries.

6.1.1 *The personal garden as a space affected by natural processes*

All the books under study contain content about greater natural forces affecting the garden – forces which are beyond the control of the gardener-authors.

6.1.1.1 The atmosphere

The most obvious natural systems and processes affecting the garden being atmospheric, it is not surprising that all authors write about climate, or seasonal rhythms, or weather patterns affecting their gardens. Marjorie Harris, who gardens in Toronto, writes that she must accept the temperature extremes which “drive most Torontonians crazy. ... mild flows of southwesterly winds in winter,

followed by frigid northwest circulation”; she adds that the “freeze-thaw cycles and drastic temperature changes make cautious gardeners of us all” (Harris 1999, x). Patrick Lane writes about his garden’s location on Vancouver Island as being “a gardener’s dream”: “The temperatures are mild year-round. It might slip down below freezing but only for a few days. Only the rare winter threatens a minor frost. It rains during the winter months but only half as much as in Vancouver” (Lane, 22). Yet the dream is deflated at times, such as periods of drought, when the garden suffers (Lane, 61). Leon Whiteson, writing on the same side of the continent, but much farther south in the Los Angeles region, also mentions drought – in particular the six-year California drought which coincides with the beginnings of his garden, and which he counteracts by hand-watering, thereby staying within established water rations (Whiteson, 84). This long drought is followed by the other extreme: heavy rains, which draw hordes of earthworms to the surface of his garden (Whiteson, 136-7). Another weather extreme in Whiteson’s garden comes during winter storms, when the powerful winds threaten to snap the trunks of slender trees he has attempted to secure in his garden (Whiteson, 156).

High winds threaten Ackerman’s garden too, in the sense of defeating measures she takes to counteract a different atmospheric threat common in her garden’s northeastern United States location: the first hard frost of the fall season. The winds mean she is unable to stabilize protective sheets over beds where vulnerable plants, such as roses still budding, grow (Ackerman, 184). Frost in the northeast is a prelude to winter, a season which, one year with particularly high snow accumulations, brings disaster to Chambers’ Stonyground gardens when a rabbit manages to stretch beyond the wrap-around sleeves protecting the young trees in the new orchard, and nibble the bark, girdling and killing over sixty trees (Chambers, 156).

Yet not all atmospheric phenomena threaten the personal garden. Some are recognised as

necessary and welcome – like sunlight, exposure to which Whiteson acknowledges as “the main elemental force shaping the garden” (Whiteson, 75); like the consistent snow cover Harris describes as the ultimate mulch (Harris 1999, 138); and like rain, “the water that falls from heaven” (Lane, 147), which gives life to the garden (Lane, 61) and offers welcome relief from dry weather and hand watering (Lane, 175). Other atmospheric elements are downright enchanting. Harris, for example, writes of sitting in the garden, watching the moon rise, its light giving “a kind of sheen, a lustre to plants all other lights fail to do. ... Moonlight becomes a garden most of all” (Harris 1995, “Moonlight”). Chambers writes about a heavy and wet November snow clinging to the gates, hedges and tall shrub-roses at Stonyground, and transforming the gardens “like a magical reblooming” (Chambers, 212). Even Harris’ garden furniture, left outside in the winter, holds the snow and casts beautiful shadows (Harris 1999, 130).

As I write this chapter on a violent winter day in February, when the storm has closed all the roads in the county for two days, I rejoice in the power of nature to call all the arrogant patriarchal noise-making of our culture to a halt. And I remember now that that is how I felt as a child. Here at last was something that could stop the adults and their smug complacency about the engineering of the world.

(Chambers, 43)

Threatening, necessary, or enchanting, atmospheric systems and processes are phenomena which gardeners cannot control. These phenomena affect the garden and gardening activities in different – some positive, some negative – and often highly visible ways. The best a gardener can do to try to counteract, or prevent, negative impacts and to maintain the desired effect of the garden is to muster his or her agency and take measures such as hand watering in times of drought, tying trees during storms, and covering vulnerable plants to protect them from frost, as the gardener-authors demonstrate.

6.1.1.2 Other natural systems and processes

I expected atmospheric processes, considering their visibility and impact on gardens, as well as on everyday life, to be discussed more often than other natural processes. Yet I was pleasantly surprised to discover the gardener-authors writing about additional greater environmental systems working in the garden, recognising the importance of certain of those processes to the space of the garden and garden-related activities, and linking some of the processes to other natural phenomena.

Both Whiteson (Whiteson, 79) and Stein for example, write about plants and photosynthesis, with Stein going further to connect photosynthesis with her woodland's capacity to take up carbon and supply oxygen (Stein, 27). Both Stein (Stein, 54) and Ackerman write about pollination, with Ackerman focusing on pollination by wind (Ackerman, 162). Harris describes another plant process, the one by which plants gradually slow down activity for the winter season (Harris 1999, 136), with Ackerman adding further ingenious strategies which help plants survive winter outdoors, such as hiding underground as roots and bulbs, "crammed with food ... until it's safe to grow leaves again" or secreting alcohols and sugars as a kind of antifreeze to lower the temperature at which cell walls would burst (Ackerman, 171).

Strangely, Ackerman does not, anywhere in her book, write about the soil where the bulbs and tubers hide out for the winter, and where her plants grow and thrive. Yet soil – its processes and effects much less visible than those of atmospheric phenomena – is a preoccupation with certain of the other authors who recognise its importance. Patrick Lane's thoughts, for example, turn biospheric, then pedospheric, as he looks over the garden in winter and muses on what is happening under the earth where roots are "pushing out their feeder tips in that living layer called dirt":

Everything is alive in the skin of this planet. The worms and nematodes, the bacteria and fungi are spreading their lives beneath the surface. They are breaking things down and building things up. The plants feed off their living and their dying. Without this crust of earth we have nothing. I think of pure sand. I love to hold it in my cupped hands. ... Yet most people hesitate before picking up a clod of damp earth. It is full of secret

life and that worries them. There is something inside the dark, moist granules and it unnerves them, makes them uneasy. What is in there, they ask?

By way of response to the question, he proceeds to the compost bin and dips his hands into the “soft fluffy substance” which is alive with worms (Lane, 37-8).

Harris adds the roles worms play in digesting organic material and consequently fertilising the soil (Harris 1999, 113), while Stein writes about the roles – herbivorous, predatory, or scavenging – of other organisms in the digestion of organic waste and the process of “converting plant waste to soil wealth”. She continues by describing plant waste as being “stripped to simplicity, pared to microscopy, disassembled step by step toward its eventual re-ascent in the tissues of a living plant” (Stein, 128), in a quick sketch of the decomposition and fertilisation processes, which, Harris points out, are little understood. “We really don’t know much about soil” she writes. “We do know that its structure is so enormously complicated, we’ve barely begun to analyze this richest part of the biosphere” (Harris 1995, “Digging”). Soil is also first on the list of essential environmental services Stein describes in a passage which warrants reproduction in full since it mentions diverse garden-related environmental processes and puts gardening activities in an interesting perspective:

We compost leaves and think we know something about making soil. It takes trillions of minute to microscopic organisms of thousands of species to decay to soil those leaves we think we compost. We haven’t identified more than a tiny fraction of these organisms, much less understood their individual contributions or imagined the complex relationships among them by which the task is done. We sow seeds and think we know something about growing plants, yet the number of seeds we plant are a spoonful compared to the oceans of seeds planted by other animals that in their combined feasts and feces, travels, trappings, burrowings, and stashings clothe the world in greenery. Consider having to pollinate by hand one’s own garden flowers, as I must do with a certain gourd I grow because its night-flying moth is absent. The few kinds of pesticides gardeners keep on hand contain perhaps a dozen chemicals, whereas the varied species in a meadow use hundreds and house in addition a host of insect predators. We piddle around with hose and cloche, shade cloth and cold frame, while any little strip of woods or wetland conserves, filters, purifies, and recycles water; controls floods, checks erosion, builds soil, makes clouds, slows wind, and moderates air temperatures.

We can’t do without these environmental services. We don’t know how to manage them ourselves (Stein, 15).

The entire passage, and the last statement in particular, is a strong point in favour of working *with* natural processes providing essential services within the garden and beyond its boundaries.

6.1.2 *The personal garden as impacted by greater human activities*

Natural processes are not the only forces at work in the garden. Greater human activities – as opposed to an individual gardener’s direct actions in the actual space – can also affect personal gardens, though often less obviously than many natural processes. Considering the implicit nature of the effect of greater human activities on gardens, it is not surprising that the gardener-authors under study do not write about them as much. Nevertheless, certain authors make interesting connections between their gardens and greater human activities.

Harris, for example, worries about the practise of spraying salt on roads in the winter, because the salt, toxic to plants, can splash onto the garden from the street in front of the house, or get tracked on boots to the garden space behind the house. She describes the difficulty of counteracting this threat to the garden, since symptoms of damage appear gradually and plants may be affected profoundly over a long period of time (Harris 1999, 22).

Stein reaches back in time to historic human activities and their impacts on gardens and gardening in the present. The settlement of North America, which brought European field weeds such as dandelion, chickweed, nightshade and stinging nettle – many now the bane of gardeners – to the continent is one such activity. Many of the weeds, Stein points out, accidentally hitched rides in ship ballast and cattle feed, and many were also deliberately imported for purposes of medicine, livestock feed, fabric dyes, and garden ornamentation. These plants, adapted to disturbed agricultural land, had an advantage over most native species when it came to growing in areas characterised by mowing, ploughing, heat, compacted soil, sterile earth, and cattle grazing (Stein, 37); these same species now appear in the continually disturbed and open soils of gardens.

Stein also points out other impacts of European settlement on the land. “Starting in the 1620s”, she

writes,

the European settlers systematically clear-cut the forest that had maintained the land in abundance and diversity for some ten thousand years. In less than two centuries, each individual's picking added up to a collective assault so powerful as to literally make the streams run dry. Leaching, erosion, compaction, and dessication forced the abandonment of fields and pastures in New England and throughout the East beginning in the nineteenth century when, in the great westward migration, farmers plowed their way beyond the forest belt onto the rich American plains (Stein, 21).

It is on a patch of this degraded farmland that Stein's contemporary suburban garden is located. Her land is located in an area where despairing farmers about to abandon their fields dealt a final "coup de grâce" to the land: scraping it of topsoil to supply to the World's Fair in 1939. Any topsoil remaining when Stein moved there was at the bottom of the hill "where topsoil had accumulated against the old farm walls". The rest of the soil on Stein's portion of the slope was "pale, hard, dry, and sterile" (Stein, 17-21) – not conducive to successful gardening. Stein also discusses land use practises in terms of the eventual suburban expansion into these abandoned farming areas, and the accompanying spread of the traditional landscaping and gardening practises, with their continuing ecological impacts.

Contemporary, as in the case of the road salt and continuing suburban gardening practises, or historical, as in the importation of European weeds and degradation of farm land – the impacts of greater human activities and practises trickle down as far as the space of the personal garden – a space connected to the greater whole, and in some cases, a reflection of it.

6.1.3 The personal garden as a reflection of the greater whole

Although all the gardener-writers under study convey a sense of their gardens being connected to the greater whole through natural processes, and some through greater human activities, not many of them communicate a perception of their gardens as actual microcosms reflecting the greater whole.

One who does is Whiteson, who writes of his garden as including plant species from every

continent and climate zone, “from Asia to Africa, from the alpine to the tropical (Whiteson, 85-87).

As such, it is a space which could be considered a microcosm of the world’s botany. Stein recognises in her garden even more: a diversity of topography and habitat representative of the greater world.

She even goes so far as to identify what is missing from her microcosm when she writes that:

The lowest portion is a ferny wetland thick with skunk cabbage and laced with shallow rivulets. A smallish pond, dug by a suburbanite in the 1940s, trickles into the wetland and is itself filled by runoff from the upland to the east, where our land rises toward the dawn. There are two woodland patches, both small: one to the far side of the pond, due south; the other, a strip on the opposite side of the property to the north. Between those shaded bounds is a hillside that begins against the rising sun with a high granite outcrop; as the slope descends first steeply, then gently, toward the sunset, it protrudes again here and there in knobs of various sizes. We therefore have as playground for our hubris dry heights, wet lowlands, and every grade between. Absent are extremes of climate: no desert, tropics, mountainside or ocean floor. Rocks are ubiquitous. Sand is rare (Stein, 13-14).

Stein calls this land an “excellent laboratory” (Stein, 13) for her habitat restoration activities.

It's [the garden] a place of harmony, of balance, and it is made from living things. All creatures that fly, swim, burrow, crawl, or run are here.

(Lane, 14)

The personal gardens portrayed in the literature selected for study are *all* microcosms, mini-worlds which reflect the larger whole beyond their boundaries, affected as they are by different natural processes, variously impacted by greater human activities – including those of the gardener attempting to counteract, or trying to work with, natural forces beyond his or her control. Each of the gardens is, after all, made up of, or affected by, elements found in the greater world: soil (pedosphere), water (hydrosphere), weather (atmosphere), plants and other biological organisms (biosphere), underlying geological features (lithosphere), and more, which provide the essential conditions – “environmental services” in the word of Stein (Stein, 15) – for the nonhuman elements of the garden discussed in the next section to grow and thrive. These services include sunlight needed by plants to perform their process of photosynthesis, as well as soil to provide a base and nutrients for the plants to germinate and grow. Flowering plants, in turn, attract insects who seek nectar and who perform processes of pollination, while shrubs and trees attract birds seeking shelter, food, and nesting sites, with the birds

helping the tree's reproduction process by eating the fruit and eliminating the seeds at a distance from the parent plant. The mini-world of the personal garden, it could be said, provides the fundamentals – the 'groundwork' to use a gardening analogy – for the presences, comings and goings, activities and transactions of the nonhuman elements of the garden's micro-environment.

6.2 The personal garden as a micro-environment

All the gardener-authors of the books under study demonstrate a certain awareness of nonhuman aspects of their personal gardens, to varying degrees and levels, from their individual gardening perspectives. I was struck, in fact, by the breadth of knowledge some of the authors show of certain nonhuman garden presences and phenomena. Not only do they write about the big picture, about their gardens fitting into the physical landscape, they also narrow their gaze to describe nonhuman residents and visitors in the personal garden spaces, as well as additional nonhuman elements and transactions which occur there. Between them, the various gardener-authors paint a fascinating and vibrant portrait of the personal garden as a natural space, a micro-environment.

6.2.1 *The personal garden fitting into the greater physical landscape*

Most of the gardener-authors write about their gardens as somehow being part of a larger physical, or nonhuman, landscape beyond the confines of their garden spaces in an echo of Jackson's community-environment, city-countryside landscape unity perspective (Meinig 1979c, 228-229; Cosgrove 1984, 35).

Douglas Chambers' perspective on his Stonyground gardens fitting into the surrounding landscape is particularly interesting because of its multiple facets: botanical, with a horticultural-aesthetic twist, as well as geomorphological, hydrological, and ecological. His unique botanical-horticultural-

aesthetic perspective is the notion of the landscape as having its own garden. “Anyone who has ever walked in a farm in southern Ontario”, he writes,

knows that the landscape has its own garden: bloodroot and dog-tooth violets ... in spring, and oxeye daisies, blue-eyed grass, and buttercups in early summer; and later, Queen Anne’s lace and clover, the little wild snapdragon commonly called ‘toadflax’, the two mallows pink and white, and the lovely intense yellow of bird’s-foot trefoil, black-eyed Susans, goldenrod ... common mullein ... and in the damp spots, the wild anemone and blue and red lobelias and Joe-Pye weed and the wild white chelone (Chambers, 12).

Later in the book, he adds the landscape’s autumn garden, with its colourful asters, dried flower heads, and, of course, flaming leaf colour (Chambers, 74) to the concept. Gardening, he points out, involves adding elements which are congruent with these surrounding botanical elements, and which are tough enough to handle the many imported weeds. In this way, the garden-landscape interchange he writes about elsewhere in the book with respect to the gardens’ visual-aesthetic interchange with the surrounding cultural-agricultural landscape, applies to the surrounding natural landscape as well. “The garden’s pleasures”, he writes, “are as much in the vistas out into my farmland, and my neighbours’, as in its interior spaces” (Chambers, 8). It might be appropriate to add that the vistas also include the surrounding woodlands, roadsides and field margins, where the landscape-garden’s flowers he lists grow and bloom.

Chambers also describes Stonyground in geomorphological terms as being situated on a drumlin at the end of the Singhamton moraine where it begins to fall away to the alluvial plain beyond (Chambers, 2 and 27), and in hydrological terms as being above the largest underground river in southern Ontario – a river, recently re-discovered by underwater surveyors, which leaves Georgian Bay over a subterranean waterfall and flows under the limestone bedrock of Bruce County to empty, eventually, into Lake Huron (Chambers, 78). The deep Stonyground well, he points out, connects to that underground river, which means that if the nearby town pumps too much water during a dry period, the Stonyground well will not, unlike those of his neighbours, run out of water. Yet the

underground river is unable to help the ecology of his pond one season when conditions are particularly dry and the town is pumping more than the usual amounts of water. Under those conditions, water levels sink, and the fish living in the pond eventually die, “martyrs to the lack of oxygen and the diminished water supply” (Chambers, 176).

Marjorie Harris also adds an ecological element to her garden’s place within the surrounding physical environment when she encourages thinking about gardens in a larger landscape context. She writes about the importance of “analyzing what the *landscape* has to offer”, understanding how we are connected with the natural environment, figuring out how to work with it, and being sensitive to needs other than our own. She also briefly discusses garden plots being part of a complex system wildlife depends on in the city environment, and the importance of providing habitat – food, shelter, and water – for wildlife (Harris 1995, “The larger context”) and muses, “When I contemplate how much land we gardeners own, abutting each other as we do ... I wonder why we don’t organize. We could become a powerful lobby to protect the environment” (Harris 1995, “Working with Nature”).

The idea of gardens abutting each other and connecting with natural areas in a continuous, habitat-providing landscape is what Sara Stein’s gardening efforts are all about. It is this idea of interconnection which also fuels her vision of the suburban landscape of the future: “suburbia regrowing into a continuity of woods, thickets, and meadows linking remnant refuges and reservations” (Stein, 251) and creating what she calls “intelligent suburban ecosystems” (Stein, 16) that link gardens with each other and to the greater physical landscape in a great, continuous interrelated whole benefiting the wildlife species who share the land.

6.2.2 *Nonhuman elements of the personal garden*

Even when gardens are not deliberately connected to each other and to natural areas in the

surrounding landscape as Stein's vision proposes, wildlife is present in those spaces, drawn to the vegetation planted there, to other wildlife residents or visitors, and to abiotic features such as water and stone.

6.2.2.1 Abiotic garden features

The variety of roles the gardener-authors under study ascribe to abiotic garden features such as water and stone are surprising and diverse, as are the efforts some of the gardener-authors make to enhance their garden spaces with these elements.

Stone

Leon Whiteson appears to collect stone on an ongoing basis to add to his garden. With passionate zeal, he lugs home sandstone boulders from Mulholland Drive, rounded sea stones from Malibu, granite rocks from the Ojai River, crumbly shale slabs from the San Gabriel Mountain slopes, iron red rocks from the peak of Dante's View in Death Valley, and aplite-and-gneiss-streaked round stones from the Joshua Tree National Monument (Whiteson, 88) – all to serve as icons of endurance and power in his garden, as well a collective embodiment of the surrounding landscape and emblem of its character, specifically its unstable geology.

Patrick Lane makes an annual trip to a nearby mountain to carry home to his garden a particular type of slate (Lane, 49). Lane also creates, painstakingly, a gravel-filled path intended to produce an illusion of slowly moving water – another abiotic element – complete with pebbles sliding up against a large stone and curling around it to reproduce the motion of water when it comes up against an obstruction (Lane, 113). Lane waxes particularly poetic about stones, singing to them a hymn (Lane, 113) and encouraging gardeners to add rock to their gardens (Lane, 145).

Stein, for her part, has no reason to collect stone and bring it to her garden, since rock is abundant

on her land (Stein, 13), and around the house, where she regrets replacing the loose stone under the door step with cemented brick, because the change drove away the toad who used to live there (Stein, 10). Yet chipmunks continue to flourish in the stone walls which mark the boundary of her land and connect her garden to the surrounding landscape. And as Stein adds more stone to outdoor garden constructions such as new walls, steps, and a stone ditch, chipmunks are drawn from the surrounding area to the garden space (Stein, 245).

Water

Water appears to attract wildlife more than any other abiotic garden element. Harris, for example, expresses concern about wildlife finding enough water to drink in the city when she leaves a metal bowl full of water outside for the cat and finds “every bug in the place attracted to it because they were so parched” (Harris 1995, “Water in the garden”). The fountain she ends up adding to her garden and planting with water vegetation also attracts raccoons, who tear out the plants and hurl them around “in a terrifyingly noisy way every night” (Harris 1999, 6). Stein, concerned about water and wildlife as well, sets about reversing some of the damage done to the pond on her land during her traditional suburban gardening phase when she and her husband disposed of tree trunks lying against the shore without realising turtles needed the ‘debris’ for basking (Stein, 10-11), and when they mowed vegetation along the pond’s edge, thereby facilitating fertiliser run-off from the lawn, which in turn hastened the pond’s eutrophication (Stein, 178-9). Stein sets about having the pond dredged and replanting it with native plants to rejuvenate it as habitat for wildlife in general, particularly frogs (Stein, 177-190).

Whiteson is not particularly concerned about wildlife as he works on adding the sound of water – “that essential Mediterranean tinkle and splash cooling the air, soothing the heated mind, stroking the

agitated spirit” (Whiteson, 81) – to his garden. In a flurry of activity, he installs several recirculating fountains in his garden, figures out how to “tune” them by adjusting the flow of water and distance of the throw, and sends water through plain and perforated copper pipes, and over a marble water wall, for additional “symphonic” sound effects (Whiteson, 81-3). Yet wildlife eventually enters the picture too. The fountains, Whiteson observes, with water splashing over the rims of the wooden barrels catching the flows, add micro-environments to the garden – micro-environments which “demand”, as he writes, water-loving plants to be set into the surrounding wet soil. These areas, he discovers, foster “a slimy subworld of slugs, snails, and earthworms”, which, together with the water, attract a host of birds, including house wrens, yellow warblers, robins, cedar waxwings, and hummingbirds (Whiteson, 94).

The water in Lane’s garden pond also attracts wildlife such as raccoons (Lane, 249), tree frogs, salamanders, spiders, as well as birds such as juncos (Lane, 192) and chickadees (Lane, 144) who come to bathe. And the sound of water there is important as well, though not in symphonic proportions. Lane’s garden is generally a quiet place, a “special room of retreat” hidden from view, where water essentially splashes from a bamboo spout. “There is nothing more welcome, nothing more soothing”, Lane stresses, “than the sound of water” (Lane, 191-2).

Abiotic garden features such as water and stone turn out to be surprisingly interesting nonhuman elements of the gardens portrayed in the books under study. Water and stone can reflect the greater physical landscape, as in the rocks Whiteson adds to his garden, as well as connect the garden with the surrounding landscape, as Stein’s rock walls do. Water and stone can also meet certain human needs such as Lane’s need for the soothing sound of water in his garden, as well as wildlife needs, as illustrated by the insects who come to drink at the water bowl Harris leaves in the garden for the cat.

Not only that, abiotic garden elements can create intended or unintended micro-environments, such as the moist areas which form as a result of overflow from Whiteson's fountains. And they can be the site where a gardener's relationship with the nonhuman world can be put to the test, as in the case of raccoons tearing Harris' water plants out of the fountain. "Sometimes", she writes, "trying to live cooperatively with nature in the city can be complicated" (Harris 1995, "Water in the garden") – a statement which hints at the thread of duality starting to weave through the chapter.

6.2.2.2 Botanical residents

The most obvious nonhuman elements of the personal garden are plants, which predominate in the gardens portrayed in all the books under study, and the majority of which are arranged to contribute to the desired effect of each individual garden space. Most of the gardens also contain a wide diversity of plants, as the partial or complete plant lists in all the books but one demonstrate. And most of the authors reveal a particular fondness for certain plants or groups of plants, such as Ackerman and her roses (Ackerman 102 and 128-9), Chambers and his summer lilies (Chambers, 53), Harris and her alliums (Harris 1999, 62), Stein and her blueberries (Stein, 215-16), Lane and his mosses and lichens (Lane, 131-2), and Whiteson, who prefers foliage to flowers, since leaves give most plants, shrubs and trees "their body and true presence" (Whiteson, 79).

Lane is also enchanted with botanical elements which immigrate to the garden on their own initiative, such as the lichens and mosses he loves, as well as a few delicate marsh violets. "I love it when plants appear from nowhere" he writes. "I've no idea how the violets came to be here, but they fit" in and complement the other violets inhabiting his garden, all three of which bloom here and there in garden beds and lawn patches "as if by magic" (Lane, 131-2). Less enchanted, however, is Lane with another plant which appears to have arrived in his garden on its own initiative – the creeping

buttercup, a little plant he considers among the most beautiful in the region, but unfortunately also terribly invasive. He describes it as spreading rapidly by seed and long stolons in the garden, where it dominates and smothers other plants, including the marsh violets he enjoys. Once established, Lane adds, the creeping buttercup is impossible to eliminate entirely, which is the case in his garden, where he and his wife have spent years waging a “great battle” to dig it up (Lane, 134-5). Lane calls this lovely little flower a “weed”, which he explains as follows: “A plant is a weed only if you don’t want it to grow in your garden” (Lane, 135).

With that statement and the creeping buttercup example, Lane picks up the thread of duality at the core of the personal garden – its duality as a cultural-human landscape on the one hand, and a natural-nonhuman landscape on the other. In this space viewed, designed and purposely shaped and ‘cultured’ by a gardener, natural elements which tend to be unruly, disobedient and not easily kept in order can counteract the desired effect. Those which contribute to the desired effect are *desirable*; those which threaten the desired effect are *undesirable* – another personal garden duality.

In this context, the gardener must make an effort to manage the space and maintain the desired effect and established order – possible as the gardener-authors demonstrate by the effects they appear to maintain in the spaces they write about in their books. Yet control over natural elements in the garden, as Ackerman point out, is fleeting and illusory (Ackerman, 245), the latter point echoed by Lane who writes that plants never behave as he expects them to, nor should they (Lane, 204). Ackerman, in fact, observing that in her garden anarchy rules (Ackerman, 245), stresses that compromise and uncertainty are important lessons for a gardener to learn (Ackerman, 68-9). Control and compromise, anarchy and order, management and disobedience – these are tensions which recur in the personal garden, and dualities which are mirrored in a gardener’s actions and attitudes toward

elements of the space, particularly the desirable and undesirable natural elements.

The creeping buttercup, in essence a lovely flower, is an example of an *undesirable* plant in Lane's garden. So is Creeping Jenny which, Harris writes, was originally a *desirable* plant when she planted it as a swift-spreading ground cover to hold soil in place in a certain part of her garden. Yet it became *undesirable* when it spread too far and too fast, and has continued to be unwanted since then, during the years she has spent pulling it out (Harris 1999, 44). Purple loosestrife, in Harris' words "a very destructive plant with no known enemies, that will overwhelm and destroy wetlands if it's let loose", is another unwelcome plant in Harris' garden, where the author has gone to considerable lengths, including pouring boiling water over it and exposing the roots system over the winter (Harris 1999, 110-113) to get rid of the plant – but to no avail. Ackerman, on the other hand, acknowledging that purple loosestrife is a scourge in local wetlands where it drives out other species, nevertheless cultivates the same plant in her garden, where it "keeps to itself, doesn't crowd its neighbours" (Ackerman, 69-70). These examples illustrate further tensions in the desirable-undesirable duality – that of a plant's changing status within the same garden, as in Harris' Creeping Jenny which is demoted from a desirable groundcover to undesirable weed, and that of discrepancies regarding desirable-undesirable status among individual gardeners, such as Harris' and Ackerman's attitudes toward and acceptance of purple loosestrife – the latter tension a potentially problematic one between neighbouring gardeners.

The desirable-undesirable duality also extends to trees and shrubs, an example of which Stein, who does not appear to worry too much about weeds in her ecologically oriented garden, provides in the shape of a certain ornamental, non-native buckthorn shrub, or small tree, which is unwelcome because it easily escapes cultivation and sneaks into woodlands where it grows unobserved among other

shrubs until it is too deeply rooted to be pulled out. If ignored, Stein points out, buckthorn quickly spreads and takes over woodlands, growing into thickets where nothing else can grow; she pulls out thousands of these buckthorn seedlings every year (Stein, 199). Yet this particular buckthorn was originally desirable in Stein's garden, where she planted it as a hedge (Stein, 199) – another discrepancy.

6.2.2.3 Other biological residents and visitors

Other biological residents and visitors bring out the same desirable-undesirable dualities and discrepancies in the personal gardens portrayed in the books under study. Life forms ranging from large mammals to tiny soil organisms, other biological creatures tend to have considerably more mobility than plants – flying, crawling, swimming, slithering, walking and hopping of their own free will – meaning they can come and go as they please in a nonhuman agency of sorts. This mobility makes other biological garden residents and visitors more challenging to keep in check than plants which, if unwanted, can be dug up and disposed of if they are not too firmly rooted or otherwise established.

Insects

Insects tend to be both welcome and unwelcome in the personal gardens portrayed in the books under study. Bees, for example, are appreciated by the widest range of authors – as harbingers of spring (Lane, 63), as pollinators (Lane, 103; Stein, 54; Harris 1995, “Attitude”), and as wildlife interesting to observe (Ackerman, 77; Lane, 181; Harris 1995, “Water in the garden”). Moths are enjoyed by Chambers sitting alone in his garden (Chambers, 54), and by Harris gazing at her garden in moonlight, where moths collect nectar from night-blooming flowers (Harris 1995, “Moonlight”).

Fireflies bring a visual thrill to Ackerman, who writes of firefly “auroras” being “one of the great treats of summer nights” (Ackerman, 107), and to Stein, who appreciates fireflies because they feed on slugs (Stein, 59), and who delights at their quick and dramatic return to the garden once she stops mowing the lawn (Stein, 228).

Yet Harris, on the same moonlit night she watches moths flutter around the night blossoms, imagines insect menace: countless bugs scuttling around the garden, waiting for her to go indoors so that they can “start their night of chewing away at the tasty banquet offered” (Harris 1995, “Moonlight”). She believes violence is an acceptable response to elements which threaten the plants in her garden, and she confesses to squashing intolerable insects such as earwigs and asparagus beetles (Harris 1995, “Gardeners and bugs”). Ackerman also finds certain insect presences, particularly the Japanese beetles threatening her beloved roses, intolerable. She patrols for them daily, sweeping them into a jug of soapy water where they suffocate. Yet she confesses to feeling a touch of ambivalence about the act, disturbed by the beauty of beetles’ “exquisitely rainbow-coloured” carapaces, even in death (Ackerman, 122-4).

Swimmers, hoppers, and slitherers

Ackerman does not appear to feel the same ambivalence toward the slugs which invade and threaten to devour her garden. Yet she does admire their eyes, “which sit at the tips of rubbery stalks, can be angled into dark corners, and are retractable”, and acknowledges that in certain cultures slugs are a delicacy. Yet they threaten her plants, and she employs three different strategies for getting rid of them (Ackerman, 91-2). Harris finds nothing at all admirable about slugs, and confesses to loathing them and stomping on them with relish (Harris 1995, “Slugs”).

Lane, on the other hand, who battles the slug’s snail cousins in his garden, wrestles with his

conscience in the clearest and most direct expression of yet another desirable-undesirable discrepancy – this time an internal one – which can plague a gardener’s efforts to maintain order and the desired effect of his or her ‘cultured’ garden space. “What does it mean to me that I preserve a garden”, he writes,

and then kill the creatures who also live here and whose needs are their own, just as mine are? I twist and turn on this dilemma, but there is no clear answer. The spring flowers disappear under the rasps of the slugs and snails. The slug bait I have placed in the garden is exhausted now and I will use no more. What snails have survived may eat what they will. The plants are no longer tender shoots, but have grown halfway to their maturity. What damage the snails do will be little or nothing now. I carry the burden of their many deaths with me. Thus it is for gardeners: life, death, and the beauty that arises from them (Lane, 124-5).

The dance of life and death in the garden is yet another duality played out within the ‘cultured’ space of the personal garden where the life of desired plants, and the maintenance of the garden’s beauty, is ensured by the death of life forms which threaten them – deaths caused by the gardener, who wields a power which can be troubling, and which adds another layer of tension to the gardener’s attitudes and actions regarding nonhuman elements in the personal garden space.

Other slithery creatures such as the earthworms and soil organisms previously discussed are generally appreciated by the gardener-authors under study. Fish, frogs, toads, snakes and turtles also appear to be welcome. Lane, for example, enjoys the domesticated koi and goldfish ‘planted’ in his garden pond (Lane, 176), while Stein appreciates the black racer snake on her woodpile (Stein, 86), and Ackerman delights in finding a tiny green frog sleeping inside a pink tulip (Ackerman, 43-44). The gardener-authors do not, aside from Stein, who devotes an entire chapter of her book, “Frogs: In Memoriam”, to amphibians and their decline (Stein, 173-190), write much about fish, reptiles, or amphibians.

Birds

The gardener-authors write much more about birds, a nonhuman garden presence all gardener-

authors appear to appreciate equally – even the flickers who eat the apples in Lane’s garden (Lane, 4) – with no discernible discrepancies regarding their desirability. “Birds here”, declares Chambers of his Stonyground garden, “are one of the great mysteries and delights”. He goes on to name goldfinches, orioles, bobolinks, house finches, song sparrows, and more species who appear in his garden (Chambers, 45). Harris expresses particular appreciation for the cardinals who light up her garden at the end of winter (Harris 1995, “Cardinals”), while Ackerman enjoys the hummingbirds who live in her garden in the spring and summer (Ackerman, 55 and 66), and Lane expresses delight, mingled with surprise and awe, at the large pileated woodpeckers which, he writes, “always startle me when they come in winter to feast on apples or to break chunks of bark off the maple. They are a rare bird and their annual visitation to my garden is an avian blessing” (Lane, 59).

Birds are normally a source of joy in Whiteson’s garden as well (Whiteson, 164), yet he expresses apprehension regarding a large wood stork who perches on his trellis one morning, spreading four-foot-long wings to the sun, and dwarfing all the other birds he had seen in the space. “It was like a visitor from another dimension”, he writes, “as its presence seemed to darken the sky and diminish the scale of the place”. His relief when the bird departs (Whiteson, 136) concludes the only negative reference to birds in all the books under study.

Mammals

Mammals in the garden bring the desirable-undesirable duality and tension, and related internal and external discrepancies, out once again – with interesting results concerning the human-nonhuman relationship in the garden.

Ackerman, for example, writes passionately about the presence of deer in her garden space: “I love watching the deer, which always arrive like magic or miracle or the answer to an unasked question....

Their otherworldliness stops the day in its tracks, focuses it on the hypnotic beauty of nature, and then starts the day again with a rush of wonder” (Ackerman, 6). Yet in the next paragraph, in almost the same breath, she expresses apprehension at the same deer ransacking her herb garden in summer, plundering her roses, and destroying the raised beds – the reason for fencing in most of her roses. “They are terrorists in the garden”, she declares (Ackerman, 6). Stein agrees, despite the fact that her first sighting of a doe with fawns on the land a decade earlier was “a thrill beyond description” (Stein, 79). With an accompanying ecological explanation for their population boom, which has risen beyond the carrying capacity of the land, Stein describes the reasons she now considers deer a threat to her ecological restoration efforts. These “house rats with hooves” as she calls them, eat the seedlings in her tree nursery and the baby trees growing naturally in her woodland – trees which should grow into the next generation of trees – prompting her to take a measure similar to Ackerman’s to keep the deer out. She encloses part of her land with electric fencing (Stein, 77-9).

On the other hand, Stein appreciates the wood rats Lane works hard to evict – kills, in fact, this time with no discernible pangs of conscience. Lane makes no apologies for setting traps to kill the wood rats which live around his garden, mammals he dislikes because they feed in the compost bin and among the seed spilled by birds, because their smell and depredations are “noxious” to him, and because he finds their tendency to carry disease repugnant, though, as he writes, “I’m sure my fear of disease is only because of ancient tales of medieval plagues (Lane, 136). Yet he adds, not without a certain note of wonder, a description of opening up untidy-looking wood rat nests to find inside “a wonderful cup of the softest mosses and grasses. Threads of wool, bits of cotton string, and oddments of torn fabrics are all used to make a comfortable spot for their brood” (Lane, 136). Stein, on the other hand, writes of the “perfectly nice wood rat family” which lived for a time in a rock dump on a

ledge. "Its only incursion into human lives", she writes of the species, "is its habit of exchanging a nest stick it is carrying for a more attractive object, such as a shiny key or coin" (Stein, 78).

Conversely, though he catches wood rats in traps that kill, Lane sets live traps for raccoons, which he catches and releases in a wild area far from the city. Why the different approaches and devices? Lane happens to like raccoons, even if they are, in his words, "obnoxious predators and can wreak havoc in the garden" by digging holes in the mossy lawn and garden (Lane, 105). "I love their presence", he adds, "the delicate way they walk, as if they were ballet dancers with wrestlers' shoulders" (Lane, 105). Yet in the case of one particularly destructive raccoon, who drags water plants out of the pond and strews them about, and who proves to be untrappable, Lane is forced to develop a different strategy. "He simply won't be caught", Lane writes,

Someone has live-trapped him before, so I think I'll have him for a long time.... The latest raccoon and I will have to share this garden space. He upends water containers, digs holes everywhere, but it's the pond he loves. I must learn to live with him. If he eats water hyacinths, then I won't bother putting any in. If he wants to tear the water-lily leaves, then I will move the plants to the centre of the pond where he can't reach them (Lane, 249).

Removal being impossible, Lane learns to compromise with the raccoon. Harris also compromises with raccoons when she stops growing the water plants they tear out of her garden fountain (Harris 1999, 6), as does Stein, who writes about letting the raccoons have some of the corn from her vegetable garden (Stein, 227).

Yet Harris cannot seem to figure out how to cooperate with the squirrels who dig up the bulbs she plants in her garden. "They are sent to drive me insane", she writes. "I plant, they pull up" (Harris 1995, "Squirrels"). She even declares that most of the time she finds herself hating squirrels, although she does acknowledge their ecological role in bringing seeds and nuts into the garden, thereby contributing to the survival of future generations (Harris 1995, "Squirrels"). Ackerman, who generally likes squirrels – to the point of participating in projects to study them in her garden

(Ackerman, 50 and 200-206) – compromises with them by sinking the tulip bulbs they like to eat into the ground in wire cages made of mesh they cannot reach through (Ackerman, 172). She also laughingly lets a squirrel have a feeder full of bird seed after the animal works intelligently and hard to send the feeder crashing to the ground (Ackerman, 241).

Lane also allows a squirrel access to the bird feeder in his garden, in a decision of compromise.

Watching this particular resident squirrel attack the bird feeder, he muses,

I have given up driving her away and now accept she has her own needs. What am I trying to save, a handful a day of sunflower seeds? I let her have her due. I enjoy her slender busyness, the way she scolds the cats if they get too close, the way she sits in the crotch of a fir branch four metres up and calmly pulls the seeds from her cheeks to shell and eat. She is as much a denizen of this place as the birds (Lane, 25).

As with the untrappable raccoon, Lane decides to compromise, and in the process develops a new appreciation.

Squirrels digging up bulbs, beetles eating roses, non-native trees taking over the woodland, slugs consuming the spring flowers, raccoons tearing plants out of the water, invasive ground covers crowding other plants out of the garden. It adds up to anarchy which appears, if not to rule, in an echo of Ackerman, then to wreak a certain amount of havoc in the personal gardens portrayed in the books selected for study, to create tensions between the activities of nonhuman garden elements and the garden's cultured effect, and to reinforce the desirable-undesirable duality, with its accompanying discrepancies and pangs of conscience in connection with certain species.

The attitudes toward, and strategies for dealing with, unwanted and threatening plants, insects and slugs is straightforward and unequivocal. They must be eliminated if possible. Plants are dug up, and insects and slugs picked by hand and killed, or poisoned. Yet even here gardeners' inner voices speak in protest, as in Ackerman's admiration for the beauty of the Japanese beetles even in death, and Lane's pangs of conscience for killing the beautiful snails in his garden. But go they must, for they

threaten the plants deliberately added to the garden to help create the effect created by the gardener.

Mammals are another matter. Generally larger and more elusive than the plants, insects and slugs, they cannot be as easily, or sometimes as legally, removed or eliminated from the personal garden. Strategies for dealing with them, and striving to maintain order in the space include trapping and killing, as in the case of the wood rats in Lane's garden; live-trapping and removing, Lane's preferred method for raccoons; exclusion or access restriction, as in the deer fenced out of Stein's woodland; compromise, as in tulip bulbs planted in cages inaccessible to squirrels in Ackerman's garden; and tolerance and long-suffering, for lack of another solution, as in the squirrels digging up plants in Harris' garden. Yet there are discrepancies. Not all gardeners have the same attitude toward the same species, as in Stein and Lane's contrasting perspectives on the wood rat; not all gardeners take the same approach in dealing with the same problem, such as Harris doing nothing about the squirrels digging up plants in her garden, while Ackerman buries her tulip bulbs in cages; and some gardeners take the measures they do with different levels of conviction, as in Lane feeling guilty about the many deaths he causes in his garden, while Harris stomps on slugs with glee.

In these cases, the individual gardener-authors each resolve the desirable-undesirable duality, and any related discrepancies, of certain nonhuman elements with respect to the 'cultured' landscape of their personal gardens, according to their individual gardening situations, and their own attitudes toward the natural world.

The garden can bring out the best and the worst in us.

(Harris 1995, "Gardeners and bugs")

6.2.3 *Nonhuman activities and interactions in the personal garden*

As much as the personal gardens in the literature under study are spaces where the gardener succeeds in maintaining a certain order among natural and cultural elements, or some sort of

compromise with natural elements which are difficult to manage, they are also places, as Lane writes, “made from living things” (Lane, 14) where the nonhuman garden elements discussed thus far interact in various activities and exchanges – in an echo of Meinig’s nature, habitat and system metaphors for landscape (Meinig 1979b, 34-9), and as a nonhuman mirror of the personal garden as a place/locale metaphor. The nonhuman activities and interactions which take place in the personal garden are beyond the gardener’s control, occurring as part of a greater natural system, according to a nonhuman version of agency within the micro-environment of the garden space: something Chambers terms, in a nonhuman intertextual reference, as nature’s “different text” (Chambers, 18).

The micro-environments developing around Whiteson’s fountains, the birds bathing in Lane’s pond, the bugs drinking from the water bowl Harris leaves outside for the cat are all examples of such activities, such agency. The fountain, the pond, and the water bowl all set up conditions for nonhuman occurrences in the personal garden, episodes which, despite the fact that they revolve around human constructions, fundamentally have nothing to do with human intention, although the gardeners could have an impact by intervening and changing the circumstances surrounding the occurrences. Yet the micro-environments around Whiteson’s fountains could likely also develop if water spilled from a hollow rock somewhere in a woodland. The birds bathing from the lily pads in Lane’s pond could be splashing water on themselves in a naturally formed pond in a protected area. The bugs attracted to the bowl of water in Harris’ garden could be drawn to water collecting in a depression in the ground in a local park.

Yet the personal gardens, along with their cultural imprints in the form of constructions and artefacts, are there, inviting a wide variety of nonhuman activity and interaction, including slugs and deer eating garden plants, bees pollinating flowers, birds inhabiting nesting boxes, soil organisms

converting plant waste into garden earth, raccoons tearing up water plants in the garden, and plants invading garden spaces – all part of the nonhuman aspect of the garden landscape, and most having to do with the search for food, or with reproduction, two of the most powerful goals driving wildlife activities in the personal garden.

The bluebird who miraculously inhabits the nesting box by Stein's meadow within hours of its erection appears, as the author writes, as if by magic (Stein, 238). Yet a reasonable explanation can be found in the appropriately designed and constructed nesting box, where the bird can raise a family, as well as the positioning of the construction with a view to meeting certain essential bluebird habitat needs: a suitable open site for both nesting and feeding, particularly with respect to meeting the demands of a hungry and growing brood. Ackerman describes a similarly intriguing garden occurrence involving two garden residents, a squirrel and the magnolia tree, around a feeding activity:

One day I watched a squirrel twist off a large magnolia bud, toss it to the ground, and lick sap from the remaining twig. The sap would carry minerals on the way up and nutrients on the way, a good tonic for a squirrel. The tough layer of bark is supposed to protect the sap, but insects, fungi, birds, and mammals have all devised clever ways to plunder a tree. Of course, trees get their own back by trapping insects in sap; the fossilized form of those drops we prize as amber (Ackerman, 30).

While the squirrel definitely benefits in this particular interaction, which appears to be more commensalistic than mutualistic. Ackerman implies, but does not specify, that there may be a parasitic benefit to the tree when it traps insects in its sap.

Sara Stein muses more directly on interactions and transactions in her garden, particularly on mutually beneficial exchanges surrounding plant reproduction – both pollination and seed dispersal. She describes how, since plants can't move about in search of mates, they depend on other life forms such as bees to pick up male pollen from the flower of one plant, and deposit it on the receptive female parts of another plant's flower. Yet for this service, she points out, the plants pay a "direct fee" through food rewards such as nectar, as well as some of the pollen. She also points out the

“overhead” involved. As in any business, she writes, “indirect costs are incurred in advertising and conveniences offered to attract and keep customers. Bright pigments, for example, are an extra expense, as are the large nectar stores and extra-sturdy landing petals that bumblebees demand” (Stein, 54). She goes on to describe seed dispersal as involving similar sorts of transactions. Both parties involved benefit in these “deals”, as Stein calls them (Stein, 54) – one gaining aid in its reproduction process, the other nourishing itself.

Lane describes another mutually beneficial reproductive transaction – one with a related feeding connection – which takes place between two orb-weaving spiders he observes on a Mexican orange bush in his garden. The sole purpose of the male spider, Lane points out, is to fertilise the female’s eggs, but the female views the male as providing both sperm and a source of food. “She will poison him in a millisecond once the sperm is delivered”, Lane writes. “He knows that” (Lane, 264-9). And so the male proceeds, slowly and carefully, over the course of two hours, to woo the female and deposit his sperm, managing to escape with his life even as the female “transforms ... into a killer” immediately following the act. All the male spider loses in the process is one leg (Lane, 264-9).

A garden is a place where someone spends a few hours each day in a wild place he tries to shape to his desire. It's a place of harmony, of balance, and it is made from living things.

(Lane, 14)

One week the bluebird family is busy raising its offspring in the nesting box by the meadow in Stein’s garden; weeks later it is gone. One night a raccoon tears plants from the pond in Harris’ garden; the next morning it is gone. One moment a squirrel is licking sap at the magnolia tree in Ackerman’s garden; minutes later it is gone. One afternoon, spiders are conducting their mating ritual in Lane’s garden; an hour later they have separated. These nonhuman life forms come and go, acting according to instincts and impulses which respond to the greater natural system they are intricately and inextricably part of, and in certain cases in response also to the garden micro-environment which

is their entire world – an environment which may include cultural constructions and artefacts either deliberately installed for their benefit, or incidentally made use of by them. Much nonhuman presence in the garden is as a result independent, mobile, transitory, moving in and out of the garden at will, with a nonhuman agency all its own – some of it delightful, in certain cases deliberately encouraged; some of it neutral; and some of it undesirable and actively discouraged.

Plants are one nonhuman garden presence, usually purposely put into the ground and arranged by gardeners for the desired ‘cultured’ effect, which do not travel. Their activities are more predictable, and they stay put for ongoing enjoyment in the garden, though they do not, in Lane’s words, “always obey even if the space, the light, and the earth and water are exactly right” (Lane, 204). Yet plants can also, the gardener-authors reveal, be transitory and unpredictable, depending on the conditions and the species. They can perish and disappear, spread and disperse, invade and crowd out other plants, according to their own botanical agency, through various, and sometimes disconcerting, reproductive means that can be extremely difficult to restrain. Just as easy to admire, and easier to control, are the abiotic elements of the garden landscape – the rocks and water – though even the rocks change with time, only more slowly than we are usually aware, and water systems can be settings for unpredictable nonhuman activities and interactions.

There is simply too much happening in the space that is beyond the control of gardeners. Some of it is desirable because it contributes to the ‘cultured’ effect of the garden, and some undesirable because it threatens the space – a status which reinforces the essential cultural-natural duality of the personal garden. Yet although gardeners cannot control these elements, take action they must, to maintain the desired effects of their garden spaces. And so Harris stomps on slugs, Stein fences out deer, Lane digs out creeping buttercup, and Ackerman lets squirrels eat bird food – all strategies for

maintaining some sort of order between nature and culture in the garden, for dealing with its essential duality. With each action, the gardeners take another step in the ongoing negotiation of an individual relationship with the garden space and with the natural elements residing and visiting in it, sometimes developing new understandings and appreciation for the wildlife species involved, sometimes developing meaningful connections which add to their personal garden senses of place.

MUSINGS FROM THE GARDEN

Coprinus

The wood chips were wet when the truck dropped them off – soaked, actually, like everything else kept outdoors this unseasonably rainy summer. As I shovelled one damp load after another onto the garden, I thought to myself, "There will be mushrooms."

I was right.

A couple of days and rainfalls later, I notice fungal growth between the beans and the onions. When I crouch for a closer look, I see delicate brown-grey caps balanced on relatively thin, very smooth and white, stalks. Some of the caps are rounded cones just beginning to open. Others, already open, are bell-shaped. Still others, older it appears, have darkened with age, disintegrated to the point of transparency, and curled at the edges.

All the caps are textured with narrow lines, close together – mere hints on the youngest mushrooms, deeper ridges corresponding to gills on the mature specimens, skeletons holding together the thinning caps on the oldest individuals.

Generations, so to speak, of mushrooms at my feet. Fascinating.

Back in the house, I consult my mushroom books to figure out who they are. I narrow it down to two possibilities – *Coprinus micaceus* or *Coprinus atramentarius* – both edible. *Coprinus micaceus* is also known as Glistening Inky Cap, or Shiny Cap, or Mica Cap because of the glittering particles on the caps of the younger specimens. *Coprinus atramentarius* is also called Inky Cap, or Alcohol Inky Cap, or Tippler's Bane, because of the toxin it gives off – producing various unpleasant results – in conjunction with alcohol consumed during and after (as much as 3 to 5 days) the mushroom meal.

I re-read the descriptions in the books I've dug out. Both mushrooms grow in open places, in association with buried wood or tree bases, though wood chips are mentioned in association with Tippler's Bane only. The two mushrooms look very similar, with a few differences, though the mushrooms in the garden seem to have characteristics of both – Tippler's Bane gray caps and Mica Cap silky white stalks. The glistening particles distinguishing Mica Cap are not obvious on the mushrooms in the garden, though their smooth stalks are unlike Tippler's Bane stems, described as having a ring which disappears early, and white fibres near the base.

I'm confused.

I peer at the photographs. Most of the Mica Cap depictions show mushrooms that are some shade of light, bright brown, though one book portrays them as taupe, which would work for the mushrooms in the garden. In fact, the garden mushrooms look EXACTLY like the specimens in that particular book, though the photograph of the Tippler's Bane on the facing page is almost identical, except for the stems. I'm still confused ... though I tend toward Mica Cap. But I'm not certain.

Does it matter? Not really. Not unless I intend to eat the mushrooms.

I go back outside and crouch among the little taupe mushrooms. I don't feel like eating them. They're so small, hardly worth the effort, and the garden is full of other edibles. I'll let these fungi fruit in peace among the onions and beans. I'll enjoy their forms and textures when I come to work in the garden. I'll tread carefully to let them grow and thrive and multiply.

Yet I'm not satisfied. I want to know who these mushrooms are, even if I'm not going to eat them. And I want to

figure out why. Why do I want so badly to determine their identity? Why is it important for me to learn their exact names? Why do I feel the need to KNOW?

I sit back on my heels. I feel the morning sun warm on my back, admire a bean flower in bloom, listen to the swallows swoop and chatter. Why do I need to know? For the same reason, I suppose, that I know these other things. For the same reason I learn about the vegetable flowers and the bird songs. For the same reason I wish to call friends by their proper names – to greet them, to show my respect, to be companionable.

So how shall I address these mushrooms that could be either Mica Cap or Tippler's Bane, *Coprinus micaceus* or *Coprinus atramentarius*? The scientific name ... that's it. Both mushrooms belong to the same genus, *Coprinus*. Thank you science.

I'll call them "Coprinus."

– originally published on August 11, 2000 in the *West Quebec Post's* "Wild Tracks" column, written under my nature writing pseudonym Robin Stone

Chapter 7 The personal garden as an interface

'Consult the genius of the place in all,' Pope wrote to his friend Lord Burlington about laying out his estate. Surely what he meant has to include, not only the nature of the topography, but the life that has been lived within it, its dense associations with people as well as its geology.

(Chambers, 13)

The relationships individual gardeners negotiate with their personal garden spaces and with its natural elements point to the personal garden's role as an interface bridging its essential duality – a role also revealed through the *landscape* metaphor. As horticulturalist and journalist Alexander Wilson writes, the garden is a “site of mediation between humankind and nature” (Wilson 1991, 97), or between the human and the nonhuman, the natural and the cultural. This observation echoes Sauer's vision of ongoing human interaction with the physical environment (Sauer 1929, 46), and the emphasis Jackson places on landscape as a *unity* of, among other things, community and environment, human and non-human (Meinig 1979c, 228-229; Cosgrove 1984, 35). Harris adds that especially for urban residents, gardens are “the only contact with nature and our best source for understanding our relationship with the land” (Harris 1995, “Introduction”).

Personal gardens are interesting and significant spaces for all those reasons – contact and ongoing interaction with the natural environment, mediation between humans and nonhumans, and a certain unity in the context of the garden's essential duality. Personal gardens offer spaces where gardeners, the culturing agents of the space, along with others using and visiting the garden – such as family members, friends, and members of the public – have the opportunity to observe the nonhuman world of the garden, to work with it, interact with it, and develop a growing appreciation for and deeper relationship with it.

7.1 Perceiving the nonhuman in the garden

All the gardener-authors enjoy their gardens visually and aesthetically, with much of that enjoyment found in looking at the botanical nonhuman elements of the space – the plants arranged in the garden for particular ‘cultured’ effect, such as Ackerman’s roses (Ackerman, 102), Lane’s corkscrew hazel shrub (Lane, 27), and Stein’s prairie, which offers year-round visual splendour (Stein, 166-7). Some of the enjoyment also comes from observing the resident and visiting wildlife, as in Harris following the movements of moths fluttering through her moonlit garden (Harris 1995, “Moonlight”) and Ackerman observing the squirrel feeding at the magnolia tree (Ackerman, 30). Whiteson, on his early-morning strolls, gets into the habit of standing very still and watching other creatures gather in the “buttery green-gold light of early morning”: a mockingbird, a scrub jay, a pair of doves, a flock of bushtits, and a female possum staring at him from her hiding place in a vine (Whiteson, 164-5). Stein, looking out her attic study window, delights in watching the wildlife activity below: chipmunks hurrying along garden walls, squirrels digging in flower beds, cedar waxwings eating berries (Stein, 57). And the visitors who stroll through Harris’ garden, enjoying the plants and the garden’s design, fall silent as they watch a hummingbird flash by (Harris 1995, “The garden party”).

But the personal garden offers opportunity for more than just visual appreciation of a natural landscape people “stand back to view” (Porteous 1990, xiv). It and its various nonhuman elements offer opportunities for multi-sensory enjoyment of the garden space, as Ackerman demonstrates through her olfactory delight in the flowers of her garden (Ackerman, 71), and as Harris describes when she writes of following her grandson in his exploration of the garden through his various senses – poking his nose into plants, crushing flowers in his hands – thereby teaching the author to let the

garden delight her senses too (Harris 1995, "Relearning the senses").

7.2 Involvement with the nonhuman in the personal garden

Even more than multi-sensory appreciation, the personal garden enables gardeners to become involved in the space – something Porteous considers extremely important (Porteous 1990, xiv) – when they engage with it physically and participate in its processes through the "endless round" (Chambers, 73) of daily and seasonal "preening and tending" (Ackerman, 15). Gardeners preparing beds for planting come into contact with the soil and its components; gardeners pruning branches or moving plants from one spot to another handle living botanical entities; gardeners picking Japanese beetles from flowers deal with live insects; gardeners spreading compost manipulate a living substance; gardeners watering plants during dry periods add an essential abiotic element to the garden's micro-environment. This ongoing tending and nurturing of the garden's botanical elements is at the root of each author's relationship with the nonhuman in his or her personal garden, sometimes bringing the gardener an enhanced appreciation for the nonhuman aspect of the space, as well as a particular, interactive sort of joy.

Harris, for example, expresses fascination with "the extraordinary amount of life in the compost" she is turning. "To work the compost", she writes, "is to stare into the face of a lot of things crawling about." It smells good and sweet, she adds, puzzled as to why people hesitate to put their hands into it (Harris 1999, 82). Lane finds special joy in planting. "Nothing in the garden gives me as much pleasure as planting", he writes in the context of putting two new shrubs, a witch hazel and a campanula, into the ground. He adds that he talked to the shrubs as he was planting them, "telling them they would love it here and not to be afraid of anything", and that the "cotoneaster across the path seemed to join in the discussion, nodding its long branches with the red berries the robins and

thrushes love.... The shrubs seem content with my assurances” (Lane, 36-7).

Lane’s interaction with the shrubs carries echoes of the “hands-on feeling” Whiteson develops for the needs of each plant in his garden, and the ensuing “nurturing intimacy” and “sense of closeness” (Whiteson, 39) which grows through the steady, year-round “source of tending and tenderness” (Whiteson, 155) he provides. Chambers, who is frequently joined by friends who enjoy working outdoors (Chambers, 182), offers the opportunity for others – who may not have personal garden spaces of their own – to become physically involved with the Stonyground garden, and to work and interact with its botanical elements.

Yet the possibility for significant interaction with the nonhuman elements of the personal garden extends beyond the botanical elements to include other biological residents and visitors. Ackerman, for example, upon noticing two fawns under a tree in the garden, creeps outside and enters the space as though on an errand all her own. “Because I seemed preoccupied by human things”, she writes, “they watched me, ever alert, but didn’t bother to stir as I sat down in the grass near them, averting my eyes, picking a blade of grass or two, only now and then studying them with long, thick glances”. A passing car startles them momentarily, but they settle down again, and she is able to continue sitting near them as they curl up and snooze (Ackerman, 8) in an undeniably close and intimate encounter. Such encounters are important to the author, who writes that she loves “sitting at the crossroads where nature and human nature meet and each throws light upon the other” (Ackerman, 100) – a crossroads such as the personal garden where such experiences are possible.

Another encounter, with wildlife some people may be nervous about having too close, involves sweat bees which sip sweat from Ackerman’s arm one sweltering summer day. Even lying there in the garden’s shade, she writes, she begins to overheat, but doesn’t want to leave because, she adds,

“two sweat bees are sipping from my arm so gently I haven’t the heart to dislodge them” (Ackerman, 126). Neither does Lane have the heart to dislodge – he appears, in fact, to enjoy – the orchard bee resting on the back of his hand to seek the warmth of his bare skin in early spring. “She’s a friendly little lady”, he adds, “and so busy with gathering food that she has no time to bother me” (Lane, 63).

Harris, for her part, admits to be petrified of insects such as wasps and spiders until she learns to appreciate them for their pollinating and bug-catching roles respectively (Harris 1995, “Attitude”) – an esteem which develops through exposure to the insects, and observation of their activities in her personal garden. Appreciation through exposure, observation, and contact is what Stein hopes to instil in a garden visitor, her granddaughter, who holds a frog for first time in her grandmother’s garden (Stein, 18).

Lane also writes about a bird who lands on his head because perhaps, as the author writes, “I was standing still and the bird mistook my balding head for a large pink stone fringed with yellow moss”, the references to stone and moss echoing the abiotic and botanical garden elements discussed earlier. “The benign gardener”, he adds, “is no threat to the birds” – this last sentence a statement, however unintentional, regarding the relationship he has negotiated with his garden space and the elements living there, as is his description of reconnection, upon his return from the treatment centre, with a crow at the bird bath, a regular visitor he recognises by the two small white feathers above her eye. “It is the eye she stares at me with”, he writes, “as if to say she knows exactly who I am and she does. After all, I am the gardener who fiddles and diddles about this patch of ground” (Lane, 26).

7.3 Relationships with the nonhuman in the personal garden

Lane does not reflect much further on the relationship he has developed with his personal garden and its nonhuman elements, except to write about the garden starting with his body (Lane, 5) and about breathing with the garden (Lane, 182). Neither does Ackerman elaborate on her relationship with the garden space, except to make statements regarding, for example, mutual nourishment with the garden (Ackerman, 171), as well as gratefulness to the garden for feeding her senses (Ackerman, 121), and recognition of emotional attachments she develops with the nonhuman life forms in her garden. “How quickly intimacy with wild animals can grow”, she observes. “One becomes fond of them, sensitive to their destiny. It’s easier if you don’t care, don’t get attached, but then you miss out on so much” (Ackerman, 62-3).

Whiteson would agree that the gardener would miss out on much if he or she did not develop a deeper attachment to the nonhuman world of the garden. The symbiotic relationship he develops with his personal garden illustrates the deep meaning that the space can hold for an individual, a meaning which has the potential to cause mental anguish, as in the case of a tree which the wind snaps in half because he fails to take preventive measures. The loss of the tree, in his words, “was like a kick in the stomach to me. Its stump was a mute reproach for my dereliction in not providing the skinny trunk with enough support” (Whiteson, 137).

Stein also makes reference to garden losses, writing about the difficulty of letting plants and animals go without grief, and about the relief and relaxing effect of a new mind-set (Stein, 229), a new relationship which she develops with her garden space. Her gardening efforts, she writes, are “not so much a landscaping project, to be planted and done with, as a sort of friendship with the land”, an ongoing and “growing intimacy” (Stein, 219). This intimacy has her saying of a rocky corner, for

example, that “‘It wants ... some silvery business,’ as one might say of a friend that she wants a good chat or a strong drink”. The friendship with the land makes Stein comfortable with making changes – moving plants around, changing the shape of beds, re-routing paths – somewhat like, as she describes in her analogy of the garden as a social gathering, “moving a guest from one group to another or, as is sometimes necessary, showing an uncongenial one the door” (Stein, 219). Stein writes about expanding the guest list of the garden over the years, and after each new invitation, waiting to see how things progress before introducing new acquaintances or old friends (Stein, 216). One of her favourite garden guests is the blueberry, because of its sensitivity, versatility and inter-species sociability. “They are natural raconteurs”, she writes, “amusing birds with their witty ripening and keeping them in a flutter of attention for weeks during the summer.... They’re chummy with evergreens, comfy among flowers, at ease in tall grass, as much at home in a foundation planting as in a hedgerow. No one could ask for a less demanding friend” (Stein, 216). Stein could be accused of anthropomorphism for the analogy of her friendship with the land and with the plants that grow there, yet how else could she be expected to describe a relationship she considers to be a ‘friendship’?

Harris openly admits to being anthropomorphic. “I quite often refer to plants as ‘those little guys over there’” she writes, adding that she did not always feel that close to her plants. “When I started out”, she reveals, “they were the Other. Something that would or wouldn’t grow for me ... Now I see them as little creatures to be handled properly, that have personal likes and dislikes” (Harris 1995, “Anthropomorphism”) – another development in her garden relationship which comes about as a result of exposure, observation, and contact with the nonhuman, specifically botanical, elements of her personal garden space.

The significance, to the gardener-authors under study, of relations with the nonhuman world in the

garden space adds to the sense of place, as discussed in chapter 5, they have of their personal garden. Each of the authors finds deeper meaning – another aspect of landscape experience Porteous considers extremely important (Porteous 1990, xiv) – through contact with nonhuman garden elements in the personal garden’s “site of mediation between humankind and nature” (Wilson 1991, 97). Even Chambers, who does not write much about personal or intimate contact with the nonhuman elements of his garden, puts gardening in terms of “interchange of the wild and the tame” (Chambers, 31). Chambers also reveals an important lesson of his relation with, in his words, “the garden and landscape”: balance, which he describes as “how to keep one’s distance, to resist the temptation of possessive absolutism or Disneyfied cuteness”. It is not, he points out, easy for the “domineering geometric inclinations of the patriarchal mind”, in a blatantly frank description of himself, to grasp, but a lesson he is beginning to learn – a nurturing that is not sheer control, and a willingness to accept the seasons and take opportunities as they arise (Chambers, 153).

This is not, admittedly, Whiteson’s profoundly symbiotic bond with his garden space, or Stein’s social connection with the plants of her garden, or Ackerman’s emotional involvement with the wildlife inhabiting and visiting her garden, yet it is Chambers’ individual relationship with his uniquely designed and ‘cultured’ garden space – one he shares with many friends, and as such an echo of Jackson’s *unity* of community and environment, and the human and non-human (Meinig 1979c, 228-229; Cosgrove 1984, 35), as well as a step toward resolution of the garden’s essential duality. Personal gardens, to link back to the concept of geographical ‘place’ in terms of both locale and sense of place, do offer spaces where other garden visitors and users, including friends and family, also have the opportunity to develop a growing appreciation for and deeper relationship with a personal garden space and the nonhuman world associated with it.

Every gardener will interpret “wildness” or “wilderness” in his or her own way. For some, it may be the

incorporation of a few wildflowers in an essentially exotic garden; for others it may be the full restoration of a functioning native-plant community. The important thing is to connect with that wildness and to feel it as part of oneself, to feel as "at home" in the garden as the butterfly searching for nectar, the bird searching for seed, the earthworm turning the soil.

(Johnson 1998, "Afterword")

In its role as an interface between the human/cultural and the nonhuman/natural, as a "site of mediation between humankind and nature" (Wilson 1991, 97) – where the gardeners who created the space, along with others who work and visit there, have the opportunity to observe the natural environment of the garden, to work with it, to interact with the nonhuman residents and visitors in the micro-environment, and develop a growing appreciation for and deeper relationship with the space – the personal garden offers the possibility of resolving its essential human-nonhuman duality. As such it also offers the potential of bridging, on a small scale, in the context of geographical study and education, the parallel duality within the discipline of geography – the rift between human geography and physical geography.

MUSINGS FROM THE GARDEN

The rose toad

Sometimes he's there. Sometimes he isn't. When I see him, it's always a pleasant surprise.

Though that wasn't my reaction the first time I spotted him, back toward the beginning of summer. Exactly how I reacted, I don't recall now. Perhaps I jumped back a little. Maybe I exclaimed softly. I do know that I was startled. So, I'm quite certain, was he.

I had transplanted some Wild Rose bushes a few weeks previously – two or three plants that had crept out into the gravel on the north side of one of the back roads I take home from the city. If they had stayed there, they would eventually have been driven over, or scraped up when the grader smoothed the roads later in the season.

So out came the bucket and shovel I always carry in the truck, and in went the creeping Roses. Back home, I planted them in a pocket of the rock wall in front of the house, where I could keep an eye on them, to water and tend as needed.

That's what I was doing – starting to sprinkle water onto the Roses, whose foliage had died back somewhat alarmingly (I thought perhaps I had killed them) despite regular watering and the thick layer of slightly composted wood mulch I had added – when suddenly the earth heaved beneath the bare Rose stems, and a thickset form emerged.

A large American Toad.

I'm not sure who was more startled – he from having a large form loom above and sudden water rain down, or I from the unexpected apparition below the watering spout. I recovered quickly, chuckled, and moved as far away as possible, while still watering. He simply sat there, unblinking in the sunlight. I left him in peace as soon as the Roses had enough water.

I've since learned that during the day, American Toads, the sub-species that lives in this area, spend a lot of time under cover to escape the hot, dry weather. They'll dig under rocks or logs, stones or boards, porches or woodpiles, leaves or soil. So the mulch around the Roses is a great place for an American Toad to spend the day.

And that Toad – I'm assuming it's the same one – has been there off and on since that first encounter. I can tell either

by the depression he's left under the Roses, or by the eyes protruding from the wood chips, which always makes me smile. He's very well camouflaged in there, with his mottled brown and greyish colouring.

At night, he's out and about in the rest of the garden, I hope, eating up great quantities of insects, including slugs, which is why Toads are so welcomed by gardeners.

I've just noticed that I've been calling the Toad in the Roses "he". Why am I doing that? Maybe because the Toad's thickset, lumpy, warty appearance doesn't make a particularly female impression. Perhaps it's the scientific name, *Bufo americanus*, and the French name, "crapaud", neither of which is very feminine-sounding. The French have, after all, attributed "le" crapaud with the masculine gender, unlike "la" grenouille, the frog.

The next time I see the Toad in the Roses, I'll check more closely, because I've just read that males have dark, blackish or brownish throats, and that females have white throats.

That is, if I see him/her again, because the foliage on some of the Wild Roses has grown back in the meantime and they've started sending up new shoots. And the Wild Strawberries I planted around the Roses as groundcover have spread. It wouldn't be as easy to dig into the Rose mulch now, and I haven't seen the Toad there for a little while.

But I've learned to tell the difference between male and female American Toads, and just this morning, when I scooped a young Toad out of a water container, I turned it over, and discovered it was a she – perhaps one of the Rose Toad's daughters.

– originally published on August 13, 2005 in the *West Quebec Post's*
"Wild Tracks" column, written under my nature writing pseudonym Robin Stone

Chapter 8 The geographical nature of the personal garden – final remarks

“What is this place people tend with such devotion?” I asked with respect to the person garden in the Introduction. “What is its attraction? What do gardens mean to people?” My journey to seek geographically relevant responses to these questions has been a fascinating and engrossing one, leading into and through this study, and in the future, as I foresee, to ongoing efforts to address related questions and continue adding to the dialogue on the geography of personal gardens.

This study constitutes initial efforts to shed light on the breadth of geographical significance relative to the personal garden. I chose to do so through contemporary personal garden books selected according to various criteria, books containing content written upon long and deep reflection on direct experiences – personal, social, cultural, environmental, etc. – in the personal garden space. These books, over the course of the study, revealed a wide range of geographical significance, more than can be covered within the limits of this thesis. The books offer, thereby, potential for additional in-depth geographical study, as such contributing a new type of literature to geographical inquiry, with the possibility also of introducing a new, geographically informed perspective – ‘geo-gardening’ – to the evolving field of ‘literature and the environment’ inquiry.

Yet it is important to note that these books represent, despite the wide-ranging geographical significance they contain, a view of gardens from the perspective of Western, caucasian, upper-middle-class intellectuals and literati, who live in single-family homes in reputable environments, with enough space to establish garden areas where they are at leisure to grow a variety of plants for various personal reasons. These are also people with the capacity and resources to write books about their personal gardens and their relationships with those spaces.

Other members of society living in different environments and conditions, who cultivate plants in spaces unlike those portrayed in the literature under study, do not necessarily write books about their gardens and gardening experiences. Yet their perspectives on and relationships with their personal garden spaces would be interesting as well, and would reveal additional, and just as valuable, geographical significance related to, for example, social issues, ethnicity, gender, nationality – meanings which either didn't come through at all in the books under study (e.g. no discernible differences among the male and female, or Canadian-American gardener-authors), and if so, only slightly (e.g. Whiteson's reflections on personal gardens within a larger community context). The potential exists, therefore, for farther and wider geographical field work study related to the personal garden space.

My approach to this study – openly and inclusively interpretive – was taken in the spirit of humanistic geography and inspired by certain of its key concerns and interests such as awareness and consciousness, creativity, intentionality, agency, subjectivity, and meaning. This approach was intended to result in an exploration conducted with a certain open-mindedness, sensitivity and insight. Humanistic geography provided not only the spirit of the approach, but also its geographical interpretive framework, thanks to Yi-Fu Tuan – the metaphors of microcosm, landscape, and place, representing three different scales of geographical consideration, endeavour and consequence, with their associated characteristics and intricacies. These geometaphors provided well-positioned windows offering what turned out to be a panoramic view of the personal gardens portrayed in the selected personal gardening literature, and helped me gain valuable insight into the complex and interrelated geographical nature of those spaces.

Over the course of the study, the landscape metaphor turned out to resonate with the most

geographical significance. Landscape, much more than both microcosm and place, allowed for an inclusive – both human/cultural and nonhuman/natural – look at the personal garden, as such revealing the space's essential duality as both a cultural landscape and a natural landscape, a human space and a nonhuman space. As such, landscape became the dominant geometaphor for the study. The metaphor of microcosm offered the environmental groundwork for the notion of the personal garden as a natural space, while the locale and sense of place components of the place metaphor enriched the concept of personal gardens as 'cultured' spaces.

Viewed and designed, shaped and maintained by gardeners through their individual creativity, intentionality and agency for varying effect and meaning; 'read' and 'written' by the various gardener-authors; reflecting and fitting into a greater cultural context, the personal gardens portrayed in the literature selected for study certainly qualify as 'cultured', 'humanised' landscapes. Personal gardens further qualify as 'humanised' by providing space for a wide range of social interaction – from intimate to professional, among family and friends, neighbours and other communities – along with a haven for developing a highly subjective personal garden sense of place, that complex mix of meaning and attachment gardeners invest in and receive from their personal garden spaces.

On the other hand, personal gardens also qualify as natural landscapes rooted in the soil, exposed to the air, and generally affected by greater natural, sometimes also human forces. Many of the gardens portrayed in the literature under study also contain abiotic features such as water and stone, along with a substantial botanical base and other biological residents and visitors who come and go, acting and interacting in activities and exchanges in response to greater natural processes beyond the gardener's control. Some of this nonhuman presence in the garden is delightful and desired, and in certain cases deliberately introduced or encouraged within the garden space, while some of the

nonhuman presence is undesirable and actively discouraged because it threatens the individual gardener's garden vision, design and intended effect.

This desirable-undesirable duality, related to nonhuman impact on cultural and personal garden effect, reflects the cultural/human-natural/nonhuman duality at the core of the personal garden space – a duality which each individual gardener-author responds to according to his or her individual gardening situation and his or her own attitude toward the natural world. With each response, the gardener further develops and negotiates the evolving individual relationship with the garden space and the natural elements residing and visiting in it, sometimes developing new understandings and appreciation for the wildlife species, sometimes developing meaningful connections which add to a personal garden sense of place. This is the interface role of the garden landscape, a space which offers a “site of mediation between humankind and nature” (Wilson, 1991, 97), and the possibility of bridging the culture-nature duality at the core of the personal garden space.

The personal garden's essential duality as a ‘cultured’ and ‘humanised’ space and as a natural and nonhuman space is the characteristic which gives it the most geographical significance, most likely because it reflects the duality at the heart of the discipline of geography, divided as it is into physical geography and human geography. The personal garden's essential duality also mirrors the duality of our human relationship with the natural environment – parts we love, parts we detest, parts we want to attract, parts we want to keep away. And it also connects with the duality at the heart of the human condition, *Homo sapiens* being a biological life form, a species with “wild” ancestors in its distant past, who evolved, through millennia of civilisation and culturing into today's complex and confused global resident seeking to understand, through disciplines such as geography, the world around them, and where and how they fit into it, including their dependence and impact on greater physical

conditions, and their relationships to and within various systems, both natural and socio-cultural.

On a small scale, the personal garden offers a space for developing some of these understandings and for bridging the human/culture-nonhuman/nature duality within our human nature and our Western civilisation. The potential also exists for the personal garden space to narrow the gap, perhaps even span the rift, between human geography and physical geography through the possibility of integrated personal garden studies combining both human and physical geography interests and concerns – for example, garden design and purpose with the distribution of pollinating insects or weed species, gardening activity and maintenance with soil composition and consistency, gardening tradition and approach with habitat significance or potential, social activity or personal meaning with the presence of absence of wildlife species, cultural influence and conformity with plant choice and diversity – for interesting effect and results, with the results perhaps feeding into planning, policy, education and communication decisions and activities. I am hoping that this thesis contributes toward stimulating and initiating a first step in the direction of such an integration.

MUSINGS FROM THE GARDEN

Early winter. Fresh snow lies thick over the landscape outside the window. The thesis is finished, ready to be “put to bed”, as one does with a garden in the fall when the plants have shut down for the winter season. Above the freshly fallen snow, dried seed heads of the taller native wildflowers protrude above the snow; I have left them there to provide food for birds and to remind me where I can expect certain plants to return in the spring. Vole tracks lead from the Wild Area to the rock wall, and squirrel tracks run between the brush fence and the pines – winter stories written in the snow by nonhuman residents and visitors of the garden space. Others living in and using the micro-environment are more obvious: chickadees calling from the old elm, spiders crawling over the snow on warmer afternoons.

At this time of year, I can only dream of what the will look like in the spring when the snow melts, the soil thaws, and the first green shoots appear, followed by early spring flowers, emerging insects, and returning birds. In the meantime, I will plan the work I hope to tackle in the season to come, anticipate changes I will make to the space, wait for things that will happen without any intervention on my part, and look forward to the many expected and unexpected things I will learn as I work in the space and participate in its many processes.

My mind and spirit ever oriented toward learning, I cannot keep from writing about ideas related to garden-oriented geographical education. Would it not be fascinating and rewarding for geography students to be able to work individually, with a partner, or within small groups in garden plots on campus – plots either concentrated in one area, or scattered throughout the campus (for comparative interest).

Physical geography students could tend and monitor these plots, perhaps through different gardening approaches for comparative value, for things like soil content, snow and ice cover, species distribution or seasonal impact. The students

could possibly go on to compare results of the monitoring to results of baseline studies conducted in other regional locations such as rural areas, protected areas, or other neighbourhoods (not being a physical geographer, my ideas in this domain are admittedly thin).

Human geography students could participate in tending these campus gardening plots. They could 'read' each other's garden 'texts' for general geographical meaning, or for significance in relation to the context of the wider campus landscape. The students could also create their own garden texts in the form of journals related to their gardening activities, and connect their gardening and writing activities with other garden-related readings – textual, visual, or other creative representations of personal gardens from various geographical perspectives. Students could also assess themselves, each other and perhaps other students working in the campus garden area – maybe also adding a passerby observation component – for attitudes and behaviours toward the nonhuman world encountered during either gardening activities or exposure to the garden space. Students could analyse and compare the attitude and behaviour assessment findings during classroom discussions, and go further to make connections to parallel attitudes and behaviours in different contexts and settings (e.g. at home, in protected areas, while on holiday), or to attitudes and behaviours represented in relevant documentation (e.g. academic studies, gardening literature, nature writing, regional literature revolving around similar landscapes).

All these activities, based on hands-on work in the garden plots, would provide an opportunity for students to apply knowledge learned in the classroom, to work on team or individual projects outdoors, and to acquire and practise related fieldwork, analytical and interpretive skills. Depending on available space and on administrative co-operation, the garden plots could become an interdisciplinary resource managed and used jointly with other departments, depending on interdepartmental esprit de corps. Professors from different departments could team-teach interdisciplinary (e.g. geography, biology, geology, chemistry, art) courses related to the garden plots and their content.

Is that sort of thing possible? Am I being unrealistic? I won't know unless I try ...

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