

**The Social World of Allotment Gardens:
An Ethnographic Account of Formations of Social Cooperation**

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Abstract

This thesis provides an ethnographic account of the social world of allotment gardens in the north east of England. The specific focus is upon the enduring everyday formation and enactment of informal voluntary social cooperation amongst allotment gardeners. This form of cooperation occurs without incentives and external to the formal organization of allotment gardening coordinated by public officials and allotment committees. Informal cooperation between allotment gardeners provides sociologists with an opportunity to analyse a ubiquitous social process. Gardening is often thought of as an individualized activity but, actually, allotment gardening is undertaken in a collective setting. This is a skilled practice, with gardeners working in (and with) the natural world via periods of intensely physical activity.

I argue that an interweaving of the social processes of skill, valuation, and social cooperation, are pivotal to the reproduction of the social world of allotment gardens. This finding hinges upon social interactions, relations, and networks, in this distinct social world in which people from a variety of social backgrounds and gardening experiences are present. However, many new arrivals have little or no gardening skill, and enskillment in allotment gardening differs significantly to descriptions in socially situated learning literature.

Central to this argument is *the* most valued social characteristic in allotment gardening practice: having sufficient skill, time, physical ability, and access to social cooperation, to produce the sensuous taste of allotment-grown-food via the presentation of the highly distinct aesthetic of a cultivated (weed-free) allotment garden. As such, allotment gardening in these locales is a highly distinct set of skilled practices requiring not only time and a strong healthy body, but also social skill and access to forms of social cooperation. These requirements course with intersections of the social processes of skill, valuation, and social cooperation, which bring both challenges (and delights) to allotment gardeners.

for my mother Jean Burn and in memory of my father James Elliott Burn

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Chapter 1. I didn't think it would be this hard

Go-halfers on cow manure

Steam rises into cold air as Lee (a working class man age mid-thirties) and Marty (a leekman age mid-fifties) shovel fresh damp cow manure at Spinham Allotments in Marnbreck on a Saturday morning in mid-October.¹ A recently delivered five feet high mound of manure looms large on the path outside their neighbouring allotment gardens.² Back and forth go the two men each at his own pace, repetitively moving the heavy manure one spadeful at a time. Every single spadeful is filled, carried, and deposited, onto Marty's garden to form a new and slowly increasing mound; when half the large pile has been moved in this way, only then will they start a pile afresh on Lee's garden, until the huge mound is gone. "Careful now..." warns Marty, as Lee begins heaving a particularly large clod of manure onto his garden spade. Marty, who started allotment gardening here as a boy, shovels manure like he's done it every single day of his life; nimble, fast, accurate, and without any sense of stress on his body. Lee, however, who arrived at Spinham³ a few months ago without experience of gardening, is struggling with the task at hand. He can't quite get the balance of spade, manure, and his body, aligned as he tries to lift a clod of damp heavy manure onto the counter-balance of the spade. A wobble weaves all the way from Lee's shoulder and down through his arm into the spade shaft, finishing at the dead weight of the clod as he fills his spade then struggles to stretch his back upright so as to be able to carry and deposit the manure. He is becoming more flushed and sweaty by the minute against the cold autumnal backdrop, as physical exertion takes its toll upon his body.

¹ People and places in this thesis are represented by pseudonyms; see Chapter 3 for Research Design (including a description of field sites). A detailed list of all people mentioned in the thesis is provided for the reader's ease of reference (see Appendix A). I explain what I mean by "leekman" shortly.

² This thesis is concerned with gardening that is practiced upon "allotment gardens" in Britain. There are, however, a variety of other forms of "allotment" in Britain (such as "fuel allotments", "cottage allotments") and, occasionally, neo-liberalised intervention projects (often called "community gardens" in Britain) are situated upon allotment gardens; none of these are of concern here. See Clayden (2008) for an overview of forms of allotment gardens in Britain; Blokland (2008) for intervention projects taking gardening practice as a theme; Wilshire and Geoghegan (2012) regarding the term "allotment garden" in a British context and the way in which its interchangeable term "community garden" is nation-specific globally.

³ Allotment gardeners at the field sites refer to their allotment garden site (and others in their locale) minus the word "Allotments", for instance simply as "Spinham". Accordingly, this means of representation is mirrored from this point onwards.

Initially, Lee had been enthusiastic to Marty's suggestion that they "go-halfers"⁴ to replenish the soil on their gardens with nutrients from rotted manure. Marty, who has connections in social networks to facilitate the skill of enriching allotment garden soil, then made arrangements with a farmer he has bought fresh manure from for years. Now, as I arrive to take up Marty's texted invitation to a cuppa⁵ at his allotment, Lee is regretting his initial enthusiasm. Out of Marty's earshot, Lee whispers to me "I didn't think it would be this *hard*", his voice fresh with the shock of realisation that this bodily movement will require repetition dozens of times and for the next couple of hours until all of the manure is moved. What is more, with a full time job and young children, Lee already finds it hard to make time to practice allotment gardening; he has to be back at work tomorrow for a long shift, knowing his body will be stiff and aching from this bodily labour. Indeed, he tells me, that if it weren't for Marty making time to enskill him in allotment gardening practice he would "be lost".

Over the following months, however, Lee's presence at the allotment is scant. With little sign of him since November, his garden is becoming weedy, the soil left untilled, the greenhouse empty of plants. Spring arrives and gardeners at Spinham, get busy with weeding, sowing, and planting for the coming growing season. Marty describes absent Lee's garden as a "battlefield", telling me (as he regularly does) that allotment gardens should be "neat and tidy" and gardeners should regularly make time to be present to do allotment gardening. Shortly thereafter, Marty tells me he has heard on the grapevine that Lee has left the allotment permanently, because he cannot make time to be present. A newcomer, George (a working class man age late-fifties), then arrives and begins cultivation of what was Lee's allotment garden. George already knows a couple of gardeners here at Spinham, as they went to school together, and with their help he swiftly clears weeds and starts sowing seeds. By the time I leave the field in the following September, Marty is pleased that George's allotment garden now bears "neat and tidy" lines of vegetables; meanwhile a greenhouse is being assembled collectively by George, Marty, and their friendship group.

⁴ To share the cost and labour of a task (or event) equally.

⁵ Drinking a hot beverage (usually tea or coffee), this can be an important content of social interaction in Britain.

Unlike Lee, accessing chains of social connections (such as suppliers of manure) and practicing allotment gardening outdoors all year round (and in all weather) is something that Marty is used to. He was enskilled in allotment gardening practice as a boy, by his now deceased grandfather, here at Spinham and he has continued practicing on the same garden ever since. Marty is legitimated (Lamont, 2012; Bourdieu, 1993) by allotment gardeners at Spinham as a skilled allotment gardener, a canonisation that has come about via the intersection of the social processes of skill, valuation, and social cooperation, in this small and highly distinct social world. I too am an allotment gardener, however, my presence at Spinham is as a PhD student undertaking ethnographic fieldwork on four field sites in the north east of England. The aim of my research is to provide an ethnographic account of social complexity in contemporary allotment gardening practice in the north east of England. Particularly, I am interested in the ways and means by which social cooperation is shaped and made by people in this social world; which social processes are involved in the formation of social cooperation and how they intersect. And, as a “pervasive and relentless reflexive exercise” (Edwards, 2000: 9), ethnographic fieldwork is a process that is at times as “hard” for me as shovelling manure is for Lee. However, like Marty, I am also skilled in allotment gardening practice; I have had an allotment garden since 1995. Yet, it is obvious to Marty and allotment gardeners at the field sites that I am certainly not skilled in *all* of the practices that layer-upon-layer produce allotment gardening in the north east of England. Hence, being able to recognise skill in allotment gardening requires as much knowledge of this practice as actually performing it.

In this thesis, I argue that an interweaving of the social processes of skill, valuation, and social cooperation, are pivotal to the reproduction of the social world of allotment gardens. Here, a social world is the cultural context within which a variety of people collectively produce something which they consider to be valuable, via their interactions and attentions to one another (Becker, 2008 [1982]; Becker and Pessin, 2006: 277). Following Mauss’ (1973 [1934]) idea of “techniques of the body”, in which culture is embodied (Marchand, 2008: 246; Crossley, 2007), this thesis regards allotment gardening as skilled practice (Hallam and Ingold, 2014; O’Connor, 2007). However, gardening practice takes many forms with skills that need to be learned (Gieser, 2014), accordingly, allotment gardening requires a particular set of skilled, bodily, labour intensive, time-demanding practices, *and* forms of

social cooperation, that demarcate allotment gardening as a highly distinct form of gardening practice.

These practices are undertaken to produce *the* most valued social characteristic in allotment gardening practice at the field sites: having sufficient skill, time, physical ability, and access to social cooperation, to produce the sensuous taste of allotment-grown-food⁶ via the presentation of the highly distinct aesthetic of a cultivated (weed-free) allotment garden. I call this aesthetic a “normative-allotment-garden-aesthetic” (Wohl, 2015; Bourdieu, 1984), because it plays an active role in valuation processes at the field sites. As such, allotment gardening in these localities is a highly distinct set of skilled practices requiring not only time and a strong healthy body that can bend, dig, stretch (and do so repetitively and with ease in all weathers), but also social skill (Fligstein, 2001)⁷ and access to forms of social cooperation. As I illustrate in this thesis, these requirements bring both challenges and delights to allotment gardeners at the field sites and are saturated with processes of skill, valuation, and social cooperation.

Contextualising allotment gardening practice

Introduction: a distinct form of gardening

Gardening is a popular pastime in Britain and this is frequently illustrated in social science explanations via reference to Mintel statistics about how much gardeners spend on their practice per annum (*see e.g.* Degnen, 2009: 155; Bhatti and Church, 2000: 188; Constantine, 1981: 387). Whilst this approach is useful for thinking about all forms of gardening bundled together, financial statistics about consumption shed little light upon allotment gardening practice. Familiar patterns of consumption are not followed at the allotment, which remains a site of production into which the market rarely intrudes and where non-market forms dominate. Yet, sociological accounts have become saturated by “the cash nexus” (Dant, 2000: 655) in which consumption rather than production is central to analysis. What is more, the means by which allotment gardening is practiced in villages, towns, and cities, throughout Britain are concurrently both the same *and* different to one another:

⁶ This thesis purposely avoids describing allotment gardeners as “food producers” (or “local food growers”), because this vocabulary has distinct connotations in contemporary Britain where food’s provenance, production, and sovereignty, is a politicised discourse (*see e.g.* Paddock, 2015). And, of course, edible plants at the allotment not only sustain humans but also other entities there, such as slugs and pigeons.

⁷ Briefly, an ability to induce cooperation; this is explained in Chapter 2.

always the same contiguous plots of land allocated (mostly) by local government for (non-commercial) gardening, yet each site different to one another via the wide variety of layered and locally context-dependent allotment gardening practices undertaken. These unique occurrences lead to the production of a distinct set of skilled practices compared to other forms of gardening, such as home gardening. This is immediately apparent upon arrival at the field sites in this thesis, which are located in an area of Britain known as the north east of England.

Allotment gardening in the north east of England

The north east of England is a distinct locale, bounded to the west by both the Pennine and Cheviot Hills, with the River Tweed to the north (representing a sub-national boundary with Scotland) and the North York Moors to the south; meanwhile, the North Sea provides all of the “east”. Here, some populations and economies have mushroomed (and subsequently deflated) since the beginning of industrialization and this has affected allotment gardening as much as any other part of social life. Initially, in the 19th Century, the north east of England became a site of intense rapid growth related to arduous (and at times dangerous) “heavy industries”, such as coal mining, ship building, and armaments production and, consequently, some villages ballooned into towns (and towns into cities) as inward migration occurred in a rapidly modernizing Britain (Nayak, 2003: 8). During these times and places, allotment gardens (as we now know them) began to appear, but always by processes of rationalization in which bureaucracy replaces tradition and values via the application of principles that are perceived as “neutral” and “fair” (Lamont *et al*, 2014: 591). It is within the context of rationalization that public officials are expected to accord value (*ibid.*); an outcome of rationalization is the enablement of some people, whilst others are constrained (*ibid.*). Accordingly, allotment gardening practice is imbued with local government’s highly subjective expectations along with incumbent monitoring and valuations by public officials and allotment committees (who perform some functions of public officials).⁸ In this light,

⁸ This thesis is not concerned with analysis of meta-narratives such as government policy, but it is important for the reader to understand the importance of the role of local government in allotment gardening practice because (at times) this has direct consequences for everyday life at the field sites. For instance, with regard to the normative-allotment-garden-aesthetic that I explain in this thesis, it is actually the local council that determines the aesthetic for its allotment sites whether the sites are managed by an allotment committee or not. These expectations are expressed in technical instruments (such as tenancy agreements and leases) via words such as “weed-free”, “neat”, “tidy”, and “husbandlike” (see Wiltshire, 2010: 6). In my previous role within allotment gardening – which I discuss shortly – I have read hundreds of such documents yet none omit this aesthetic expectation or this vocabulary. Not meeting this expectation can result in sanctions: the

allotment gardeners in the north east of England (and beyond) can be imagined as willing participants in a practice for which they have affective sentiment, but which is imbued with the regulatory intrusion and authority of the State.

Commencing in the late 1970s, however, populations and social life in the north east of England transformed significantly as a consequence of widespread deindustrialisation when many (so-called) Western nation states instigated economic restructuring (Wheelock and Mariussen, 1997: xv). Although heavy industry and manufacturing had become *the* source of “life-long labour” for many men in this locale, following this switch to post-industrial economies these jobs were sunk almost without trace (Nayak, 2003: 7). Hence, these settings moved in only 25-30 years from being highly regarded for their industries to become (in)famous for city nightscapes of pubs and nightclubs (Robinson, 1988, *in* Hollands, 1997: 174), as well as service sectors (Hollands, 1997: 174). Accordingly, the social fabric became somewhat fragmented due to “disrupted access to previous channels of social interaction and sources of meaning” (Degnen, 2013: 558). In particular, gender roles altered with men’s roles diminishing as main income earners in households, whilst women’s positionality relocated further from home and more fully into the workplace, although often in insecure and part-time employment (Sande, 1997: 11). Alongside, the role of men in arranging their sons’ apprenticeship and life-long employment faded with their occupations, hence, trajectories of gender power and influence folded rapidly, becoming ripe for transformation (Dawson, 2002: 108). Some very specific and gendered local sources of meaning and their hegemonies connected to allotment gardening began to fade in the north east of England during these post-industrial transformations. Particularly, the role of social clubs – a firm nodal point for chains of networks in allotment gardening practice – began to subside because men⁹ had less (of their own) money to spend on socialising, whilst (freshly economically independent) women and younger people sought sources of socialising and entertainment elsewhere.

allotment gardener is ordered to leave the allotment. Gardeners at the field sites call this being “thrown off”. These sanctions are enforced by public officials and allotment committees; technical instruments underpin this process.

⁹ Gender equality in social clubs (such as, women’s access to all areas and positions on management committees) was not enacted until 2007. Previously, areas such as The Bar were exclusively men-only domains; women were only permitted to enter areas designated for mixed gender (and family) use and a very different kind of socialising (*see* Cherrington, 2012; Smith, 2012; Mollona, 2008).

Yet, although there are now three cities, a clutch of universities, and three rival (big league) football teams in this locale, there are pockets of land without settlements and consequently some settlements are actually quite separated from one another. This, along with post-industrial social transformations can produce settings of intense localness with strong senses of shared histories, traditions, and intimate and finely-detailed knowledge of one another's life biographies, thus, producing distinct identities and affiliations (Degnen, 2013: 554). Hence, like many locales in Britain, intricately tuned social distinctions are produced, the outcome of which are discrete boundaries that are present variously via detailed intersections of accents and dialects, forced socialisation, and forms of sociality that occur in Britain, such as practicing and watching sport, drinking in pubs or social clubs, or religious observance (Edwards, 1998: 148). However, post-industrial social transformations are also a very complex, multi-layered and not linear set of processes of social, economic, cultural, and historical, transformations. Thus, whilst moves to post-industrial social life undoubtedly produce "socioeconomic deprivation and material devastation in areas of industrial decline" (Mah, 2009: 287), there is also a deeper and more nuanced set of stories. Vibrant, vital, and dynamic, local experiences and forms of meaning remain present in the north east of England and allotment gardening practice at the field sites is one such meaningful experience.

Recent social transformations at the allotment: a paradoxical story

Like the north east of England, so too has allotment gardening undergone distinct phases and transformations. After a collapse in popularity post-World War II, allotment gardening in Britain is currently in the latter stages of a boom in popularity that has also seen (to a certain extent) the social characteristics of the allotment transform since the early 2000s (see e.g. Buckingham, 2005). Yet, to claim that changes in social demographics in allotment gardening have fully transformed this social world – from a site with a majority population of men into one with a wide variety of people with various social characteristics – can create romanticised ideas of contemporary allotment gardening practice as something authentically socially diverse. Actually, this thesis notes that although allotment gardening sites have undergone processes of social demographic transformation to a large extent, some have done so only marginally. Indeed, the majority of allotment gardeners across the field sites in this thesis are actually men with working class characteristics, skilled in manual and/or heavy industry labour practices, who are not engaged in the formal economic sphere

and whose working lives span the post-industrial social transformations I have explained above; it is actually their interactions, skills, memories, and practices, which are most commonplace at the field sites.

What is more, this thesis illustrates that exactly *who* is legitimated as a “proper” (authentic) allotment gardener is actually the outcome of social processes not only in operation at the allotment but also beyond the allotment gates; this point has important methodological implications about how scholars study forms of gardening and represent allotment gardeners. Thus, whilst it is clear that allotment gardening has increased in popularity in recent years, my points above (about exactly *who* is doing allotment gardening and how they are valued) emphasise that allotment gardening practice is context-specific to the locales in which it is undertaken; and that it is only via deep and sustained engagement with allotment gardeners that a full picture of the contemporary social world of allotment gardens can be gleaned.

Allotment gardeners at the field sites describe themselves as present at the allotment (and remaining so) to produce the sensuous taste of allotment-grown-food; and, derive delight, pride, and satisfaction (and some frustrations and disappointments) from doing so. Cultivating edible plants such as strawberries, potatoes, and tomatoes, to eat oneself and also to distribute via one’s social networks is the main focus of attention in this social world. However, this requires both skill and social cooperation; in this case the form of informal voluntary social cooperation (*see e.g.* Sennett, 2012; Burawoy, 1979) between allotment gardeners.¹⁰ Understanding how social cooperation is formed, which social processes are involved, and how they interweave, is the key aim of this thesis.

However, there are actually multiple, distinct, vibrant, skilled practices both within and without the allotment that layer and overlap (with the cultivation of allotment-grown-food) to produce allotment gardening practice in these localities. These include, for instance, labouring to produce a significant and prominent object for the allotment without spending any money at all, or cultivating certain plants and animals to exhibit in organised

¹⁰ Accordingly, this thesis is not concerned with forms of formal social cooperation undertaken by mobilized civic society groups in allotment gardening, such as allotment committees.

competitions with prize giving.¹¹ These two examples are a strong component of this thesis, as they are important facets of allotment gardening practice at the field sites; signalling that there are distinct groups and skilled practices in operation at the allotment along with distinct identities and affiliations.

Leekmen and bricoleurs

Marty is not only skilled in producing allotment-grown-food, he also cultivates vegetables to enter into organised competitions for prizes, and produces complex and significant objects for use in his allotment gardening practice without spending money; he is also skilled in raising chickens for eggs and breeding racing pigeons, although he no longer practices the latter. As such, Marty illustrates the distinctiveness of allotment gardeners at the field sites; he undertakes a variety of layered, distinct, skilled practices to produce his allotment gardening practice and which is never exactly the same as anyone else's. Hence, Marty's allotment garden is as socially distinct and individual as Marty himself. For instance, the way he nets his peas with old football goal netting; his beloved grandfather's gardening knife (a much loved and treasured object) always on a specific shelf in the greenhouse, and the times he is present and with whom (or not) reflect Marty's everyday life and social relationships in the town of Marnbreck and the wider locale. Thus, although this thesis goes on to explain that there are some distinct groups and affiliations at the allotment, each allotment gardener at the field sites is a socially distinct person with their own experiences and practices.

Specifically, however, and diverging from most allotment gardeners at the field sites, Marty has skill in cultivating "giant leeks"; these are leek plants cultivated to a size, shape, colour, and appearance, that is socially distinct from leek plants grown at the allotment (and in commercial cultivation) for human consumption in Britain. Leekmen¹² who grow giant-leeks at the field sites – to weights often over 15 lbs – actually grow their giant-leeks collectively via the "joint activities" form of social cooperation, in which people work together on a joint

¹¹ Such as pigeon racing (see e.g. Jerolmack, 2013) and "shows" (exhibitions) (see e.g. Constantine, 1981) in which competition for prizes is based upon the physical appearance of particular plants or animals, for instance, vegetables, fruits, flowers, chickens, fancy birds. Whilst these practices are not unique to the north east of England (or to allotment gardening practice) this locale hosts a particularly rich seam of these practices.

¹² Women do not grow giant-leeks at the field sites. This is a highly gendered practice in Britain; it is extremely rare to find women giant-leek growers. Hence giant-leek growers are identified as "leekmen" at the field sites.

task to produce something they value as a collective achievement (Becker, 2008 [1982]). Giant-leek growing has an iconic status in the north east of England and the localities in which this study was undertaken have a particularly rich seam of this practice compared to other parts of Britain, thus, it is this specific instance of joint activities (*ibid.*) that is explained in the thesis.

What is more, Marty is also skilled in *bricolage*; with no direct equivalent in English, the term *bricolage* comes from the French to mean the assemblage of something useful or valuable from found or acquired objects (Leach and Wilson, 2014: 12).¹³ The skilled practice of the *bricoleur* is the unprecedented repairing or construction with what is on hand (Harper, 1987) and the presence of *bricolage* on an allotment garden clearly demarcates *bricoleurs*¹⁴ and their allotment gardens. The garden of a *bricoleur* at the field sites is prominent and easily recognisable because it contains objects (such as sheds, greenhouses, fences) that have been *bricolaged* from found objects. Marty, for instance, became enskilled in manual labour practices during his working life in Marnbreck and, although now retired, has access to chains of social networks via which he has obtained objects to improvise a complex coal-fired, piped, heating system in his *bricolaged* greenhouse to provide warmth for his giant-leeks (and his body) in winter.

The role of the social club in the process of *bricolage* is a strong presence at the field sites, indicating that not only is allotment gardening a highly social practice but also one dependent upon social networks extending way beyond the allotment gates and into the surrounding locales, but which (to a certain extent) remain gendered. Recently, a new thrift culture (Allen *et al*, 2015; Ginn, 2012: 295) has refocused these practices as (partial) responses to austerity. Hence, a practice such as *bricolage* (which has long defined allotment gardening) is now somewhat inviting for those wishing to engage with thrift but via a more commodified, less skilled, less gendered, means than the skilled *bricolage*

¹³ “*Bricolage*” here is used materially, not metaphorically as Levis-Strauss did; I am not the first person to note *bricolage* in allotment gardening practice, for instance Buckingham and Theobald (2003) conceptualise *bricolage* as a means to “sustainable lifestyles”.

¹⁴ By referring to men who practice *bricolage* as “*bricoleurs*” I stress most firmly that I do not seek to ascribe a particular identity or world view onto these people. What is noteworthy about *bricoleurs* at the field sites is that these men function as a distinct group in allotment gardening practice, for instance via regularised social interactions, participating in collective activity, and having similar kinds of social ties, but no more than that. Hence, I do not seek to confer an identity or denote a “tribe” in the thesis by referring to a group of people as *bricoleurs*.

practiced by bricoleurs such as Marty. As I illustrate in this thesis, bricolage is a very important part of social life at the field sites for some and a marker of identity. However, it is also a practice under certain threats; there are instances of local councils and some private providers of allotment gardens in Britain restricting – or proposing to restrict – allotment gardeners from bringing found objects onto allotment sites, or restricting sheds to only those produced by commercial manufacturers (*see e.g.* Harrison, 2015).

Accordingly, although some elements of industrialized social life in the north east of England have diminished (or vanished completely) there remain nodal points of intense localness and gender divisions, such as the social club, that continue to connect the allotment – and especially bricoleurs – with the histories and traditions of this locale. Thus, despite post-industrial social transformations, allotment gardening practice at the field sites remains a vibrant and vital dynamic local experience and form of meaning-making, comprising of layers of highly distinct practices, individuals and groups. And, even though some recent demographic transformations have occurred in allotment gardening, the field sites continue to have a majority group of allotment gardeners who are men with working class characteristics, skilled in manual and/or heavy industry labour practices, who are not engaged in the economic sphere, and whose working lives span post-industrial social transformations in settings of intense localness. Thus, bricoleurs signal the range of ways in which allotment gardening is practiced and by whom; it is within these settings of complex, enduring, and historical, social networks and boundaries, that people who live in these localities practice allotment gardening at the field sites.

Representations of allotment gardening

An imaginary is a means of “thinking the world into being”, hence, less a metaphor and more a way by which people practice ordering (Latimer and Skeggs, 2011: 397). Accordingly, it is critical for me (a sociologist seeking to understand a social world) to unpack, question, and contest, representations of allotment gardeners and their practice (*ibid.*). This provides the reader, firstly, with an understanding of assumptions present in various channels and, secondly, imparts how this thesis perceives allotment gardening practice and the people who undertake it. As such, unravelling imaginaries can help bring understanding of (large and small) cultural and political agendas affecting the people and practices being studied (*ibid.*: 394). Like Taylor (2008: 59), I too have concerns about some representations of

allotment gardening. For instance, Crouch and Ward (1994 [1988]), frequently regarded as a classic text on allotment gardening, is actually “a socialist history of working class allotment gardens” rather than a critically reflexive account (Taylor, 2008: 59). What is more, and as I discuss below, when allotment gardeners are imagined beyond academia (for instance, by some public officials, journalists, authors, TV and radio producers), individual people can become amalgamated and cemented into one group of allotment gardeners that is simultaneously peaceful, heroic, plucky, and eccentric, but *always* amateur. Instead, and as I posit in this thesis, allotment gardeners at the field sites are simply a variety of people who practice a form of gardening and from whom sociologists have much to learn about processes of skill, valuation, and social cooperation.

Within the multiple pathways via which allotment gardening is represented, it is clear that the practice has become and remains (to a certain extent) a fixture of social life in most localities throughout Britain. At the very least, this indicates that some people believe allotment gardening sufficiently valuable enough to hang onto, to set some land (with, at times, incredibly high economic value) aside for, and keep it that way. However, within this valuation (Lamont, 2012) “of sorts”, it is seldom stated how this legitimisation is arrived at or for whom, to the extent that it is not even known how many allotment gardens there actually are or how many people use them.¹⁵ Hence, at times, it simply appears to be enough that allotment gardening is “there” in the background without requirement to stipulate *why* allotment gardening matters to people both internal and external to the allotment.

However, within renderings of allotment gardening, there is a veer towards imagining this practice through romanticising other times and places. An instance is the portrayal of allotment gardeners as notable heroic citizens who collectively produced allotment-grown-food to feed Britain during World War II, through a “Dig for Victory” gardening campaign

¹⁵ There are no publically available data about the *total* number of State-provided allotment gardens in Britain. Even the State concedes that its own attempts, to gather this information from its own local officials in England, provided (optional) responses that were “too low to provide robust information” (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2006: 2). Nor is there publically available data about the number of allotment gardens provided by non-State actors, apart from occasional localised history projects (*e.g.* Burchardt and Cooper, 2010). Thus, claims about total numbers of allotment gardens (and numbers of people who want one) and the number of allotment gardeners in Britain should be treated with caution. This is important to note in research design, *see* Chapter 3.

devised by the State (Ginn, 2012). For sure, there is evidence of Britain producing more food via non-commercial gardening practices during these times (*ibid.*: 296), however, recent scholarship finds the systems of measurement applied debateable, and the campaign far more about engendering a spirit of collectivity and citizenship (*ibid.*). Yet, Dig for Victory remains a firm component of contemporary imaginings of the past in Britain, with allotment gardening embedded; examples include promotional material about allotment gardening produced by local government (*see e.g.* Enfield Council, 2015); affiliations by some civic society gardening organisations (such as Garden Organic, *see* Platten, 2013: 304); even the most left-leaning of broadsheet newspapers, the Guardian, selects the title “Dig for Victory” for a book review of (mostly) allotment gardening publications (*see* Lacey, 2006). Coursing through these ideas are descriptions of the allotment as not only productive, but as an ever-peaceful idyll. In this imagining, allotment gardeners are portrayed practicing a quieter slower-paced life. In a local State-sponsored book (*see* Fryer and Rigby, 1992), for instance, allotment gardens are “Peaceable Kingdoms”, thus implying a tranquil practice. Yet, illegal activities are noted in allotment gardening practice too, such as concealment of stolen goods, explosives, and cannabis cultivation (Wiltshire and Burn, 2008: 58). Recently, an allotment gardener was found co-guilty of the murder of a woman called Sameen Imam and burying her body on his allotment garden (Hinckley Times, 2015).

Within some representations, are claims that allotment gardening is a practice “...which crosses boundaries, transcending class and monetary values...” (Crouch, 2003: 19). Hence, despite social class being but one form of categorisation, allotment gardening here is described without due attention to deeper and more complex forms that are present, such as the social process of skill which I explain in Chapter 4. Hence, the past can undergo problematic processes of valuation when people consider which stories to value and retain, and which to screen out (Edwards, 1998: 150). Thus, even though “we all need a bit of history” (*ibid.*), ideas of a peaceful allotment with classless heroic allotment gardeners serve only to reproduce romantic notions of an Englishness that never actually existed (Leddy-Owen, 2014; Tyler, 2012).

Yet, pick up a local or regional newspaper off the racks in newsagents’ close to the field sites and (occasionally) you might find an everyday story about an allotment gardener who has

had her shed broken into, or a photograph of a pigeonman with this year's winner.¹⁶ Thus, glimpses of the everyday lives of individual allotment gardeners are actually quite faithfully represented in some journalistic accounts. But, once away from the local source of these representations, allotment gardening can become imagined in various forms of media as an "eccentric" part of life in Britain. Although there is obsession with hobbies in Britain, there is even more infatuation with the people who undertake them; hobbyists are valued as "odd" but welcome. One example is how allotment gardens are described as sites of illicit sexual activity; this is a commonplace activity in everyday life, hence, the allotment is no exception (see e.g. Dawson, 2002, 1990). Yet, in "Bread" (Nash, 1988) – a TV situation comedy representing a working class family as "feckless benefit cheats" – the estranged father is portrayed as participating in illicit sexual relations with a woman in a brightly-painted pink allotment-garden-shed they live in. However, allotment gardeners are neither permitted to live at the allotment (one may only visit daily), nor are allotment sheds frequently painted bright pink; sheds are more usually painted in mundane colours (brown or green), or retain the colours of objects they were bricolaged with. Hence, via this representation, a tiny facet of allotment gardening has been expanded beyond everyday ordinariness and proportions and is, instead, rendered through over-inflated characterisations of eccentricity.

Finally, within all these representations, is an ever-present reference to a distinct role that allotment gardeners are expected to attend to: being amateur. Hierarchies of knowledge production continue to persist as an enduring feature of social life, dividing and categorising people on the basis of recognising qualification (Malcomson, 2014: 225), and can be placed on a spectrum ranging from amateur to professional (Bush *et al*, 2005: 661). Within discourse on forms of gardening in Britain – including allotment gardening – a hint that ways of knowing are being made distinct is when the word "keen" crops up to describe a gardener. Here, people with qualifications in gardening practice are referred to as "(professional) horticulturalists" – for instance people working in garden design or municipal parks (see Geiser, 2014) – whilst anyone without qualification and not earning financial income from their gardening practice is demoted to a "keen" gardener (see Taylor, 2008, for several examples of home gardeners self-identifying as "keen"). As such, although the word

¹⁶ As with leekmen, allotment gardeners' identification of people who breed and race pigeons is based on the practice being gendered at the field sites (see Jerolmack, 2013).

amateur is not always used outright,¹⁷ “keen” has become a norm in distinguishing between and creating distinction amongst gardeners, and allotment gardening is no exception. Such hierarchies of knowledge production do little to acknowledge that amateur hobbyists (or “non-professionals”) actually possess and transmit significant specialist knowledge and are skilled in and hold affective sentiment for their chosen practice (Malcomson, 2014: 224; Platten, 2013; Barthel *et al*, 2010). Furthermore, being positioned as amateur has consequences for the reproduction of the social world of allotment gardens. Particularly, newspapers and gardening TV programmes have erased the social processes of skill, time, and social cooperation, required for allotment gardening practice (Platten, 2013: 305). Subsequently, new arrivals to the allotment with little or no experience of any form of gardening can have unrealistic expectations of what this practice entails and leave soon after arrival (*ibid.*). Such media portrayals are persistent, despite the self-awareness of gardening journalists (*see e.g.* Leendertz, 2015). As Platten (2013: 315) astutely notes, the depth of skill, the complexity of social cooperation, and the time spans involved, mean that the nuances of allotment gardening practice cannot be easily subsumed into a 30 minute primetime TV slot. Thus, just as Lee whispered to me whilst struggling to shovel manure, some new arrivals do not expect allotment gardening to be as difficult, as *hard*, as it can be.

Women aren’t supposed to push wheelbarrows: researcher autobiography

Ethnography and autobiography

Ethnography has been subjected to a variety of contested definitions and discourses across and within disciplines, for instance about whom can claim to “own” ethnography, how ethnography is undertaken in the field, and the privileging of some forms of data over others (Lamont and Swidler, 2014; Okely, 2012: 15). For me, ethnography is always the conscious and unconscious participation in the practices of a social world that is of interest to the researcher, and her subsequent representation of that social world to an academic audience (Okely, 1983: 45). As such, ethnographic fieldwork (“participant observation”, here including semi-structured interviews) is a form of “knowing” practiced through the senses and the body, rather merely observing through the eyes (*ibid.*). Hence, from my perspective, ethnography is far more than a research method for my fieldwork and is actually a methodological framework for this thesis (Brewer, 1994: 231), from its earliest

¹⁷ An exception is a weekly gardening magazine that has retained the title “Amateur Gardening” since 1884 (*see* Constantine, 1981), thus, further reinforcing hierarchies of knowledge production.

conceptualisation to the ongoing commitment I have to the representation of the people I have worked with in the field (Simpson, 2011).

In moving beyond ethnography as merely a data collection method, however, this rendering requires a strong autobiographical element and is also, hence, a means by which positivism – a natural sciences approach to understanding social life – can be challenged and possibly even dismantled (Okely and Callaway, 1992: 3). However, this stance demands reflexivity; an appreciation of the social complexity (and context) of knowledge production in the academy, along with an ability (to learn) and act upon that by ascertaining and defending one's position (May, 2004: 183, *in* Roberts and Sanders, 2005: 296). This in itself is a skilled way of knowing, but is also a process that can “haunt” and emotionally toy with the ethnographer (Borneman and Hammoudi, 2009: 6). Accordingly, it has been vital for me to reflexively consider my biography throughout this research, because my social characteristics, and my prior knowledge and experiences, directly affect my position in relation to the people I am able to work with in the field *and* how I represent those people textually (Lumsden, 2009: 502).

Whilst some scholars (*see e.g.* Adkins, 2002, or Skeggs, 2004; 1997, *both in* Lumsden, 2009: 498) urge researchers to consider that reflexivity can be counterproductive – because narrating the self might subsume authority over reflexivity – the whole point of autobiography is to undergo a process of working through the self to contextualise and transcend it, rather than description (Okely, 2012: 9; Okely and Callaway, 1992: 2). That I am a woman of middle age, from a working class locale in the north east of England, and a late arrival to the academy, are key facets of my biography for reflexive consideration. However, that I am also an allotment gardener, with a prior employment period in promoting this practice too, is a prominent means by which I self-identify; allotment gardening is a skilled practice I am proud to affiliate with, have affective sentiment for, and have invested significant labour in. This combination of social characteristics directly affects every single aspect of this thesis.

Matter out of place

After collecting freshly-laid eggs in Michelle's (a working class woman age late-thirties) henhouse one day, during which our clothes soak up the smells and stains of chicken

manure, she tells me she needs to go home and collect a bag of compost from her home garden. She will walk home with her wheelbarrow, returning later to the allotment with her compost in the wheelbarrow. Then Michelle adds, with a frown, that she will get some “funny looks” from neighbours and passers-by for doing so, before going on to explain to me that it is a widely-held belief in her neighbourhood that “...women aren’t supposed to push wheelbarrows...”. Michelle’s statement reflects that contemporary portrayals of allotment gardening as an appropriate femininity can be distant from the everyday experiences of some women at the field sites; this thesis concurs with and further illustrates that women’s role(s) in the garden have been misunderstood (Bhatti, 2014; Raisborough and Bhatti, 2007; Bhatti and Church, 2000).

Like me, Michelle has been raised (and continues to live) in a respectable working class neighbourhood of intense localness, in which women are expected to perform in a manner reflecting middle class ideals. “Being respectable” is an embodiment of moral authority for those who possess it, and is a process of identifying and demarcating people considered unrespectable (Skeggs, 1997: 3). Accordingly, although Michelle is skilled in allotment gardening – including growing food in a polytunnel all year round¹⁸ – and takes great pride in filling her children’s packed lunches with allotment-grown-food, she is actually denoted in her neighbourhood more for what is considered to be her inappropriate femininity than her skilled allotment gardening practice. Michelle’s experiences, of her allotment gardening practice and her associated clothing and comportment, being judged as inappropriate for a woman in her neighbourhood, closely parallel my own when I began allotment gardening in 1995. As a young woman, raised and living in a neighbourhood where women are expected to keep net curtains brilliantly white at front windows, do housework, raise children, and seek (preferably part-time) employment – but certainly not practice allotment gardening other than to “help” her husband occasionally on his allotment garden and preferably by growing only flowers – I am like Michelle “matter out of place” (Skeggs, 1999) in the locality I reside in, thus, highlighting that social distinctions remain context specific (*ibid.*: 216).

¹⁸ The continuous production of allotment-grown-food in a polytunnel (a large, long, walk-in, arch-shaped, structure covered in light emitting polythene) across all four seasons in Britain is a highly skilled facet of allotment gardening practice. This is yet another layer of allotment gardening practice at the field sites.

After only two years' experience of home gardening practice (growing ornamental plants in pots, in a concrete yard), I arrived at the allotment garden site nearest to my home as a 27 year old woman. I was one of three women on an (at that time, mostly derelict) allotment garden site where 20 or so men with working class characteristics were quite unused to a woman wanting an allotment garden of her own and some (but not all) of whom were hostile to our presence. For instance, when I offered to take a position on the allotment committee two years after arrival, one man allotment gardener wrote to the local council stating that, whilst he did not object to women having allotment gardens "of their own", he did not believe women should be "allowed" on the committee. He demanded the local council intervene, which was firmly rejected in the interests of equality.

A (privileged) navigation and enskillment

Whilst I clearly lacked allotment gardening skill upon arrival, three facets of my biography enabled my social navigation (Vigh, 2009; 2006) of the allotment. Firstly, I did have some (limited) home gardening skill, having been enskilled by a relative; this enabled me to improvise some plant cultivation practices and enter into tentative social interactions about gardening at the allotment. Secondly, after initial probing of my biography by men at the allotment, it was quickly established that most knew my father (and some had known his late father, both trusted local shop keepers in the locality). Thus, I could be located as "known" in the neighbourhood, via connotations of where I lived (and was born), the past, and sociability (Degnen, 2013: 557). Thirdly, having been raised in a household situated only a matter of a few feet from an(other) allotment site, as a girl I had played on the other side of the chain-link (transparent) fencing to the (men) gardeners but had overheard their conversations, become familiar with their comings and goings, and heard my domestic neighbours' opinions of what went on there. Thus, following my arrival at the allotment as an adult, I gradually developed social relationships, learning which men approved of women being present and (of those) who I could and could not trust to give me gardening advice.

And so I stayed put and remain gardening there to this day but, like Michelle, the sight of me pushing my wheelbarrow remains unsettling to some men and women in my neighbourhood, and at the allotment. Accordingly, my participation in allotment gardening has been (and continues to be at times) a process of contestation as well as one of affective sentiment. However, this combination of prior experience of a form of gardening,

attunedness to the locality, and the affiliations of the allotment gardeners I encountered, was actually a privileged position; I have noted many women without such privileges leaving the allotment shortly after arrival. Accordingly, and as this thesis illustrates, not all women allotment gardeners have the same experiences and encounters as Michelle and me. This enhances the point I made earlier, that whilst there are distinct groups and affiliations at the allotment each allotment gardener remains an individual person.

My gardening biography is similar (in some ways) to that of many people: I got interested in gardening, I tried doing it and found I liked it, and over time and via social relations I became enskilled in the practice. However, unlike most people, my enskillment process became highly privileged when (in 2003) I became an employee of a fledgling project to stimulate public and government interest in allotment gardening. Having entered higher education as a mature student age 31, I was the first person in my family to gain a bachelor's degree and entry into a "professional" employment position (*see Reay et al, 2010*). Over the next nine years, I became immersed in allotment gardening as a form of "serious leisure"; my hobby had also become my career (Raisborough, 2006; 1999). As such, I was privileged to be constantly surrounded by (or in communication with) skilled allotment gardeners from whom I could learn further. What is more, via visiting an incalculable number of allotment sites around Britain and interacting with a wide variety of allotment gardeners, I became more deeply attuned to what the practice means to people than when I was (limited to) practicing allotment gardening only on my allotment site.

Key to this thesis, however, is that during this employment role I developed an understanding of the wide variety of local, vibrant, and context-specific, allotment gardening practices that are present in Britain. Hence, I came to understand that allotment gardening everywhere is always the same but different, depending upon the social life of a locale and its residents, the weather, and length of growing season. And so too I became adept at interacting with a wide range of allotment gardeners I had only just met, from a variety of social backgrounds, finding some commonality in our practices with which to initiate interactions and develop professional relationships. Yet, despite this privileging, there remain facets of this practice that I am not enskilled in; I cannot grow giant leeks or practice bricolage, as I am without the required gendered enskillment experiences. Hence my lack of skill in some aspects of allotment gardening practice affects my biography as much as the

practices that I am enskilled in. Thus, who I am clearly affects, and (as I explain in Chapter 3) has been at times problematic, my researching this social world. But, my biography also brings a nuanced, highly original, understanding of allotment gardening in Britain through my privileged positioning that others could not bring to this particular piece of research.

Rationale

Lone actors and high “scruffy” fences

My rationale for undertaking this research is, of course, directly linked to my biography; I not only delight in this practice but am intellectually interested in how it is reproduced (Tyler, 2012: 27). However, that I sought to study allotment gardening practice via the academy is no accident and has come about through both frustrations and joys. As I emerged from the confines of my allotment garden in 2003, I was struck time and time again in my new employment position that allotment gardening practice is frequently perceived in various channels in two ways. Firstly, that all allotment gardens are a site of the lone actor, who plods-away at growing vegetables with little or no interaction with the people gardening on the contiguous plots of land alongside. Secondly, that a prevalence of high internal fencing around some but not all allotment garden plots (for instance, in parts of the north east of England, Stoke-on-Trent, Glasgow) appears “shabby” (unrespectable) and results in absolutely no socialising between allotment gardeners at all.

Yet, by comparing my knowledge and experiences with those of new (allotment gardener) colleagues, and via encounters with allotment gardeners and public officials on field visits, I was aware that these perceptions were far from the actuality we were living and gardening. I simply did not recognise the description of the lone actor and was disappointed that this formed the basis for policy decisions at various levels of State.¹⁹ And, that allotment gardening practice in some locales is considered unsociable and aesthetically displeasing, simply because of the erection of fencing to certain heights, pushed me to consider again and again the role of valuation; a ubiquitous, normative, social process via which value is ascribed to an entity (Lamont, 2012: 205). I knew that, often, it is allotment garden sites with a majority of gardeners with working class characteristics that have high internal

¹⁹ Which civic society groups get economic resourcing and for what in Britain is often grounded in the notion of “helping” groups of people who can perform as (widely defined) “communities”. Being defined as lone actors has (at times) excluded allotment gardens from resource allocation.

fencing. Thus, I wondered what “respectability” meant at the allotment, because I had personal and employment experience of high internal fencing being no barrier at all to social interaction on allotment garden sites.

Yet, it was visible to me that whilst socialisation did occur, not every allotment gardener was receiving social cooperation at the allotment no matter the location in Britain. Accordingly, I began to understand that the social processes of skill, valuation, and social cooperation, are highly active and intertwine in allotment gardening practice. Thus, from the earliest conceptualisation of this thesis, these social processes have been privileged over others that could have been focussed upon.

Sociology: a later arrival to the garden

The etymological root of “garden” originates in “*geard*” (fence), meaning an enclosed space cultivated in some way (van Erp-Houtepen, 1986: 227), hence, providing sociologists with an early indication that boundaries and distinctions are in operation in the garden. Indeed, in her call for greater sociological attention to gardens and gardeners, Hondagneu-Sotelo, (2010: 499) notes that “...gardens reflect prevailing social relations of power, culture, race, class, and gender, and there are significant social and environmental consequences connected to the way we garden”. As such, one could anticipate that sociologists would be rushing towards the allotment garden gate but, actually, sociology is a later arrival to the garden than most social science disciplines. Hence, there is only a scant body of sociological primary data analyses of gardens and gardening (including allotment gardening) available at present, *e.g.* Kettle (2014), Benson and Jorgensen (2013), and Hondagneu-Sotelo (2010). There is, however, a substantial body of inter-disciplinary, (secondary data) sociological analyses of home gardening in Britain (*see* Bhatti and Church, 2004; 2001; 2000), along with a limited amount of social theory literature that touches upon gardening (*see e.g.* Szerszynski *et al*, 2003; Franklin, 2002). Indeed, at times, some of the most sociologically-intense analyses of gardening have actually been undertaken outside of the discipline (*e.g.* Taylor, 2008).

What is more, in both sociology and cognate disciplines, there is less a study of gardening as a time-pressured, intensely physical, skilled, and oft-times collective practice, and more of a veer towards analyses of the gardening self; I discuss this literature further in Chapter 2, but

for now it is important to note that there is greater study of gardening as meaning making (see e.g. Ginn, 2014a) than as collective activity. Thus, there is a paucity of gardening analyses in sociology and, whilst these (and those from cognate disciplines) certainly provide useful conceptualisations and questions, there is a significant opportunity to gain sociological insight into everyday social complexity in gardening practice, especially the processes of skill, valuation, and social cooperation.

Allotment gardening has social messages central to sociology, but which have typically been confined to sub-disciplines and fields. These include, for instance, studies of social cooperation in the social movement literature (see e.g. Fligstein, 2001) or “ability to practice” in the physical cultures field (see e.g. Allen-Collinson and Hockey, 2007).

Accordingly, the research territory of gardening and forms of gardening, such as allotment gardening, has not yet been fully opened up in sociology but has great potential to reveal facets of social life that are of interest to the discipline. In the social sciences, originality can be studying a new topic, or researching an under-studied area (Guetzkow *et al*, 2004: 191). Accordingly, the social world of allotment gardens can be considered to be underexplored and ripe for original sociological research.

Aims and objectives

Conceptual underpinnings

I believe that the detailed and nuanced knowledge of social life at the allotment that I seek cannot be understood through data obtained from natural science research design; this is reflected in the interpretivist epistemology and auto-biographical stance of the thesis, taken in opposition to positivism (Okely and Callaway, 1992: 3). This stance is particularly important when analysing social cooperation, because a positivist literature tends to dominate (which I discuss in Chapter 2).²⁰ An ethnographic theoretical framework has been selected for the thesis, however, some sociologists criticise suchlike as being concerned only with a symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969) approach to studying social phenomena, in which the micro details of social interactions are privileged over wider narratives and

²⁰ There is a risk that positioning against positivism – knowing via a natural science approach - enables the natural world to be described as “out there” and external to social life (Asdal, 2005: 253). I counter this risk by situating the allotment as a “taskscape” (Ingold, 1993: 156), in which allotment gardeners are embodied and incorporated into their practice and are not apart from it. This is incorporation rather than a realized inscription upon a “landscape” (*ibid.*); see Chapter 2.

structures that affect social life (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983; Silverman, 1985, *both in* Okely, 2012: 15). And yet, ethnographers can and do undertake a wide variety of theoretical stances (Okely, 2012: 16). Hence, although this thesis is of course concerned with the minutia of everyday social interactions in a distinct social world, I do not actually seek to take a solely symbolic interactionist approach as I feel that does not entirely do justice to the analysis of interconnecting social processes in the overlapping social worlds, circuits of value, and chains of social networks, intersecting with social cooperation in allotment gardening practice.

However, a “relational sociology” (Crossley, 2015; Emirbayer, 2013; 1997; Powell and Dépelteau, 2013; Tilly, 2008)²¹ conceptual approach does connect more fully with the interconnectivity of the allotment, via its primacy of affording analysis to the complexity of “transactional accounts” (Crossley, 2015: 66; Tilly, 2008: 27). Transactional accounts are the dynamic, unfolding, social relations that are immanent and enduring to social life, such as the social interactions at (and social networks connecting) the allotment and the social club, the domestic world, the local neighbourhood, and the ever-looming Town Hall (*see e.g.* Powell and Dépelteau, 2013: 1; Emirbayer, 1997: 281). As such, this thesis applies an ethnographic framework within which a relational sociology approach is embedded.

Research questions and scope

The key aim of the thesis is to analyse social complexity in allotment gardening, with specific focus on formations of the social process of social cooperation and how it is involved in the reproduction of this social world. Approaching this aim within a series of discrete questions enables key sociological themes to be identified via the sociological imagination (Wright Mills, 1959). Engaging the sociological imagination not only enables navigation and understanding of the social world the researcher is interested in, but also encourages “critical sensibility” towards understanding private troubles as representative of wider social issues (Gane and Beck, 2012)

Social processes are constituted by flows of action, and interaction, which are pervasive in social life (Powell and Dépelteau, 2013: 2). Hence, to study the formation of one social

²¹ There are various interpretations of relational sociology, *see* Crossley (2015) for an overview and his steer towards recognising similarity between these approaches.

process (cooperation), and in a small social world, requires attention to understanding the transactional accounts (Tilly, 2008: 27) that constitute social processes, such as social interaction. As such, I seek to understand the forms of social interaction (Adams and Sydie, 2001; Simmel, 1908) in the social world of allotment gardens. Asking this question of social groups under-explored within sociology goes to the very heart of transactional accounts. This question, thus, permits understandings of everyday social interaction, and how one form (cooperation) might be made and shaped.

Cooperation takes various forms (Vail and Hollands, 2012: 542) and so to enable understanding of the finer details of this social process, the question of which forms of cooperation are present in the social world, and how they are formed and enacted, is considered. However, social processes do not operate in the singular, nor are they static, but instead intersect with one another in social life. Hence, in asking about social complexity, I probe which key social processes might intersect with one another to shape the social process of cooperation, and what the consequences are for individual gardeners, groups, and the collective at the allotment. In light of these questions, and particularly in relation to the ubiquitous presence of valuation in social life, throughout this thesis I pose the question “Who is a “proper” allotment gardener?” in this distinct social world and what does it take to achieve and/or protect that? Asking this question serves as a reminder that this is actually a small social world and, as such, might be expected to have a variety of circuits of valuation in operation.

Taking account of recent social transformations in allotment gardening, careful consideration is given in the thesis to distinct groups of allotment gardeners. However, as outlined earlier, there lacks firm evidence from which to assume that “newcomers” to allotment gardening (present in the social imaginary) actually remain present, or are specific to only certain locales. Accordingly, before wading into consideration of distinct groups, this thesis asks if (so-called) newcomers are actually present at all in the way that the social imaginary insists “they” are. And, if so, if recent social transformations in allotment gardening have affected social processes of valuation; do existing distinct groups remain legitimated (if they ever were at all) and are newcomers legitimated and, if so, what for?

And, because there are winners and losers in valuation processes, this thesis considers if there are distinct groups of gardeners who are considered unworthy at the allotment, if there are any gaps in valuation processes, why and what the consequences are. Although I am studying social life within a small social world, I also consider if there are indications in the data about the way in which allotment gardening practice might be valued beyond the garden gate. Finally, as part of the research questions but also as a sociologist concerned with both opening up an underexplored field *and* keeping it open, I ask if this thesis can shed light on methodological means by which allotment gardening might be studied.

Summary of research methods

Although in the opening vignette to this thesis I am simply arriving to have a cuppa with Marty, actually, my presence at Spinham that day had been underpinned by meticulously designed research. As mentioned above, ethnographic fieldwork is the main data collection method in this thesis. As such, participant observation and semi-structured interviews have been adopted over other data collection methods (for instance, solely interview-based research, or structured questionnaires) because it is only via the ethnographer's deep and sustained immersion in a social world over a period of time that an detailed explanation of what reproduces (and potentially transforms) that social world can be understood and illustrated.

The data for the thesis was gathered during one year's ethnographic fieldwork, on four carefully selected allotment garden sites (each with more than 50 allotment garden plots) in the north east of England. The fieldwork involved spending time in everyday contexts with allotment gardeners across all field sites regularly for a one year period; an incalculable number of people because people leaving the allotment are replaced by new arrivals constantly, and who is considered to be an "allotment gardener" has different meanings and interpretations in this social world; all of these points have methodological and analytical implications which I discuss more deeply in Chapter 3.

From this fluctuating population, I went on to work intensively (on a detailed and one-to-one basis) with a research sample of allotment gardeners ($n = 64$); data collection involved participant observation and face-to-face semi-structured interviews. During the fieldwork year, 28 of these 64 allotment gardeners (and evenly dispersed across field sites), took part

in this form of interview with me (Pini, 2005; Hockey, 2002). Of these 28 allotment gardeners, 13 were re-interviewed via follow-up interviews, resulting in a total of 41 face-to-face, semi-structured, interviews.

I stress that in combining participant observation with semi-structured interviews, data collected from neither method has been privileged over another (Lamont and Swidler, 2014). What is more, there is not a demarcation or privileging in the thesis between data collected from the wider population of allotment gardeners at the field sites and those 64 gardeners who worked intensively with me. This thesis aims to push forward ideas that methodological pluralism (rather than methodological tribalism) is a key part of social science analysis of data and that what is important is not so much that one form of data is privileged over others, but what the researcher actually does with the data (*ibid.*: 154).

Thesis overview

After this introductory chapter, the thesis follows sociological convention comprising a theoretical chapter (Chapter 2), followed by a reflexive explanation of research design (Chapter 3), three data chapters then illustrate the research findings (Chapters 4, 5, 6) before closing with a consideration of the findings (Chapter 7); References and Appendices are then provided. With the exception of Chapter 2 (Theory Chapter), the thesis is data rich throughout and is written in “the ethnographic present” (Hastrup, 1990), not because I wish to represent research participants as frozen-in-time nor as distant objects²² but for the following two reasons. Firstly, I would like the reader to hear and see what I experienced, albeit textually, and to be able to apply their own sociological imagination by looking at the data in the present (as I did). Secondly, a clear narrative and ethnographic present style brings anchoring to academic writing that facilitates navigation of theory within textual representation (Tyler, 2012: 225).

The word “garden” is used in the thesis as an abbreviation of the term “allotment garden”, likewise, “gardener” as an abbreviation of “allotment gardener”. However, when other forms of gardening (such as “home gardening”) are being discussed, then full terms are expressed in the text.

²² As outlined in various critiques of the ethnographic present (see e.g. Fabian, 1983; Stocking, 1983: 107, in Hastrup, 1990: 45).

Chapter 2 details the argument of the thesis conceptually and does so via three interlinked sections, each explaining one of the social processes that are of central concern: skill, valuation, and social cooperation. This chapter provides an opportunity for the reader to become familiar with the finer points of the ideas, and distinct bodies of literature, that conceptually underpin the data gathered during ethnographic fieldwork. After allotment gardening is explained as a distinct form of gardening practice, enskillment in allotment gardening is noted to occur as an outermost instance of socially situated learning. Reference to the toil that gardening practice can take upon the body, and (in)ability to practice across the lifecourse, is shown to be absent in gardening analyses. After discussion of the process of valuation, with specific reference to legitimation, the forms of symbolic capital conceptualised in gardening analyses are illustrated to enable understanding of what and/or who might accumulate symbolic capital at the allotment. Two distinct forms of social cooperation enacted in allotment gardening practice are then illustrated, to bring the chapter to conclusion, highlighting that cooperation is not only ubiquitous but is actually a process that the allotment cannot be imagined without.

Chapter 3 furnishes the reader with a reflexive account of the research design for the thesis from its earliest desk-based stages, through one year's ethnographic fieldwork on four allotment garden sites in the north east of England, and ending with a return to indoors for an explanation of the analysis of the full data set. A key turning point in this chapter is when I learn that "plothead" and "allotment gardener" at the field sites have different meanings and is not at all what was anticipated prior to entering the field. Embedded into this chapter is a consideration of researcher positionality, with specific reference to gender, distance from the academy of most research participants, and my allotment gardening skill. This chapter offers the reader an opportunity to become more familiar with descriptions of the field sites, and to begin to meet some of the allotment gardeners who appear throughout the data chapters, to commence providing details about how life is enacted on a daily basis at the field sites.

Chapter 4 commences the three data chapters by setting the scene of the allotment as a public-private setting in which one group is most prominent; the bricoleur group, described here via an extended introduction. Social complexity in skilled practice is the central concern of this chapter, providing insight into the role of skill and enskillment in everyday

practices of allotment gardening in the north east of England. Via memories of childhood gardening experiences, a gendered enskillment in gardening is noted and discussed, via reference to men and women allotment gardeners and their experiences of how skill can be an advantage or disadvantage upon arrival at the allotment. The chapter draws to a close with an opportunity to meet a newcomer to the allotment whose enskillment is inhibited, via a single case study of navigating the allotment without skill or existing social connections. In concluding thoughts, suggestions are made to the reader about who a “proper” (authentic) allotment gardener might be and how the allotment of the future might be imagined.

Chapter 5 begins by offering a (literal) taste of everyday valuation processes at the allotment, by focussing upon the valuation of the sensuous taste of allotment-grown-food and its activity in chains of networks coursing through not only the allotment but also the domestic home, school, workplace, and social club. The ever-present role of local councils’ valuations upon the allotment is considered here, noting that allotment gardening practice can be regarded as a form of “peculiar goods”. Having time and ability to practice allotment gardening is illustrated as a key point in the legitimation of allotment gardeners, via reference to those who can and cannot meet expectations. Layers of distinct valuation processes at the field sites (including the ability not to spend money, and signing particular pieces of paper) are alluded to in order to ask again who a “proper” gardener might be and noting which allotment gardeners are falling through legitimation gaps. This chapter culminates by asking the reader if the full value of the allotment is actually represented in the social imaginary.

Chapter 6 explains to the reader why the allotment is quite unimaginable without the process of social cooperation. In this final of the three data chapters, two forms of social cooperation are explained. Firstly, the form of informal voluntary cooperation between allotment gardeners and which produces allotment gardening collectively as an everyday practice. Reference is made to allotment gardeners who receive this form of cooperation and the socially skilled actors who enable it; but also to those allotment gardeners who do not receive cooperation as an enduring everyday occurrence. Secondly, the joint activities form of social cooperation is illustrated by reference to the practice of competitive giant-leek growing, as the means by which leekmen collectively grow their giant leeks. Via

accounts of the leek club, “the pool” of resources, and chains of social networks, again this thesis steps momentarily outside of the allotment to show how it is actually collective activities by a vast range of people that enables giant-leek growing to continue. In these senses, this chapter closes by arguing that social cooperation is the engine house of the allotment.

Chapter 7 draws the thesis to a close by converging on four key points that I would like the reader to depart with from the social world of allotment gardens. Firstly, an analytical review of the three key social processes that are the conceptual concern of the thesis. Secondly, the importance of the adoption of a relational and processual sociological approach to the thesis is considered. Thirdly, risks to the reproduction of the social world of allotment gardens are discussed. Finally, taking into consideration the negative experiences of some scholars who have researched aspects of gardens and gardening, I ask if the allotment (and those who have affective sentiment for it) are ready for social science research findings.

Chapter 2. Skill, valuation, and social cooperation

Introduction

This thesis argues that an interweaving of the social processes of skill, valuation, and social cooperation, are pivotal to the reproduction of the social world of allotment gardens. My argument hinges upon social interactions in this small social world in which people from a variety of social backgrounds practice allotment gardening. As noted in Chapter 1, social interactions are a feature of “transactional accounts”; these are the dynamic, unfolding, and processual relations immanent in and enduring to social life (Roseneil and Ketokivi, 2016: 148; Tilly, 2008: 27; Emirbayer, 1997: 281). Social processes are at the heart of a relational approach in sociology (Crossley, 2015: 66; Emirbayer, 2013; 1997; Tilly, 2008: 27) as compared, for instance, to a substantialist approach that perceives social phenomena as comprising of individual static entities and essences (Emirbayer, 2013: 210; 1997: 282). A relational account seeks to promote greater clarity in the study of social relations (Kasper, 2013: 68) and such an approach enables social complexity in allotment gardening to be conceptualised as processual, enduring, and embedded in social relations at the allotment and in chains of networks beyond the garden gate. As such, a relational sociology approach brings conceptual clarity when studying the dynamic crosscutting of key concepts in sociology, for instance social interactions and valuation.

The aim of this chapter is to conceptually describe the social processes of skill, valuation, and cooperation, and their points of intersection. A social process is “an observable and repetitive pattern of social interaction that has a consistent direction or quality” (Bardis, 1979 [1978]: 167). Hence, this is an understanding of social relations as fluctuating and constituted by ever-flowing interactions in social life (Powell and Dépelteau, 2013: 2). If social processes are ignored then sociologists run the risk that social life will be regarded as “normally unchanging”, rather than as produced by continuous actions (Elias *et al*, 1997: 372). Accordingly, thinking of social phenomena as processual ought to be a *raison d’être* for sociologists describing social life (Hazelrigg, 2010: 62; Elias *et al*, 1997: 357) and is the approach I take in this thesis. An example of a social process is becoming enskilled in allotment gardening, via which a novice allotment gardener moves sequentially towards skilled practice but always doing so through her social relations with the wider collective of

allotment gardeners. Rather than a single process governing social life and “out there” awaiting discovery, there are multiple processes present in social life that connect and affect one another (Tilly, 1984: 33). When social processes connect (that is, they interweave, intersect) they affect one another; these connections may be crosscutting or mutually reinforcing. An instance of the intersection of social processes is when a novice allotment gardener’s process of enskillment connects with social cooperation (via who informally offers to enskill her) and which in itself is a part of the process of valuation in which members of the collective assess the novice’s enskillment progress and consider if she brings (what they deem to be of) value to the social world.

As noted in Chapter 1, in allotment gardening practice at the field sites *the* most valued social characteristic is having sufficient skill and time to produce allotment-grown-food via the presentation of the highly distinct aesthetic of a cultivated (weed-free)²³ allotment garden. I call this aesthetic a “normative-allotment-garden-aesthetic” (Wohl, 2015; Bourdieu, 1984), because it plays an active role in valuation processes. An infamous concept, I follow Wohl (2015) in defining “aesthetics” as a variety of social experiences that processually move from the sensuous perception of forms to the process of valuation via social interaction (*ibid.*: 302). By way of this idea, aesthetic judgement is produced and shaped by social interaction whilst, concurrently, social interaction is produced and shaped by the aesthetic (*ibid.*: 300). What is more, the relationship between aesthetic form and social interaction is an important part of group formation in allotment gardening, in that it produces not only collective senses of belonging and self-identification, but also symbolic boundary work and social distinctions (Lamont and Molnar 2002; Lamont 1992, *both in* Wohl, 2015: 301). Accordingly, aesthetic judgement is a significant phenomenon of collective activity, producing a “shared sense of worth” to that which is produced collectively (Becker, 2008 [1982]: 39).

In addition, symbolic capital (Lamont, 2012; Bourdieu, 1993) is accumulated by an allotment gardener who is able to produce the sensuous taste of allotment-grown-food via the presentation of this highly distinct garden aesthetic, but is dependent upon a connection of

²³ What is (and is not) a desirable non-human inhabitant of the garden is a perennial valuation process beyond the scope of this thesis (*see e.g.* Ginn, 2014b).

skill, valuation, and cooperation. Whilst producing such a garden can be a source of pride for those who can do so, those who cannot may feel troubled and (as noted in Chapter 1) there are sanctions for gardeners who do not meet the expectations of local government. Thus, there are multiple and intersecting social processes in allotment gardening, all of which are saturated with affective sentiments and valuation. However, and as I will be arguing, also at work are the variety of locally distinct practices that layer upon layer produce allotment gardening, such as, bricolage, giant-leek growing, and other forms of competitive practices. Gardeners who are able to accumulate symbolic capital – via the production of the sensuous taste of allotment-grown-food – can also (concurrently) accumulate further symbolic capital via distinct layers of skilled practice. Indeed some allotment gardeners are skilled in multiple layers of practice, but it is actually the production of allotment-grown-food via the presentation of the highly distinct aesthetic of a cultivated (weed-free) allotment garden that is *the* key form of symbolic capital in this social world from which all others arise.

Social processes are inherently temporal (Giddens, 1979: 128) in that they constitute a sequence of “choice points” in social relations (Tilly, 1984: 14). By temporal, I mean that social relations occur simultaneously *in* time, but are also *of* time rather than being chronological points on a rigid linear scale (Ingold, 2000: 194). Allotment gardening provides an opportunity for sociologists to emphasise that temporality is an important part of social processes. This is because the allotment garden emerges temporally and processually; the allotment gardener is cultivating the natural world via a process of making and growing (Hallam and Ingold, 2014).

Consequently, a socially distinct garden is produced via skilled practice with the body (Hallam and Ingold, 2014). Here, the gardener is dwelling in, rather than building, her allotment garden (Ingold, 2000: 154). This is “embodiment as a movement of incorporation” rather than human inscription upon a landscape (*ibid.*: 193).²⁴ The outcome is the production of a “taskscape” rather than a landscape (*ibid.*: 154). As such, the allotment garden is temporal and has meaning, via the socially distinct way(s) in which plants are

²⁴ By “embodiment”, I mean the corporeal body is not simply a vessel of organs but also one of meaning (Waskul and Vannini, 2006: 3); this is discussed later.

cultivated, or the colour a shed is painted; this is nature performed by humans (Szerszynski *et al*, 2003).

However, should a gardener become unable to produce allotment-grown-food via a cultivated (weed-free) garden – perhaps she lacks time or has insufficient skill – the garden swiftly returns to an uncultivated (weedy) presentation; to permit weeds to grow is unacceptable in this social world and can lead to the gardener becoming devalued and being ordered to leave (by public officials and allotment committees). And the sequencing of the intersections of these processes plays a role, not only in affecting how they occur but also constraining possible outcomes later in time (Tilly, 1984: 14). Thus, outcomes at one particular point in time can constrain (or enable) potential possibilities – such as social cooperation – in the future (*ibid.*). Accordingly, time is a key player in social processes in allotment gardening practice.

There are, of course, social processes other than skill, valuation, and cooperation, present in allotment gardening, such as processes of meaning making, identity formation, or civic engagement (via allotment committees). But, the three processes (and their intersections) focussed upon in this thesis do help sociologists to understand the ways in which this social world is reproduced. Towards these ends, the argument of the thesis – that intersections of skill, valuation, and cooperation, are pivotal to and reproduce allotment gardening practice – is presented in this chapter by three sections. Firstly, allotment gardening is discussed as the practice of a distinct form of gardening that requires skill, but with an unusual process of enskillment that may inhibit as well as grow skill. Secondly, valuation as a social process in allotment gardening practice is described via an explanation of how one specific valuation process (legitimation) is a central feature of allotment gardening. Finally, the two forms of cooperation present in allotment gardening are described in order to illustrate the ways in which social cooperation can be understood to be the engine house of the allotment.

Skill

Techniques of the body

Franklin (2002: 164) claims that “gardening requires gardeners who are reasonably fit” and this statement mirrors a general assumption that gardening is a physical activity undertaken outdoors. Yet one can prune a houseplant in the comfort of one’s living room, or sit in a

chair to sow a seed, and indeed there are many ways in which one can garden without breaking into a sweat. But, Franklin (*ibid.*) does have a point when it comes to allotment gardening as expected to be practiced at the field sites; this is skilled practice, in and with the natural world, and demanding periods of intensely physical activity. Indeed it is difficult to imagine that such a practice can be undertaken without a bit of help at times; that allotment gardeners are labouring in and with the natural world suggests that they are subject to forces they cannot always control. What is more, this labour is practiced within the context of contemporary Western social life in which people employ strategies (“time budgeting”, see Sullivan, 2000) when faced with the demands of various forms of labour, such as employment and care-giving. However, within social science analyses of gardening, there is less study of gardening as time-pressured and intensely physical skilled practice, and more of a veer towards analyses of the self; for instance, via the study of affect, meaning, memory, and metaphor. This literature ranges, for instance, from Francis and Hestor’s (1990) early ground breaking edited collection to more recent writing, such as Ginn (2014a), Nadel-Klein (2010a), Bhatti *et al* (2009), and Tilley (2009). These are noteworthy and useful contributions to the social and cultural study of gardening, however, they draw attention away from gardening as a skilled intensely physical practice and valuation thereof from which the process of cooperation is formed.

Practice is an understanding of the world via a form of cultural theory in which symbols of meaning are reached through the ways in which “...bodies are moved, objects are handled, subjects are treated, things are described...” (Reckwitz, 2002: 250). This follows Mauss’ (1973 [1934]) idea of “techniques of the body” in which culture is embodied (Marchand, 2008: 246; Crossley, 2007). Theories of practice are more distinct in their approach to ideas of social action and order than, for instance, “homo-economicus” and “homo-sociologicus” (Reckwitz, 2002: 245); the latter two stances being associated with knowing via the outcome of single interests, or via normative consensus, respectively (*ibid.*). There are two distinct fields of literature within practice theory containing descriptions that align with the finer nuances of arguments in this thesis: first, that allotment gardening is a skilled practice that must be learned and, secondly, that (in)ability to practice triggers processes of valuation.

This first body of work is concerned with degrees of skilled by-hand practice – for instance, glassblowing (O’Connor, 2007) or boxing (Wacquant, 1995) – studied as “skills of the body”

that need to be learned (Gieser, 2014: 134). Such accounts push forward ideas of practice (and how it is enskilled) as corporeal rather than solely cognitive (*ibid.*). Hence, this is an understanding of skill as embodied practice and knowledge; a focus upon a way of knowing and bodily ways of knowing (*ibid.*; O'Connor, 2007: 126). Thus, it is the contexts and social processes of learning that are focussed upon, all of which are considered to be embedded in social relations (Gieser, 2014: 134; O'Connor, 2007: 126). Furthermore, whilst this literature describes practical knowledge, as tacitly understood and accrued (*ibid.*), it also describes how learning can be inhibited (Gieser, 2014). Inhibited enskillment forms a distinct and nuanced argument in this thesis because valuations are made in this social world based upon how skilled an allotment gardener is. However, as I discuss soon, becoming enskilled in allotment gardening involves less familiar processes than in the enskillment literature and can be fraught with difficulty.

Secondly, the “physical cultures” field stresses the bodily issues encountered in skilled embodied practices in outdoor leisure and exercise (for instance, distance running, rock climbing) (Allen-Collinson and Leledaki, 2015) and also in paid labour practices, such as professional ballet (Wainwright and Turner, 2006). This field specifically analyses ability (and inability) to perform skilled practice, especially following injury; it also considers the affect this experience has upon identity and the identity work undertaken during enforced withdrawal from a practice because of injury (*e.g.* Allen-Collinson and Hockey, 2007). By identity, I mean a social process providing “meaning, form, and continuity” to the self (Kroger, 2002, p. 82) and which also contributes to the production of groups (Wohl, 2015); the material body and what it can (and cannot) do performs a key role in the processual formation and renegotiation of identity (Budgeon, 2003: 45, *in* Allen-Collinson and Hockey, 2007: 389). What is more, the physical cultures literature includes analysis of valuation processes emanating from inability to practice, particularly emphasising the ways in which the collective’s valuation of a person might decrease (*e.g.* Wainwright and Turner, 2006).

As yet, allotment gardening does not feature in either of these fields. Thus, other than Taylor’s (2008) account of home gardening as classed and gendered practice, and Degnen’s (2009) study of human and plant relatedness in home and allotment gardening practice, there is but a paucity of literature about allotment gardening as *practice*, and a dearth in terms of the interweaving of skill and valuation at the allotment. However, the two fields of

literature mentioned above do provide explanations of the processes of skill and valuation that are of concern in this thesis, laying an important foundation for my argument to follow.

It is generally accepted that gardening practice takes many forms and that these are skills that need to be learned (Gieser, 2014). Hence, gardening can be described as skilled practice within which there are social distinctions present, thus, providing early indications that valuation processes are at work. That said, however, a (brief) comparison of contemporary home gardening practices, with those in allotment gardening, enables a more thorough and detailed picture of allotment gardening as a distinct form of gardening. Via this approach, allotment gardening emerges as a highly distinct form of gardening, with its own incumbent skills. This is also useful for thinking about the ways that forms of gardening, and their incumbent social life, can change through time (Hitchings, 2007: 366; Franklin, 2002: 170). In this latter respect, skill is not simply transmitted from one generation to the next (Ingold, 2000: 5), instead novices reinvent practices (via improvisational ability) and this is dependent upon the circumstances people happen to find themselves in (Harris, 2005).

The key differences between home gardening and allotment gardening are in the types of plants cultivated and the forms of skill required. This is mainly the growing of ornamental plants (flowers, shrubs, lawn) in home gardening and mainly the growing of edible plants (potatoes, broccoli, tomatoes) in allotment gardening.²⁵ However, such a finely detailed and vernacular distinction has not always been present and a significant transformation in home garden cultivation practices in Britain, post-World War II, has occurred (Franklin, 2002: 170). Broadly speaking, a move away from growing both edible and ornamental plants in home gardens (following the end of food rationing in the 1950s and the beginning of consumerism) towards the growing of only ornamental plants in the home garden; by the 1970s, home gardening in Britain began to “destandardise” to a skilled practice in which only ornamental plants were grown (*ibid.*). More simply, the majority of gardeners in Britain stopped growing food (edible plants) *and* ornamental plants in their home gardens. Instead, home gardeners

²⁵ Allotment gardeners do grow ornamental plants, such as flowers and shrubs often grown alongside edible plants. But, from various points of evidence (including my former role), the main focus of allotment gardening continues to be growing edible plants. Growing ornamental plants in allotment gardening is frequently subsidiary to growing edible plants. And, of course, growing edible plants is nested with (for instance) skill in bricolage, “show growing”, and other distinct practices that cumulatively produce allotment gardening practice. Whilst technical instruments denote allotment gardening as being for the production of edible plants only, allotment gardeners are also “permitted” to cultivate ornamental plants (including lawn); this was granted in response to a command paper (see Great Britain, 1969).

began to grow ornamental plants only; such as bedding plants, shrubs, and swathes of lawn. Whilst I fully accept that people do (occasionally) grow edible plants in the contemporary home garden, this is far less commonplace than growing ornamental plants there. What is more, home gardens are becoming smaller and are often paved-over entirely, with little or no plant cultivation at all (Hitchings, 2007: 366). As a consequence, enskillment in growing edible plants in home gardens might be decreasing because of this transition to what is grown there at present. Growing plants at the allotment, however, has remained steadfastly the cultivation of edible plants. Taking this evidence into account, allotment gardening differs from other forms of gardening (such as home gardening) and, thus, can be described as a distinct form of skilled gardening practice and one with its own requirements that must be learned.

Enskillment

Because learning is contextual, social distinctions and inequalities (ever present in social life and which affect a person's ability to learn) are present in forms of gardening and the way in which they are (and can be) learned. When people learn to garden (if they have opportunity to do so at all) it is partly dependent upon their social circumstances (Nadel-Klein, 2010b: 111; Taylor, 2008: 128). A person, for instance, who has only ever gardened with flowers in containers situated on the balcony of a high-rise dwelling might not necessarily have had the opportunity to learn how to cultivate lawn at ground level. Lawning grass, for instance, requires skill in soil preparation, seed sowing, pest deterrent, raking and mowing, all of which are expected to conform to the rules, norms, and distinctions, of lawning grass in Britain. Thus, as allotment gardening is mostly about growing edible plants, along with other interactions with entities (such as watering cans, pigeons, and people), it is a distinct *skilled* practice that needs to be learned. Broccoli (an edible plant frequently found on dinner plates in Britain), for instance, is actually a large, unopened, flower bud. Cultivating a large flower bud, to a precise size and formation, whilst preventing the flower bud from blooming (opening) and ready for harvest at a specific time of year, whilst meeting the sensory requirements of the palate in a particular food culture, and all grown *in situ* at the allotment (away from the grower's immediate gaze at home or work), requires a highly specific set of gardening skills that need to be learned. However, being able to learn how to grow broccoli and other edible plants at the allotment is context specific and dependent upon social circumstances, such as prior exposure to gardening and particularly allotment gardening.

Allotment gardening skill, therefore, is an important social process; who possesses this skill, who wants (and needs) to grow it, and how skill is recognised by others, represent sequences in the processual reproduction of this social world. Without skilled practice, allotment gardening grinds to a halt, which in turn becomes an opportunity for the natural world to weave its way back into the allotment via weeds. Weeds return to the allotment garden via the process of concrescence (Whitehead, 1929: 410 *in* Hallam and Ingold, 2014: 2), in which “beings continuously surpass themselves” until senescence (*ibid.*). And when this occurs at the allotment, processes of valuation are triggered and consequently the allotment gardener can be devalued. Thus, deciding what skill is and who does (and does not) have it, along with what skill produces, are saturated with processes of valuation at the allotment that consequently affect who is included in processes of cooperation.

Knowledge and skill are related interweaving processes in which knowledge can be thought of as social position, and thought, related in the formation of ideas of how we come to know the world (Dilley, 1999: 33). However, the situations in which people come to knowledge can be placed on a spectrum ranging from “formal” (instruction and classroom-based) to “informal” (socially situated learning) (Pelissier, 1991). This thesis is concerned with the latter, in that enskillment in allotment gardening is a form of socially situated learning (Wenger, 1998; Lave and Wenger, 1991). In this conceptualisation, learning is contextual to practice and embedded in social relations and interactions (Wenger, 1998; Lave and Wenger, 1991). Thus, coming to know by socially situated learning is different to learning through verbal or written instructions (Ingold, 2000; Dilley, 1999: 33).

In socially situated learning, knowledge is conceptualised as being more about variation in embodied skills than discursive knowledge (Gieser, 2008: 300). This approach challenges ideas of learning as merely cognitive (not corporeal) and being about abstract knowledge (Lave and Wenger, 1991), thus, pushing a cleave between social and cognitive sciences’ ideas of the way in which people learn (Gieser, 2008: 300). Hence, in socially situated learning, people come to know through “understanding via practice” which is “a process of *enskillment* in which learning is inseparable from doing” (Ingold, 2000: 416); more simply, this is “learning by doing” (Sennett, 2008: 96). Being in gardens, being around people doing forms of gardening, doing some gardening oneself, are all processes of gardening practice enskillment. Thus, from this perspective, learning allotment gardening is a process

emergent in social relations and interactions, with embodied skills developing via engagement with a particular environment (Ellen and Fischer, 2013). From this perspective, skill is a process of *growth*, placing the allotment gardener as a participant in amongst a world of active materials, with which she attempts to joins forces (Hallam and Ingold, 2014; Ingold, 2013: 20).

But, I alert the reader now that enskillment in allotment gardening differs significantly to descriptions in the socially situated learning literature. Prominent in this literature, is an expectation that enskillment emerges by way of a highly specific (and formal) social relationship. In this relationship, a master (one who is skilled) is situated in the social world and to whom novices (unskilled people beginning to practice) are allocated to take instruction from (Ingold, 2000; Wenger, 1998; Pelissier, 1991). Through this relationship, novices learn a new skill as an apprentice to a particular master in a “community of practice” (Wenger, 1998).²⁶ Put more simply, this is a formal mentoring (apprenticeship) relationship, in which a mentor enables her learners to learn from both herself and each other. It is under the direction of a master, and to her periphery, that a novice enskills via observations, monitoring, and social interaction, amongst her fellows (*ibid.*). When this skill grows, it is honed (“crafted”) and, thus, is a process of becoming a “master” (Ingold, 2013; Marchand, 2008). Accordingly, for a novice to discover for herself what is taken for granted by the master she is formally allocated to, she must fine-tune her perception through observation and imitation; the ultimate task of the novice is to fine-tune her perception, via “an education of attention” (Ingold, 2000: 22).

However, in the enskillment of allotment gardening, there is *not* a formal master to novice (“apprenticeship”) relationship. Although there is formal organization in allotment gardening (coordinated by public officials and allotment committees), newly arrived novices are not formally assigned to a master allotment gardener from whom to enskill. Instead, novices in allotment gardening practice are left to their own devices to enskill informally;

²⁶ Some of the scholarly language of enskillment is gendered and hierarchical (such as, “master”), mirroring historical terms. At times, the appearance of women in contemporary accounts of skilled practice can be scant, for instance Sennett (2008) ignores the role of women in skilled practice entirely, although, Hallam and Ingold (2014), and Ingold (2013: 116), do acknowledge the omission of women in accounts of skilled practice. I have chosen, however, to continue the use of the terms “master” and “novice” (despite their gendered overtones) because, there is a certain uniqueness to the master-to-novice enskillment relationship that the word “practitioner” does not quite achieve. However, *I stress most firmly that in allotment gardening there are both men and women who are master allotment gardeners.*

this is an outermost instance of socially situated learning. As such, learning via this method can be turbulent, it is not uniform but negotiated by what is offered by masters and taken up by novices (Billett, 2008: 29). Whilst Becker (1972) argues that apprentices have a responsibility to organize their own enskillment, and seize opportunities to learn, there is less opportunity to do so in a collective such as at the allotment that is without the formal and marketized organization, incentives, and scheduled timetabling of, for instance, Wenger's (1998) classic example of master and novice Xerox™ employees operating as a community of practice.

Thus, a principle nexus in the intersection of the social processes of skill and valuation in allotment gardening, is in both a novice's navigation (of who in the collective she can enskill from) *and* master allotment gardeners' decisions about whom they may wish to enable (mentor) to enskill. This process is saturated in valuation; forming an informal process of cooperation in which a novice allotment gardener learns from a master allotment gardener(s). And, because this relationship is embedded in informality, the outcome is formed not only by processes of valuation, but also upon whether either novice or master(s) have sufficient social skill (Fligstein, 2001) and time to get the relationship off the ground in the first place. Social skill is discussed in greater depth later in this chapter but, for now, this is the ability to induce others to cooperate (*ibid.*) and is immersed in relations and interactions, and highly dependent upon one's social experiences. But, I stress, should a master-novice relationship not begin (or lapses), then enskillment can become inhibited (slowed, or halted completely) (Gieser, 2014), because of this outermost instance of socially situated learning.

Accordingly, skill is a key nexus in the interweaving of processes forming social cooperation in allotment gardening. However, within the rare accounts of allotment gardening enskillment (*e.g.* Platten, 2013; Ellen and Platten, 2011; Barthel *et al*, 2010), there is little regard to how this outermost instance of socially situated learning operates. Ellen and Platten (2011: 572) usefully hint at the presence of a "community of practice" operating in allotment gardening, but leave it at that. Regrettably, Platten's (2013: 316) later work (from the same data set as Ellen and Platten (2011)) and which is specifically an analysis of knowledge transmission in allotment gardening, does not develop the idea that this is an outermost instance of socially situated learning other than noting "...this model is not

institutionalized as we might expect from, say, an apprenticeship model...". And, whilst Barthel *et al* (2010) specifically frame allotment gardening as a "community of practice", they do not acknowledge the lack of a formal master-novice relationship. What is more, Hallam and Ingold's (2014: 9) work on practice with plant material ignores valuation processes within enskillment, stating that as one ageing master's body becomes troubled (hence, affecting ability to practice) this might facilitate another master's growth, thus, reproducing the practice through time. There is an assumption, in Hallam and Ingold's (*ibid.*) argument, that social cooperation is guaranteed when, actually, there is no such guarantee that a master might be willing – or have time – to enskill a novice in any form of skilled practice. Thus, when considering enskillment in allotment gardening, it must be taken into account that all learning is contextual and that social distinctions and inequalities (ever present in social life and which affect a person's ability to negotiate learning) might well be present in forms of gardening. Accordingly, allotment gardening enskillment implicates numerous issues: whose skill is legitimated in allotment gardening; who is considered valuable enough to be enskilled via an informal process. If allowing an allotment garden to become weedy is deemed as failure to meet expectations, then skill is a key social process in this social world.

(In)ability to practice: bodily trouble

Sennett's (2008) account of the history of skilled practice is rightly criticised by Hallam and Ingold (2014: 9), for providing a "somewhat rose-tinted" view in which the toil of practice against the body is not taken into account. What is more, Hallam and Ingold (*ibid.*) argue further that, whilst bodies become enskilled over time, so too does the body age during practice (*ibid.*). These arguments, which are extended here in this section, intriguingly hint at the connections between the body and practice. How an ageing body might be affected by allotment gardening practice, and how the body becoming troubled – at any age – might affect an allotment gardener's ability to practice at all, are subject to the valuation of a gardener at the allotment.

Within the context of a "highly contested" concept associated with various and oft times incommensurate theories (Shilling, 2005: 767), sociology has developed many theories of the body (Thomas and Ahmed, 2008: 2; Waskul and Vannini, 2006: 2). And, in particular, some approaches have received criticism for their privileging of the theorizing process over

studying embodiment as a practical experience (Watson, 2000; Turner, 1996; *both in* Wainwright *et al*, 2005: 50). This thesis is concerned with inability to practice at any stage in the life course because of bodily trouble, such as pregnancy, injury, or ill-health, and how that might interweave with processes of valuation.²⁷ Here, the body is not just a vessel of organs, but one of meaning (Waskul and Vannini, 2006: 3). Thus, allotment gardening is an active social process of embodiment, by which I mean the body is done socially by people (not by flesh), and is embedded in practice within social relations and interactions (*ibid.*: 7).

What bodily trouble might mean (firstly) in the valuation of an allotment gardener, and (secondly) how valuation might affect the gardener – and whether she is offered cooperation – are of great concern in this thesis. Within a small social world and its practices, there are certain characteristics and dispositions that are considered valuable; for instance, in the practice of distance-running, endurance is considered valuable (Allen-Collinson and Hockey, 2007: 388). Accordingly, social worlds do invest in, and shape (and deploy), human bodies (Wacquant, 1995: 65 *in* Wainwright *et al*, 2005: 50) and, thus, have their own circuits of valuation relating to the body normalcy expectations of that particular skilled practice. Hence, should an allotment gardener become unable to meet the expectations of the collective, for instance because of bodily trouble, members might well alter their valuation of her. Thus, it is key to the argument of this thesis that within the social complexity of a skilled practice, certain bodily attributes will be legitimated.

In allotment gardening, digging a trench to plant seed-potatoes for instance, requires not only time, skill (about when and how to do this), but also a strong body. This is a body that can bend, dig, stretch, and do so repetitively and with ease in all weathers. But if an allotment garden becomes uncultivated (“weedy”) because of lack of time, skill, or bodily trouble, the allotment gardener is deemed to have failed in this social world (and by the local council). However, both the garden and gardening practice are clear identity markers for gardeners (Bhatti, 2014; Taylor, 2008: 128), therefore, an allotment gardener experiencing temporary or permanent bodily trouble might feel their continuity of biography to be threatened, as well as their self-identity being placed somewhat “at the mercy of the body” (Waskul and Vannini, 2006: 13, citing Frank, 1995). As such, ideas begin to emerge in

²⁷ I use the word “trouble” here in the sociological sense evoked by C. Wright Mills (1959) and acknowledge that pregnancy is not necessarily interpreted as trouble by the woman concerned.

which facets of a gardener's identity might be legitimated, or deemed to have failed, and how that might feel.

Whilst inability to practice is seldom the full concern of social scientists' analyses of gardening, there are points in the literature that align with the arguments here; for instance, Bhatti (2006), Gross and Lane (2007), and Milligan *et al* (2004). These authors specifically discuss inability to practice in terms of gardeners in *later* life only; suggesting that inability to practice gardening has so far only been connected with (older) ageing gardeners, thus, ignoring that inability to practice might occur at *any* stage across the life course, and on a temporary or fluctuating basis. However, there are some points of alignment with these writings, in relation to my argument about inability to practice caused by bodily trouble (either temporarily or permanently) at any stage in the life course. For instance, when discussing home gardening in later life, Bhatti (2006: 323) sums up succinctly the connection and issues this thesis draws attention to within gardening practice, the body, and valuation:

“...if the older person is unable to maintain the garden and looks uncared for, (especially the front), this may come to reflect (to passers by at least), the status of the person inside the house. It may also be the beginning of lowering esteem for the individual themselves.” (Bhatti, 2006: 323)

Thus, in allotment gardening, bodily trouble affecting ability to practice is noticeable (via a change in the presentation of the normative-allotment-garden-aesthetic), not only affecting the temporal aesthetic appearance of the garden (via, for instance, the growth of weeds) but also the legitimation of the gardener, which Bhatti (*ibid.*) refers to here as “status” and their social position. And, Milligan *et al* (2004: 1787) note an “inability to cope” with practicing gardening in later life could affect the self. Meanwhile, Gross and Lane's (2007) study of ageing gardeners (including a small number of allotment gardeners) builds on Bhatti's (2006: 323) idea that inability to practice is a threat to facets of a gardener's identity, noting that gardeners mourn “...for the loss of identity as [a] gardener...” and perceive a concomitant sense of loss of control (Gross and Lane, 2007: 236). As such, there is a clear argument for the presence of a gardening identity in the literature.²⁸

²⁸ I resist seeking to further conceptualise the term “gardening identity”, a term which is underdeveloped, begs sociological attention, and is beyond the scope of this thesis to explore.

Although these analyses are (mostly) about home gardeners in later life experiencing permanent bodily trouble which affects their ability to practice gardening, they are cognate with allotment gardening, but only up to a point. Implicit to these analyses, where gardeners are studied in later life, is a taken for granted idea that inability to practice because of bodily trouble will be *permanent* both in later life and outside of it. Actually, bodily trouble can be temporary, or intermittent and reoccurring, and only in some instances permanent. In the wider literature, there are examples of inability to practice that can be placed on a spectrum from temporary to permanent inability to practice; for instance injured bodies in classical ballet (*e.g.* Wainwright and Turner, 2006), or in distance-running (*e.g.* Allen-Collinson and Hockey, 2007), as previously mentioned. However, there remains a very clear difference between these practices and gardening practice and which can be expected to have consequences in the social world of allotment gardens. It is clear from these physical cultures studies that there are some similarities when bodily trouble is encountered, particularly when the self is challenged by inability to perform a part of identity, and legitimation recedes (Wainwright and Turner, 2006). But, the difference between these examples and gardening is that, whilst the dance is un-danced and the run un-run, the temporal garden *continues to grow* whilst the gardener is troubled and unable to practice; this can devalue a gardener in the eyes of the collective and local government.

Valuation

A normative social process

Such is the ubiquitousness of valuation in social life, it is challenging to imagine any entity that is not the object of or subject to valuation (Helgesson and Muniesa, 2013: 3).²⁹

Following Lamont (2012: 205), valuation is a social process taking place in practice and experience, rather than cognitively occurring inside the brain of the lone actor (*see also* Doganova *et al*, 2014: 87; Helgesson and Muniesa, 2013: 4). Valuation here is a normative social process concerned with establishing the value (worth or authenticity) of an entity

²⁹ I use “value” as a term meaning the legitimised value of an entity; I use “valuation” to denote social processes, via which value is ascribed (*see* Lamont, 2012: 205). A varied vocabulary is used to describe value and valuation sub-processes in sociology; such as worth, legitimation, evaluation, valuation. I use the verb “valuation” because I am working with social processes in which the value of an entity is reached processually. I do not use the word “evaluation” (*ibid.*), which is written within a north American sociological context; in Britain, “evaluation” is more closely associated with policy discourse and, thus, does not best serve sociological description within an ethnography of everyday social complexity.

(Lamont, 2012: 205). By normative, I mean a form of social agreement that morally endorses an ideal (Pellandini-Simányi, 2014: 653). In allotment gardening practice, the normative-allotment-garden-aesthetic is, hence, what is considered to be right and proper in this social world. Via this rendering, normativity can be clearly distinguished from objective ideas that what is “good” or “proper” in social life are grounded in a “human nature” or in an intrinsic value of entities and practices (Sayer, 2011, *in* Pellandini-Simányi, 2014: 653).

Valuation requires interplay between three actions that are deeply immersed in social interaction (Lamont, 2012: 205). Firstly, distinguishing and comparing between entities, via an attention to what is being valued and in comparison to what (*ibid.*: 205). An example of this is allotment gardeners distinguishing skill and then comparing (and ranking) levels of skill, such as who is skilled enough to produce the earliest (and tastiest) strawberry of the growing season in the cool climate of north east England. However, this interaction is also saturated with valuation, of (secondly) who is considered to be a legitimate judge of what is valuable; this in itself can involve conflicts and struggles over power (*ibid.*, following Bourdieu, 1993). Can someone without skill in allotment gardening, for instance, judge who has skill or can this valuation only be enacted by a skilled allotment gardener, and how is that recognised (and so on). Clearly this involves (thirdly) negotiation within this discourse and its agreements and disagreements, in order to reach a point at which the value of an entity can be distinguished (Lamont, 2012: 205). The outcome of establishing the value of an entity is its legitimation; the juncture in the process of valuation when an entity is consecrated into the canon as valuable (*ibid.*: 206; Bourdieu, 1993). As noted above, *the* most valued social characteristic in this social world is having sufficient skill and time to produce allotment-grown-food via the presentation of the highly distinct aesthetic of a cultivated (weed-free) allotment garden. Being able to do so accumulates symbolic capital (Lawler, 1999: 6; Bourdieu, 1993) for an allotment gardener, but is simultaneously dependent upon an intersection of the social processes of skill, valuation, and social cooperation.

Thus, entities do not just happen to “have” value nor are they imbued with “natural” value, instead value is made and shaped processually by people (Hutter and Stark, 2015: 3). This normative process in turn makes and transformations identities (*ibid.*), for instance valuation produces and codes the production of persons (Skeggs, 2009). Thus, valuation is a

reciprocal, normative, social interaction (Hutter and Stark, 2015: 3) that is extraordinary in its breadth of complexity and scope. However, valuation is also quite mundane and is actually a vernacular normative practice that we all do, day-in and day-out, no matter what we are engaged in (Pellandini-Simányi, 2014: 652). And the allotment is no exception, valuation is practiced all of the time and, despite its complexity, valuation is the practice of everyday normativity. In accepting that human orientation is normative, then valuation and emotion are not in opposition (Sayer, 2005: 951), and (as noted in Chapter 1) allotment gardeners do have affective sentiment for their practice. Accordingly, valuation is an everyday normative (and at times mundane) process in which the value of an entity is established, via simultaneous negotiation, contestation, and reproduction (Doganova *et al*, 2014: 87).

However, before moving on to describe the key valuation process at the allotment – the legitimation of allotment gardeners by one another – I stress that there is actually a complex nexus of a variety of processes of valuation in operation in this social world. Another example of a valuation process at the allotment is, for instance, valorization (Vatin, 2013) in which the process of valuation is consequential to the process of production wherein entities are produced to be of value. Producing the sensuous taste of allotment-grown-food is the key example of valorization at the allotment; it is the main reason people are present in the social world and gardeners are legitimated for their skill in producing it within the distinct (weed-free) normative-allotment-garden-aesthetic. Yet valuation in allotment gardening also occurs in relation to *not* practicing some activities; this instance particularly relates to moving away from materials and objects in economic exchange and towards ideas that a person can be legitimated for engaging in non-market material processes. This is a reversal of the way valuation often works in social worlds, where being able to purchase something is often equated with other forms of capital that are valued. What is more, most allotment gardeners in this study are men and, particularly, older men. From this perspective, valuation processes in allotment gardening practice can be expected to be imbued with ideas of what these particular men hold close to themselves, but also of how these men feel their own identities are valued more widely (Loveday, 2014). Hence, there are some highly specific and gendered circuits of valuation present, and accordingly, valuation in the social world of allotment gardens is not only normative, complex, and mundane, but also courses across various and intersecting points.

Legitimation

A key valuation process that is central to the social world of allotment gardens is legitimation. In valuation, legitimation is the juncture when an entity is consecrated into the canon as valuable (Lamont, 2012: 206; Bourdieu, 1993). My concern here is with (a) the legitimation of allotment gardeners by one another and (b) what is being legitimated and for whom; this approach also reveals who is being devalued. As mentioned above, what is being legitimated above all else in this social world is the production of allotment-grown-food via a cultivated (weed-free) allotment garden; this accumulates symbolic capital and legitimates the allotment gardener presenting it. Not producing allotment-grown-food via this aesthetic is deemed as failure and, thus, highlights who is being devalued.

Following Lamont (2012), legitimation is examined here through the lens of Bourdieu's (1993) approach to legitimation. Bourdieu's (*ibid.*) idea is actually an appropriated and adapted form of Weber's notions of class antagonism and Durkheim's ideas of relative autonomy and reproduction in relation to social class (Lane, 2000: 84; Cipriani, 1987: 1). Although social class is clearly not the social phenomena under examination in this thesis, Bourdieu's (1993) explanation of legitimation remains favourable because it permits the analysis of social phenomena (other than and in addition to) the social class analysis it was originally applied to (Lamont, 2012: 206). An example of this application of Bourdieusian legitimation is Wainwright and Turner's (*see e.g.* 2006) study of professional ballet dancers, in which the conversion of a dancer's physical capital to symbolic capital is noted, along with the devaluation that occurs subsequent to this capital beginning to fade. Hence, by this means, sociologists are able to explain and compare forms of capital across different social worlds; although I do acknowledge that this approach continues to be dominated by authors concerned with social class analysis. Meanwhile, Beljean *et al* (2015: 41) suggest that the oft-critiqued "replication" of Bourdieu's ideas of valuation are ebbing, citing the ways in which the self-concepts of people participating in processes of valuation are now considered more deeply than earlier carbon-copies of Bourdieu's conceptualisation. Accordingly, applying Bourdieu's concept of legitimation can now be viewed as post-Bourdiesian rather than mere replication by rote (*ibid.*).

During legitimation, "certain cultural practices obtain legitimacy in opposition to other cultural practices" (Swartz, 1997: 63), a process producing clear winners and losers. Key to

legitimation is the presence of various forms of capital in social life (Johnson and Lawler, 2005). These forms of capital are “economic capital” (income and material assets); “cultural capital” (cultural competencies, knowledge of key practices); “social capital” (social relationships, social networks, and social connections) (Skeggs, 1997; Swartz, 1997, both cited *in* Johnson and Lawler, 2005). And it is only via the conversion of one of these forms of capital (“cultural capital”) into another form of capital (“symbolic capital”) that legitimation (consecration) occurs (Johnson and Lawler, 2005). Symbolic capital is the recognition (prestige) acquired by a person by “virtue of *being* recognised and ‘known’ as legitimate” (Lawler, 1999: 6) [original emphasis]. Thus, an allotment gardener who is legitimated by their production of allotment-grown-food via a cultivated (weed-free) allotment garden is considered authentic; a “proper” gardener in the eyes of those present at the allotment, but also by the local council.

However, without conversion into symbolic capital, no form of capital can be “traded with” in social relationships (Johnson and Lawler, 2005). Thus, whilst some allotment gardeners become legitimated, this process of valuation also clearly demarcates allotment gardeners who are not considered “proper” gardeners. Accordingly, the study of legitimation places emphasis on the role of normative valuation in the production of symbolic capital for certain cultural goods (Swartz 1997, *in* Lamont, 2012: 207). These manoeuvres occur in the social field (arena), with each arena having its own “taken-for-granted structure” of relevance’s and necessities (Jenkins, 2002 [1992]: 84), for instance what is at stake can be education, social class, cultural goods, and so on. In allotment gardening, what is at stake is the capacity (if not the necessity) to produce allotment-grown-food via a cultivated (weed-free) allotment garden. What we know is that this does not occur without an intersection of the social processes of skill, valuation, and social cooperation. It is via this process of legitimation that hierarchy is created in allotment gardening and, thus, power exercised (Swartz, 1997: 43) in relations and interactions in the social world.

Whilst there are accounts of legitimation in gardening practice these are scant and focus only upon individual home gardeners (*e.g.* Nadel-Klein, 2010b; Taylor, 2008). However, within a collective of allotment gardeners, gardening practice is undertaken contiguously in the same locality, where legitimation interweaves with skill and social cooperation. Contiguosity is important, because it means regular sustained proximity during valuation

processes; allotment gardening places bodies in close proximity to one another during practice. Contiguous gardening is something which Nadel-Klein's (2010b) collective of middle class women ornamental-gardening-club members do not practice (*ibid.*), hence, this is analysis of a very different gardening situation to allotment gardening. Whilst Taylor (2008) does consider legitimation, this is actually only within the context of the intersections of social class and gender of (again) gardening club members who (although they visit one another's home gardens) do not actually garden contiguously; hence, similar to Nadel-Klein (2010b), there is actually little similarity between Taylor's (2008) notes on legitimation and allotment gardening.

A useful example of legitimation in gardening, however, is Askew and McGuirk (2004: 22). These authors (*ibid.*) note that symbolic capital in gardening is accumulated by practices relating to high inputs of water (to lawns, and so on) in new home gardens in Australia, which consequently denotes a certain distinct respectability. And, in Ellen and Platten's (2011) study of home gardening and allotment gardening practices (in Kent), it is noted that there are distinctions between gifting to newcomers and those who have been present at the allotment for longer (*ibid.*); a clear indication of valuation in operation in allotment gardening. Yet despite these examples there is a paucity of analyses of legitimation in allotment gardening. Nonetheless, the cumulative evidence from Ellen and Platten (*ibid.*), Nadel-Klein (2010b), Taylor (2008), and Askew and McGuirk (2004), is helpful in understanding what is noted as accumulating symbolic capital in forms of gardening and the ways in which legitimation has been mapped out within analyses of gardening.

As noted above, producing allotment-grown-food via a cultivated (weed-free) allotment garden accumulates symbolic capital for the gardener who can present it. And, this aesthetic also happens to be *exactly* what is stipulated in local government's expectations of allotment gardeners. As such, social worlds and processes do overlap and are permeable. However, to present such a garden requires time, skill, and ability to practice allotment gardening. Skill requires enskillment; ability to practice requires a strong body that can lift, bend, and stretch, repetitively and with ease. And social cooperation is an ever present social process here, always interweaving with who gets to learn from whom and who gets a bit of help when they are struggling with labouring in and with the natural world. And, as I have mentioned, there are multiple and varied layers of practice that accumulate symbolic

capital, such as bricolage, giant-leek growing, and pigeon racing. When viewed in this way, in which layers of skilled and highly distinct practice can be accrued, the idea of a “proper” gardener can be seen. Thus, to accrue symbolic capital in allotment gardening requires time, enskillment that is not inhibited, and a healthy body, but also social skill (Fligstein, 2001) to get social cooperation off the ground. As such, skill, ability to practice, social cooperation, are the tangible symbols of legitimation in allotment gardening.

As in all social worlds, the accumulation of symbolic capital creates social distinction (Bourdieu, 1984) at the allotment. What people regard as “good” and “bad”, however, do not always come in neat and tidy packets corresponding with commonplace social divisions, such as social class, age, and gender (Sayer, 2005: 952). Processes of legitimation in forms of gardening are certainly more complex than these more commonplace social divisions. There is already awareness, for instance, via Quest-Ritson (2003: 6, *in* Nadel-Klein, 2010b) and Taylor (2008), that legitimation via social class does not necessarily perform in gardening as it does in other social spheres; social distinction in gardening can relate, for instance, to the types of plants cultivated and how, where, and by whom (*ibid.*); indeed, the word “culture” is derived from “cultivation”. Thus, whilst it has been claimed that gardening “cuts across” social class (*see e.g.* Crouch, 2003: 19) it is clear from the aforementioned studies, of Nadel-Klein (2010b) and Taylor (2008) that this is most definitely *not* the case and is more complex. But, whatever the form of symbolic capital – in this instance a cultivated (weed-free) allotment garden, but also a winning giant-leek or a speedy racing pigeon or show flowers cultivated to “perfection” – social divisions do saturate social order(s), whilst positioned within the core of practices that are symbolic, psychic, discursive, economic, and political (Anthias, 1998: 506). Thus, a cultivated (weed-free) allotment garden is the root of symbolic capital in the social world of allotment gardens, deeming allotment gardeners as valuable (or not).

Social cooperation

Ideas and restraints

If allotment gardening practice is saturated with skill and valuation, it is equally unthinkable without reference to the process of social cooperation (“cooperation”) (Sennett, 2012; 1998; Becker, 2008 [1982]; 1974). Cooperation is concerned with people doing things together for mutual benefit (Sennett, 2012: 65; Becker, 1986: 11) and, thus, this is an immanently *social*

and *collective* phenomena (Moss, 2011, *in* Weinstein, 2013: 128), such as allotment gardeners building a shed together, watering a gardener's tomatoes if they are unable to practice or on holiday, or enskilling a new arrival in the practice of allotment gardening. Such is the prominence and consequence of this process, cooperation is the engine house of the allotment.

Two roles in social life are simultaneously claimed by cooperation: it is a form of social interaction (Simmel, 1908) *and* a conjunctive (or associative) social process drawing people together (Bardis, 1979 [1978]: 149) via a variety of forms (Vail and Hollands, 2012: 542). It is difficult to imagine that a practice like allotment gardening can be undertaken without a bit of help at times; time-pressured allotment gardeners are labouring in and with the natural world, suggesting they are subject to forces they cannot always individually control. Hence, in social worlds where such skilled practice matters, cooperation "oils the machinery of getting things done" (Sennett, 2012: ix). However, cooperation does other things too at the allotment, such as further legitimating people who receive help because they have been judged as valuable enough to receive it. And those who cooperate are legitimated too, with their value increasing because they are identified in the collective as kindly – an attribute carrying great weight in social life. Whether people actually choose to cooperate (or not) depends, however, upon interweaving social processes (within overlapping and permeable social worlds (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012)), having sufficient time, and whether people have acquired sufficient social skill (Fligstein, 2001) to initiate social cooperation in the first place.

Cooperation is actually a feature the world over: in philosophical systems and faiths as a social and ethical norm (Sennett, 2012: 5; Bardis, 1979 [1978]: 154); in informal practices of everyday civility (Sennett, 2012: 5; Misztal, 2001: 375) and as a form of social organization. At the same time, cooperation also has darker sides (Sennett, 2012: 5): collusion (such as, insider share dealing) is actually a form of cooperation, as are racist social movements which require particularistic and exclusive forms of cooperation and trust. These facets of cooperation cumulatively add layer upon layer of further social complexity to this multifarious and ubiquitous feature of everyday life. Hence, because we are all members of social groups (Fligstein, 2001: 107; Becker, 1986: 1), cooperation is a constant presence.

Collective actions, along with their consequences, ought to be one of the basic units of sociological analysis (Becker, 2008 [1982]: 370). However, for what is a ubiquitous and universal feature of social life, cooperation does not have as wide an attention in contemporary sociology as other ubiquitous social processes, such as valuation or conflict. Apart from notable exceptions,³⁰ the contemporary study of cooperation is (mostly) limited to accounts in social movement scholarship (*e.g.* Vail and Hollands, 2012; Polletta, 2006) and economic sociology literature (*e.g.* Fligstein and McAdam, 2012; Fligstein, 2001). Yet, actually, cooperation can point sociologists interested in conflict and competition towards what serves to undermine *and* enhance collective action. In as much that some forms of social interaction can weaken or corrode social cooperation – for instance, competition and conflict (Sennett, 2012: 65) – in certain circumstances cooperation and competition can actually be mutually associated and produce collective action (“joint activities” *see* Becker, 2008 [1982]). Thus, neglecting cooperation sociologically can be of detriment to the study of some central concerns in the discipline.

Consequential to this paucity (of studying cooperation throughout the discipline), analysis of cooperation becomes vulnerable in two ways. Either to an “almost ritualistic” (Vail and Hollands, 2012: 4) citation of Becker’s (2008 [1982]; 1974) conceptualisation of “joint activities” (which I discuss later), or to the analysis of individual propensity to cooperate (Sabbagh, 2010). The latter is paid frequent attention by scholars operating within a positivist ontology who undertake research via laboratory experiments (*e.g.* Fehr and Gintis, 2007); occasionally, scholars seek to synthesise sociological approaches with these (*see e.g.* Simpson and Willer, 2015). Such positivist analyses certainly generate useful questions to help progress scholarly thinking about cooperation but, whilst experimental studies (in the main) can inform what *potentially* might occur in social life that is not necessarily what *will* actually happen (Ellen and Fischer, 2013: 6). Thus, this paucity of the study of cooperation in the discipline has resulted in the prominence of positivist descriptions of single actor decision-making about cooperation.

Accordingly, sociologists such as myself must heed caution not to misalign data acquired ethnographically in the field with theory produced as an outcome of data collected in

³⁰ Including Becker (2008 [1982]; 1974) and Sennett (2012; 1998).

(aforementioned) laboratory or field experiments. Otherwise, interpretivist analysis of data could be (mis)aligned with positivist-driven theory. Although there are interdisciplinary approaches to the study of cooperation, these are noted as limited by insufficient interdisciplinarity and inadequate parity with relevant social theory (Sabbagh, 2010: 645). Hence, this situation can place a reliance on niche bodies of cooperation literature in sociology, about what is actually one of *the* most ubiquitous facets of social life. Another way of thinking about this is to ask the following question: do the descriptions generated by laboratory experiments of social dilemmas – such as, prisoners’ dilemmas or multi-person dilemmas (*see*, Kollock, 1998) – in any way correspond with findings about, for instance, leekmen at the allotment feeling compelled to care for the giant-leeks of an absent leekman? I argue it incomparable, and would be akin to comparing apples with pears, such is the complexity of social life. For instance, a laboratory setting might be unable to take into account the effects of the role of social ties in cooperative practices in manual paid labour, as experienced and enacted across the life course by leekmen at the field sites. Perhaps Sennett (2012: 5) is alluding to this unusual circumstance of skewed literature when he notes that cooperation can be defined “drily” and as “exchange in which participants benefit from the encounter”, but later concluding that cooperation is really far more varied and interesting than merely studying the self-interest of the lone actor.

Voluntary informal cooperation

Cooperation between allotment gardeners is noteworthy because it is both voluntary and informal (Sennett, 2012: 5). Often, however, cooperation occurs in social life because people are induced to do so by incentives of one form or another (Lacetera and Macis, 2010). An example of an incentive to cooperate is symbolic prizes (for instance, medals) awarded to blood donors (*ibid.*); incentives are usually material, or institutional. However, people do cooperate without any incentives in place at all, for instance civic society groups and new social movements. Without incentives in place, cooperation is regarded as “voluntary” in that it is enacted without reward; incentives to induce cooperation are not present in allotment gardening. What is more, voluntary cooperation in allotment gardening is situated *informally* (Sennett, 2012: 5). Less visible than formal organization, are the informal ways in which people do things together, for instance the workplace has the informality of “the grapevine” as a means of informal communication (Fortado, 2011: 212).

Hence, cooperation occurs amongst the informal social relationships of allotment gardeners going about their everyday lives at the allotment.

Informal cooperation in allotment gardening can be further defined by contrasting it with its opposite: formal (and rationalized) organization, such as the formal rules and bureaucracy of public officials and allotment committees. As noted in Chapter 1, allotment gardening is a practice in which the control of formal organization (Gabriel, 1995) is ever-present, via rules imposed by local government and enforced by public officials and allotment committees. However, in most aspects of social life, people seldom perform within the context the State expects them to (Thrift, 1999, *in* Dinnie *et al*, 2013: 3). Thus, whilst allotment gardening has formal practices and processes these are dwarfed by the durability and range of informal practices present. Formal organization in many facets of social life does, however, provide a safety net of sorts to getting cooperation off the ground; for instance (and at the very least) a formal means of communication and (most likely) with hierarchies for giving and receiving instructions. As such, formal networks exist within which cooperation can (and might) occur. But, in informal life such as daily life at the allotment there is not necessarily a “safety net”. Instead, allotment gardeners must rely on social skill (Fligstein, 2001) to get cooperation off the ground, but only if they actually have time to do so.

Social skill is the ability to induce cooperation in others, which is enacted via appealing to and helping to create shared meanings, understandings, and collective identities (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012: 46). However, group members (and the sets of people within them) have broad conceptions of interest and identity (*ibid.*); it is by understanding this within the context of their collective that socially skilled actors operate (*ibid.*). Thus, by being empathetic to the situations other people find themselves in, and being able to give reasons as to why those people should cooperate, socially skilled actors are able to induce cooperation (*ibid.*). However, shared understandings are not a given when the people who form a collective are from a variety of backgrounds; although everyone may have an idea of what the matter at hand is – in this case allotment gardening – they do not all necessarily share the same social experiences, vocabulary, and practices (Becker, 1986: 13). Hence, whilst social skill is present in all actors, in the case of allotment gardening there will be multiple pathways of meaning and valuation that must also be navigated prior to cooperation actually being induced. All human beings have the capability to present socially

skilled performances (at the very least for their own survival) (Giddens, 1984, *in* Fligstein and McAdam, 2012: 48), yet the literature on social skill (*e.g.* Fligstein and McAdam, 2012; Fligstein, 2001), does not provide a rigorous account of how or why some people possess more social skill than others. This thesis suggests that social skill's formation can be understood as an accumulation of our social experiences, meaning making, and access to chains of networks with weak ties (Granovetter, 1973), for instance in paid labour or leisure activity.

Requiring collective activity in allotment gardening practice can be a consequence of personal trouble, such as insufficient time to be present regularly at the allotment to do any gardening at all, encountering temporary or permanent health troubles, holidays, or not yet having grown sufficient skill to produce allotment-grown-food via the aesthetic of a cultivated (weed-free) garden. As noted earlier, in these circumstances symbolic capital is either not being accrued or is at risk of being lost entirely and the allotment garden becomes uncultivated. Yet, simultaneously, so too are these occurrences simply things that happen everywhere, everyday, and with regularity; for instance, in all walks of life and all of the time someone gets ill, or is pushed for time, or decides to learn something new. And, so too are valuation processes frequent, regular, occurrences, as part of everyday social life (Sayer, 2005: 951). Hence, needing some help at the allotment is concurrently both extraordinary and mundane; a crisis for the person concerned, but also part and parcel of everyday life. However, in terms of cooperation, it is when a personal crisis is collectively recognised that a person's private concern actually becomes "a matter of public attention" (Turner and Wainwright, 2003: 271) and personal troubles transform into wider societal issues (Wright Mills, 1959). Explanations of cooperation are similarly described in sociological literature; either as informal collective responses to mundane everyday occurrences (*e.g.* Burawoy, 1979) or as informal collective responses to extraordinary "moments of crisis" (Sennett, 2012).

For Sennett (2012: 154), informal cooperation is a means by which to solve problems in social life; he explains informal cooperation as a response to "moments of crisis" (*ibid.*).³¹ An

³¹ Sennett (2012: 154) does not dwell on the difference between "cooperation" and "collaboration" when outlining "informal collaboration" here; he discusses collaboration within the context of (and as a form of) cooperation. Whilst collaboration is an across (or between) group social process (Hegtvedt, 2005), allotment

instance of problem solving by informal cooperation in moments of crisis, described by Sennett (*ibid.*), is an incident in a bakery where formal organization is completely ignored when ovens overheat; the chain of command is suspended as workers informally collaborate to prevent fire. Sennett (*ibid.*) suggests these “moments of crisis” push people out of formal organization and its incumbent rules and hierarchies and into “the informal zone” (*ibid.*). Formal organization is thus revealed as fragile in events such as this, whilst informal cooperation is shown to be strong (*ibid.*).

However, Burawoy (1979) explains informal cooperation as a mundane and enduring process flowing through everyday life, which is quite different to Sennett’s (2012) idea. In Burawoy’s (1979) description of cooperation, an example is given of shop floor machine workers who are paid via the process of piece rate.³² Here, it is intensely difficult for an individual worker to sustain a high rate of piece time, resulting in loss of earnings and delegitimation as a valued worker (*ibid.*). But, in practice workers cooperate constantly to share tasks to ensure a level of production that always earns incentive pay. Burawoy (*ibid.*) calls this “making out” and it is an enduring processual form of informal cooperation in which collective action is undertaken in everyday life (*ibid.*: 51). Making out is so ubiquitous in the social lives of these workers that it becomes a social process occurring mundanely day-in, day-out. Thus, like Becker (1986), Burawoy’s (1979) idea of informal voluntary cooperation is less about a response to moments of crisis and much more of an acknowledgment that people do things together all of the time, in everyday relationships and interactions to reproduce social worlds.

Accordingly, this thesis argues that it is Burawoy’s (1979) idea of informal cooperation that is actually enacted in allotment gardening. Hence, cooperation in allotment gardening alleviates gardeners’ personal troubles by regarding them as a wider issue of concern for the collective. As such, cooperation in allotment gardening is more about informally dealing with everyday troubles that gardeners encounter, rather than moments of crisis (Sennett, 2012: 154) or formal interventions. Thus, via reference to Burawoy (1979), cooperation in

gardening is undertaken by people from a variety of social backgrounds and who form some distinct groups in allotment gardening (for instance, the bricoleur group). As such, I believe it is possible to conceptualise Sennett’s (*ibid.*) “informal collaboration” as social cooperation.

³² A worker is paid a base rate for a set standard of production, but incentivized to produce as many items as possible over that amount (or “piece”) (Burawoy, 1979: 48).

allotment gardening is a process of becoming, for what is at first a personal trouble processually undergoes resolution via informal voluntary cooperation. But, I note that this form of cooperation is only enacted towards legitimated gardeners, highlighting further the interconnectivity between the social processes of valuation, skill, and cooperation. It is this regular, routine, process of cooperation that reproduces the social world of allotment gardens. Via these ideas, informal voluntary social cooperation can be thought of as the engine house of the allotment and is, thus, noteworthy of sociological attention.

Joint activities

An interesting related process of informal voluntary cooperation in allotment gardening is “joint activities” (collective action), as conceptualised by Becker (2008 [1982], 1974). This is the process of cooperation in which people labour together on a joint task to produce something which they value as a collective achievement; valuation is never distant from this process, as some contributions are valued more highly than others (*ibid.*). An example of joint activities is the amount of people needed to produce an orchestral performance: inventors, makers and maintainers of musical instruments; composers; musicians; publicity agents for concerts; printers producing sheet music and tickets for concerts; music teachers; an audience; performers; along with a concert hall and its incumbent organizers in which to perform (Becker, 1974: 767). It is this collective (“the pool”) and the resources members bring to their practice which collectively produces something of value to them; these actions are “joint activities” (*ibid.*). Conceptualizing a social world in this way, as the production of something valued by all of the participants, helps to generate broader ideas about how social life is organized (Becker, 1974: 767). Above all else, the concept of joint activities is always understood as people doing things together to accomplish a task (Becker, 1974: 768).

The idea of joint activities (Becker, 2008 [1982], 1974) represents a valuable contribution to sociology. Specifically, in the case of the relationship between the forms of cooperation and competition, it is (generally) understood that cooperation is weakened or corroded by competition (Sennett, 2012: 65), thus destabilising collective action. As such, these two “forms of social interaction” (Simmel, 1908) are often regarded as polar opposites in sociology. Yet, in various joint activities (Becker, 2008 [1982], 1974) there are certain circumstances whereby cooperation and competition can be mutually associated (reinforcing) and produce collective action (Becker, 2008 [1982], 1974). Thus, people who

are in direct competition with one another actually cooperate with one another in order to keep a social world going and to reproduce it (*ibid.*). In team sports or art worlds (*ibid.*), for instance, practice grinds to a halt without joint activities, hence, people in direct competition must cooperate in order for their practice to continue and be reproduced.

There are many instances of joint activities in allotment gardening practice, such as gardeners collectively assembling sheds and greenhouses. These practices align with the joint activities literature, in that people are working together on a joint task to produce something they value. However, also present in allotment gardening are instances of joint activities that are enacted only in relation to certain highly skilled and very particular practices, and which diverge from examples in the cooperation literature in four ways.

Firstly, these are practices that are *competitive* with prize giving. Examples of these practices include pigeon racing and competitions in which the contest is judged by the physical appearance of particular plants or animals, such as giant-leeks, vegetables, fruit, flowers, chickens, and fancy birds. These practices are part of the wide variety of highly skilled practices that (layer upon layer) co-produce allotment gardening. However, the practice of allotment gardening is (generally) not a competitive practice, as most gardeners are present to grow allotment-grown-food for eating rather than enter into a competition for prizes. Thus, whilst these competitive practices are not the routine practice of every allotment gardener, they are prominent, vernacular, and highly distinct.

Secondly, these practices noted above are not undertaken by all (or even most) allotment gardeners. What is more, not all members of the collective at the allotment necessarily support these practices. This valuation process is strikingly dissimilar to most examples of joint activities in the cooperation literature, in which most (if not all) members of the collective value and participate in the joint activity. As such, the practices that are the focus of joint activities in allotment gardening are not only highly distinct and requiring exceedingly specific sets of skills, but have their own valuation processes. Thirdly, these practices attract prizes (often money), but these prizes are actually of such insignificant value (compared to the financial commitment required of participants) that they do not recompense competitors for their economic investment in competing. This impossibility (to recoup the investment) demarcates joint activities in allotment gardening from those cited

in the frequent examples of joint activities present in cooperation literature and in which economic markets are fully engaged.

Finally, joint activities are usually denoted by a shared understanding and valuation of the practice at hand in the collective, but this is not necessarily the case at the allotment. Not every gardener at the allotment cares about the practice of giant-leek growing, or pigeon racing, or show-growing. Hence, joint activities in allotment gardening are nested within the commonplace practice of producing allotment-grown-food, but as practices that are not necessarily understood and supported (or approved of) by the majority of people present in the social world. This situation in allotment gardening is somewhat unusual, for instance compared to an orchestra where everyone is present to practice music. Thus, joint activities in allotment gardening are a clear process of cooperation but are enacted by a distinctly different combination of means to commonplace examples in the literature.

When social cooperation in allotment gardening is thought about by these means (as voluntary informal cooperation, and joint activities), this social process is revealed as a ubiquitous facet of everyday social complexity. Yet, social cooperation at the allotment also illustrates that much of what people do is actually done collectively rather than as the individualized activity of the lone actor (Sennett, 2012: 65; Becker, 1986: 11). What is more, informal voluntary cooperation in allotment gardening is initiated by and occurs amongst allotment gardeners without incentives or recourse to formal organizations and their interventions. This is actually the case even if the precise nature of *what* people do together is open-ended.

Conclusion

Within a relational sociology approach and via reference to explanations in sociological and wider social sciences literature, this chapter has laid the conceptual foundations for the argument of the thesis; that an interweaving of the social processes of skill, valuation, and social cooperation, are pivotal to the reproduction of the social world of allotment gardens. A central feature of this argument is the symbolic capital accrued by and accorded to the production of the sensuous taste of allotment-grown-food via the presentation of a distinct (weed-free) normative-allotment-garden-aesthetic, along with the time, skill, healthy body, and social cooperation, required for reproduction. However, gardening and especially

allotment gardening are late arrivals to sociology. This is telling via the scant literature available about this form of social practice with which my data from ethnographic fieldwork can be aligned. This is also the case for processes of social cooperation, which lacks due attention in the discipline. However, via reference to distinct bodies of work in the discipline and beyond it is possible to dovetail my argument with scholarly work on the three social processes that are key to my argument.

But, exactly who gets help with things like watering lettuces or tomatoes at the allotment is certainly no accident. As I have explained in this chapter, the formation of informal voluntary social cooperation is the culmination of an interweaving of the processes of skill and valuation. Yet enskillment at the allotment is highly dependent upon both novices and masters having sufficient social skill to get cooperation off the ground in the first instance and that in itself is a process deeply imbued with valuation. Thus, it is actually the connectivity of social processes which reproduce this highly distinct social world and which make it attractive for sociological analysis. But, the vulnerabilities implicit in such social processes and by the way in which time and ability to practice can also be so fragile resources in this social world, give early hints that elements of allotment gardening practice might have vulnerabilities that could well affect the way in which this social world is able to reproduce into the future.

I have described the means by which skill, valuation, and cooperation, can come together in a distinct social world. From this vantage point it is possible to see how everyday life is enacted in allotment gardening practice and why affective sentiment is held for what is at times a challenging practice. I have also noted that social worlds are not hermetically sealed units and, as such, there are multiple overlaps and permutations; this is particularly the case in allotment gardening, which is forever bound in a relationship with local government, which has its own rules and expectations of how allotment gardens should be cultivated. Thus, processes of valuation such as legitimation in allotment gardening are actually imbued with valuations that are produced far beyond the allotment gate.

To a person unfamiliar with gardening of any form, it might seem unusual that valuations might be formed around a blade of grass considered to be “out of place”. That such a seemingly small incidence of a “weed”, an entity not considered valuable growing in the

natural world, could lead to valuations about people might be difficult to comprehend for anyone who has never set foot on an allotment site and has not been party to social relations and interactions occurring there. But, cultivation and especially being “weed-free” highlight the detailed distinctions in, and nuances of, everyday life that matter to people (Sayer, 2011). Thus, whilst this thesis illustrates that the allotment is a highly distinct social world, so too is allotment gardening practice similar to many facets of everyday life that are imbued with ubiquitous and normative social processes such as skill, valuation, and social cooperation.

Chapter 3. But you don't want to do my garden, do you?!

Research Methodology

Introduction

"Are you from *The Council*?" demands a woman wearing a high-viz waterproof jacket and over-trousers, as she marches toward the notice board onto which I'm stapling a laminated poster. I can only just see her eyes, as they peer out from beneath a jacket hood pulled down over her forehead, providing shelter from a relentless downpour of chilly rain that stabs at puddles and sends mud splattering around our booted ankles. Accompanying her is a man, dressed identically and equally dripping with rain water. "No, I'm not from the council I'm a student..." I quickly reply, noticing both now begin peering out further from beneath their hoods to get a better look at me (and with a hint of disappointment that an opportunity to come face-to-face with a rain-soaked public official has been lost), but curious as to whom I might actually turn out to be. "I'm Deb, I'm going to be doing a project here, can I give you a leaflet?... I've got an allotment". The moment I say that I have an allotment garden the atmosphere changes to polite and interested questioning. *What* am I going to be doing, *where* is my allotment, how *long* will I be here for, *why on earth* does anyone want to study allotments and then hastily a few minutes later "OK, we'll take some info, but we have to go now and get to work". Rain splattered leaflets are pushed inside large flapped pockets and then I'm alone again in a sea of muddy puddles and surrounded by high fences and locked gates. I look around: somewhere in here at Spinham the two people I have just encountered do gardening. But, this introduction was anonymous (Candea, 2010), hence, I neither know their names nor exactly where in here they actually practice gardening. I wonder if, when the rain has stopped and they are not swathed in high-viz, will I even recognise the two allotment gardeners again?

As an ethnographer I did not simply stroll into Spinham on this, my very first day of fieldwork, and begin developing deep and meaningful research relationships with the rain soaked people I encountered (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997: 5). Actually, fieldwork is an overdetermined setting – a destination reached via the process of research design – and one in which complex social processes can be obscured if careful attention to methodology is not undertaken (*ibid.*). The research methodology employed for this thesis is ethnography;

whilst a methodology is a theoretical and philosophical framework for research compared with a method which is data collection technique, an ethnography is simultaneously both (Brewer, 1994: 231). As such, in this thesis ethnography is not only the research method by which data is gathered during fieldwork by participant observation and interviews, but is the overarching theoretical framework for the entire thesis.

This chapter outlines the methodological planning (as well as plans going awry) and practice of ethnographic “embodied fieldwork” undertaken to gather data for the thesis (Okely, 2012; 2007). In ethnographic fieldwork, the fieldworker participates both consciously and unconsciously in the practices of the social world she is studying (Okely, 1983: 45). Although this participation (“participant observation”) can be perceived as something done merely via watching with the eyes, actually participant observation is practiced through the senses and the body (*ibid.*). Were I to provide here a list fieldwork methods that would be mundane, nor would that approach contribute to discourse about the way in which knowledge is generated; illustrating that reflexivity can be as much about theoretical as methodological issues (Edwards, 2000, p. 13). Rather than providing a list, in this chapter I give a reflexive account of the ethnographic fieldwork I undertook between September 2013 and September 2014, on field sites situated in the north east of England.

Researcher positionality

Gender

At the heart of ethnography is participant observation, which entails the body of the ethnographer immersed in the field as a thinking sensuous person, collecting data from the social world around her (O’Riain, 2009: 290). This is an embodied process that is not simply verbal and cerebral, but a mingling of kinetic and sensual processes that transpire in ways that are neither predictable nor controllable (Okely, 2007: 77). The processes, interactions, and data collected, in ethnography are affected (and also tempered) by the autobiography of the researcher (such as, gender, age, education, and skilled practice), hence, this chapter draws strong attention to my own researcher positionality in the field during participant observation (Okely and Callaway, 1992: xi).

As mentioned earlier, the whole point of autobiography in research design is to “work through” the self to contextualise and transcend it (Okely and Callaway, 1992: 2). Some

characteristics of my biography attuned me to some of the gardeners present at the field sites, for instance I was born and raised in the north east of England. However, it would be sociologically naïve to suggest that facets of my biography, such as my allotment gardening skill, education, social class, gender, race, and age, did not affect the research I undertook, or the data I was able to collect. Although I specifically chose to present in the field simply as “Deb the gardener” (doing a university course involving going out and asking gardeners about gardening),³³ I believe it was actually discrete bundles of facets of my biography (for instance, a woman plus a late arrival to higher education, and a skilled allotment gardener) that most affected my positionality and the data I was able to gather.

Gender positionality in particular can be overlooked in research design and subsequently cause problems in the field (Fiske, 1988: 219). My own gender (that is, as a woman) identified me as “different” to the majority of gardeners at the field sites. Here, most gardeners are (so-called) “older men” who are (mostly) retired, which in Britain occurs around the age of 65. Yet, the greater part of scholarly endeavour about men actually focuses on “young” men operating in the economic sphere (Milligan *et al*, 2015: 141). Thus, the majority of gardeners at the field sites form a somewhat ignored research group, whose gender performances “remain hazy” (Thompson, 2006: 634, *in* Milligan *et al*, 2015: 141). A researcher entering the field, however, must decode the group’s expectations and make a decision to conform or not; women often improvise something in-between to aid maintenance of the group’s normative stance, by which she is then constrained into performing established roles such as child, prostitute, or “honorary man” (Golde, 1986, *in* Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1988: 613).³⁴ My decision was to conform to the group’s expectations and, as such, I was regarded as a child (Golde, 1986) by many older men even if only a few years older than me. This I detected via tone of voice and comportment when men interacted with me. For instance, Marty who is less than ten years older than me, insists in a grandfather-like tone that he switch on the paraffin heater in his greenhouse when I am

³³ I decided against informing gardeners about my previous role as employee with a national project about allotment gardening, to avoid presenting as an intimidating form of “expert” (as defined by others), but that I would be honest should enquires be made, thus, permitting serendipity. Only Shona and Beverley (each a middle class woman, age early-seventies and late-fifties respectively) at Leontonby enquired, each agreeing with and accepting my decision. Neither are distant from the academy and have held (pre-retirement) “professional” occupations, thus, are able to relate to me sharing some of their social characteristics.

³⁴ Other presentations of gender can be (im)possible, for instance Conaway and Whitehead (1986, *in* Fiske, 1988: 218) and Perrone’s (2010: 723) expectations and attempts to be genderless and sexless in the field – via clothing and behaviour – were unsuccessful.

present in winter because “I don’t want you getting cold Deborah”. This is despite Marty knowing I am used to cold conditions on allotment sites and can see that (like him) I wear clothing suitable for gardening in cold weather. However, I was working in close bodily proximity with men on their gardens and in their sheds and often alone with them for hours and, therefore, my gendered position was negotiated and renegotiated. Additionally, some men are under forms of surveillance at the allotment, by their wives, relatives, and other gardeners, because allotment gardens can be sites of illicit sexual liaison (Dawson, 1990: 213). Hence it was possible that my being there as a woman might compromise the everyday life of some men, a risk that required careful management by all concerned.

My response was to present at the allotment wearing very modest Western-style clothing, a ring on my wedding-ring finger, and to attempt not to be sexually provocative in my appearance: no make-up, a baseball cap always covering my hair (also an essential accessory to protect from cold winter rain and summer sun); loose and baggy clothing and always trousers. This is what I sometimes wear to do gardening and I do at times wear a ring on my wedding-ring finger, thus, I felt comfortable both physically and emotionally in this presentation. But, I acknowledge that I used subjective and symbolic markers in a way that was contrived and specifically constituted for this particular piece of fieldwork.³⁵

During many introductions, men enquired about my marital status, noted the ring on my wedding-ring finger, and appeared relieved when I explained that I was in a steady, long term, relationship with a man. My performance as a modestly dressed heterosexual woman not seeking sexual liaison clearly put some minds at rest, however, masculinity (as reiterated, social, performance, see Butler (1990)) was compromised by my entry into the field and provided me with early glimpses of valuation processes in allotment gardening practice.

³⁵ In terms of my personal safety during lone-working, I used a project-specific mobile phone number and email address. Prior to entering a field site (throughout the year) I texted a health and safety “buddy”, giving information about where I was going and expected length of visit; if I did not “call in” at an agreed time, a list of formal contacts (plus emergency contacts) was held. Allotment gardeners would occasionally query this, for instance when I arrived to interview Pete (a bricoleur age late-fifties) he asked with some concern if anyone knew where I was? He had worked in a role involving supervision of lone-workers and, hence, was concerned as to whether I had completed a risk assessment.

Particularly, men often found “Deb the gardener’s” identity difficult to locate; to many men (particularly older men) my having had an allotment for almost 20 years could mean that I had either had an allotment *for as long as them* or that I had had my allotment for *longer than them*. In a social world where men tend to have been present longest, a younger woman claiming to have had an allotment garden for almost twenty years just did not add up. Questioning immediately began, framed in *time*: Deb, how *long* did you say you’d had your garden for? So that means you got it in *which year*? So exactly just how *old* are you? By answering that my age was 46 gave men room to manoeuvre some blame for this awkward encounter back onto me: “Deb, you look too young!”, often with a look of relief that a reason could be found for the problematic that challenged the normative expectations of their social world. Men, particularly older men, would also ask “But you don’t want to do my garden, do you?!” and I would reassure them that “No, I’m not here to do your garden.” Masculinity scripts so dominate the field sites, that any notion of a woman – a *younger* woman – turning up and helping a man with his gardening was simply beyond belief and had to be challenged immediately. Thus, great relief was expressed when I explained I simply wanted to hang out, listen to chat, and understand what gardening meant to people. In this way, however, my participant observation did not follow commonplace patterns of fieldworker participating fully in the practices of the social world she is studying.³⁶ But, I stress, that had I arrived and announced to the majority group of older men that I wanted to do their gardens with them this would have been interpreted as a man being weak; such an occurrence would have been a step too far and would have been problematic for the continuation of fieldwork.

Distance from the academy

Our own senses of belonging clearly mark a boundary by which we exclude in order to make ourselves secure in our “own culture” (Okely, 1986). A boundary was most certainly generated, between myself and the majority of gardeners at the field sites by my having been to university *and* being present in the field as a student currently at university (Skeggs, 1997: 34). Most (but not all) gardeners at the field sites are socially distant from academia and, accordingly, they made their own sense of who I was and what I was about (Tyler, 2012: 46; Edwards, 2000: 12). To many gardeners unfamiliar with academic research, it was

³⁶ Details are given later in this chapter.

inconceivable that anyone would be interested in studying allotment gardening at all and, particularly, social life at the allotment. Thus, some assumed that I would be a history or horticulture student, seeking to point me in the direction of, for instance, the most prominent gardener in the history of their locality (*ibid.*: 41); justified by choosing to inform me that allotment gardens have a long and important history in Britain via reference to Dig for Victory. Others found it easier to relate to what “research” might actually be, via memory-work and comparison. For instance, Billy (a bricoleur age late-sixties) explained to Lecky (a bricoleur age estimated to be age early-sixties)³⁷ that “it’s a bit like one of those surveys you’ve done, you know, in the high street”. This way of knowing was sufficient for Lecky to begin to understand why I was interested in what he did everyday at the allotment, but also justified (to Billy’s friendship group) his participation in the study.³⁸

I found that the best way to reiterate what I was actually interested in was to listen carefully to whatever interaction I happened to be included in, piping-up “that’s an interesting story” whenever I heard something un-historic, mundane, and about everyday life at the allotment. This transformed understanding of what I was interested in and I soon stopped hearing about famous people in the locality and sensing more about everyday life. However, being a mature student, with an employment history that commenced immediately I finished compulsory education age 16 (paired with not entering higher education until age 31), actually made *the* most connection with gardeners distant from the academy. Marty, who – like most bricoleurs – left school age 14 without formal qualifications, summed this up by concluding “Ah, so you’ve been in the *real* world...”. Thus, that I have been occupied in full-time employment prior to entering higher education, served (at times) to enable fieldworker connections with allotment gardeners unfamiliar with higher education and academic research.

³⁷ Where I did not learn the age of an allotment gardener I have estimated *downwards* in years, in order to give the reader an idea of the age of the participant.

³⁸ Bricoleurs form friendship groups at the allotment, the formation of (and how) I do not analyse in the thesis. I add, however, that these group boundaries are a moveable feast, hence, if a bricoleur has a particularly large “job” – such as fitting polythene to a polytunnel, which requires several people – group boundaries blur and merge until the task is completed; this is a form of problem solving via social cooperation (*see* Sennett, 2012).

Allotment gardening skill

I have outlined earlier how I became enskilled in allotment gardening, however, upon entering the field I did not consider myself to be particularly skilled in the practice.³⁹ But, there is knowledge in practice (Wulff, 2008: 83), via our correspondence with the world around us as sensual beings (Ingold, 2013: 31). And, skilled practice provides insight into the way in which techniques of experience can shape our dealings and interactions with others (Sennett, 2008: 289). Thus, in this social world (where skill and valuation, and cooperation intersect), my own allotment gardening skill affected greatly my positionality in the field and the data I was able to collect. For instance, as I indicated above when describing my introductory encounter with rain drenched allotment gardeners, that I have an allotment garden is a vital and key piece of information that had to be communicated instantly during fieldwork. Otherwise, I was immediately treated with suspicion *and* relegated to a naïve clueless student who (probably) knew nothing about allotment gardening. Whereas, announcing “I’ve got an allotment” instantly transformed me from unknown, to unknown with an allotment, to an allotment gardener-student happy to listen, learn, and swap allotment gardening tips.

Yet the level of my (perceived) skill played out somewhat differently. On the one hand, my skill was a resource for both myself and the people I was working with in the field; skill was something held in common when I interacted with skilled allotment gardeners. And, my knowledge and skilled practice was also a resource when working with novices, who regularly asked me for tips and ideas. But, conversely, having never grown a giant-leek, or grown for “the show bench”, or bred a fancy bird or raced a pigeon, and having no skill in bricolage, marked me out as a novice in some distinct areas of allotment gardening practice to those who do have those skills; and this particularly means bricoleurs. Hence, whilst bricoleurs would cheerfully interact with me about (for instance) plants and seeds and acknowledge that I am skilled, I was not considered worthy to be asked for my opinion on bricolage. Often, if I was being shown details of bricolage (such as a piped heating system) I was informed “of course you wouldn’t understand that”; accordingly, a clear line was drawn about exactly where my skill lay and where it stopped. Hence, my skill affected my

³⁹ I believe this was partly because, in my previous job, I was frequently amongst men allotment gardeners who had been gardening for decades, hence, I assumed (and was, at times, subsumed to) the role of a younger, less-skilled, gardener as a means of facilitating smoother relations.

researcher positionality and this was dependent upon with whom I was interacting. As such, skilled practice clearly enabled me to navigate the field sites and develop research relationships. Yet facets of my skill also clearly demarcated me as a woman not enskilled in some allotment gardening practices. This constantly fluctuating assessment of my skilled practice enabled me to begin to understand the social complexity of skill at the allotment and to see glimpses of highly specific valuation processes at work.

Ethics and representation

Ethical statement and practices

From the beginnings of its design, research can (and most likely will) evoke ethical dilemmas that do not necessarily present as orderly and predictable nor ensue in a tidy manner (Devine & Heath, 1999: 17). Yet also, ethical consideration is not momentary to the point of having met the (medical-model-driven) requirements of academic ethical review committees; nor does it diminish upon entering and leaving the field; nor is it finite upon submission, or publication, or leaving the academy completely (Simpson, 2011). As such, much of my ethical labour was undertaken far away from the comforts of the guidance of research supervisors, or the insurances of ethical committees and professional bodies. Such distance means a large part of the long-term commitment to ethics by those undertaking research is actually based upon their own personal morality (Marzano, 2007: 431). Thus, it is my democratic beliefs, my respect for autonomy, equality, freedom of speech, and open dialogue, that underpin my ethical decisions during research design and in the field, and which will continue beyond this thesis as my ongoing commitment to the ethically-led representation of research participants (Zanchetta *et al*, 2012: 611).

Fieldwork was undertaken in places and cultures in parts of the north east of England and it was those cultural settings that marked out the ethical boundaries within which I worked (Marzano, 2007: 427).⁴⁰ To alert allotment gardeners that research was occurring, a publicity poster was placed in various prominent locations within field sites. Informed, written, consent was received in advance from every allotment gardener interviewed, so

⁴⁰ Ethical approval was required by (and, therefore, applied for and approved by) the Ethics Committee at Newcastle University because I was studying people; all research was designed and undertaken to comply with the ethical policies of the British Sociological Association (2002). Via this compliance I not only met the requirements of the academy, sponsors, and professional bodies, but also sought to protect the field for future research.

that I could record their voice; immediately post-interview, a written debriefing form was provided.⁴¹ Copies of the poster, and a leaflet⁴² containing further information, were offered to gardeners at the field sites as and when encounters occurred. However, gardeners took different stances when learning about the ethics of this particular research. For instance, Jimmy (a pigeonman age late-sixties) pins the poster onto the inside wall of his shed, next to a list of pigeon races and a football poster, so that it is visible to members of his friendship group when they call into his shed for a cuppa. However, Jimmy tells me he is “not bothered” when I mention confidentiality, shrugging his shoulders when I stress its importance. Meanwhile, Gordon (a middle class man age late-thirties) is welcoming of the project and keen to take part, but is scathing of the need for any consent at all to participate in a study “only about gardening”. He explains that, as he works in a medical field, he is well aware of different types of consent required by various research bodies, adding dismissively “...it’s not like you’re doing medical research or anything...”.

Mostly, however, gardeners were constantly bemused at the amount of bureaucracy involved with a piece of research. Morris (a bricoleur age late-sixties), for instance, exclaimed “Oh no not paperwork!” during my outline of the particularities of informed consent prior to his interview. Some months later, however, Morris proudly tells me that, having decided to take part in some other research, he has warned the researchers “Mind, I know all about informed consent!”. The variety of these reactions – ranging from mild indifference to the clear legitimisation of other forms of research – serves to push home that allotment gardening involves a wide range of people from a variety of social backgrounds and experiences, who are all involved in differing and intersecting chains of networks and processes of valuation regarding what really matters to them. Thus, whilst ethics remained at the forefront of my mind during fieldwork, I had to be prepared to either stand-up and firmly defend my ethical stance, or fall-back after learning that there was absolutely no (apparent) interest whatsoever in the labour I committed to ethics.

Confidentiality relates to the way in which private information is managed, whilst anonymity specifically refers to the removing or obscuring (via pseudonym for instance) the names of participants and research sites to ensure textual representation does not include identity-

⁴¹ Copies of poster, consent and debrief forms, *see* Appendices B, C, D, respectively.

⁴² Available on request.

compromising details (Tilley and Woodthorpe, 2011: 198). I have applied confidentiality to all aspects of data collection and management in the study (Wiles, *et al*, 2008; Nespor, 2000). Anonymity is not a “given”, however, as maintaining anonymity during *and* after research requires commitment by everyone involved in the research, including the researcher (*see e.g.* Scheper-Hughes, 2001). My commitment to anonymity in this research has been to achieve protection for research participants and I have done so by creating pseudonyms to obscure identities of gardeners and locations; removing all posters when leaving the field; encouraging the allotment gardeners (and gatekeepers) I worked with not to reveal information about identities in the study.

Representation

“Representation” has a multitude of meanings, including interpretation, visualisation, communication, and advocacy (Hockey and Dawson, 1997: 2). Researchers must be alert and ready to the requirement of paying attention to the epistemological grounding of their representations of the people they work with in the field and whose lives create data (*ibid.*: 3). Via the example of dialect (below), I outline my reflexive process about representation.

The trope of the cheerful Geordie call-centre operative (*see e.g.* Sage Limited, 2011) belittles these localities, which actually have a diversity of dialects. I heard several (so-called) “north east dialects” in the field and was able to interpret each one, having been biographically attuned to them. However, to textually represent dialects and simultaneously preserve the anonymity of individuals and places required careful consideration. For instance, some dialects in this locale are specific to particular places, or to people who worked in certain heavy industries, and/or (in some instances) are used to include and exclude other people (*see* Dawson, 1990). Also, of course, (some) people are spatially mobile, moving in and around these localities and beyond. But, some of my research participants have remained solely in the locale into which they were born. As such, dialects in these localities continue to demarcate people as belonging to (or from) very particular locales and, thus, can at times reveal the identity of a particular locale being studied. Thus, accents and dialect have currency and are important boundary markers, as in many locales in Britain. Hence, Stan (a working class man age estimated late-sixties) has a distinctly different dialect to me, even though we have both spent our lives in the locality. Stan is a skilled vocal mimic and often

pretends to be me, by performing to other gardeners a highly accurate version of my dialect, raising a laugh about who I am and where I am perceived to be “from”.

After consideration, I decided to textually represent Stan and the gardeners I worked with simply as I heard them; myself as a speaker of one dialect listening to another person’s voice and textually representing what I heard. However, readers must be able to understand too but would I misrepresent (or even insult) research participants by including a “translation” into a so-called “standard English”? Furthermore, would the exercise massage my ego; interpreting voices in the way (I thought) I had heard them? The solution arrived in the form of a cuppa with Jimmy and several other bricoleurs and pigeonmen in his shed and listening to their chat one spring morning.

At least once per week, I would sit in Jimmy’s shed and listen to interactions undertaken in a very specific dialect, different to mine, but which I could interpret and keep up with. Usually, by about 9.30am, Jimmy has got his leaky, smokey, wood burning stove fired up. The large shed he refers to as “Jimmy’s Café” is now full of bricoleurs, awash with cups of coffee and Bovril that he provides every day. Through the smokey air, thick with the smells and sounds of pigeons in abutting crees, discussion today focuses on whether anyone has seen a bird of prey on the site; the raptor has been swooping at racing pigeons being exercised, leading to fears it will “take” one to eat. However, it takes me a few minutes to catch up with what is being discussed; I keep hearing the word “hac” and cannot place it. Eventually, after what feels like an eternity, I realise that the word “hawk” was (to my ears) being pronounced “hac”. My uncertainty was quickly picked up on, nothing was said but for the next few minutes the word “hac” was *overemphasised* in the local dialect several times; sang, spat, and gutturally squeezed out of throats. Jimmy and his friends are extremely *proud* of the way in which they speak the human name for this bird and are now over-performing its pronunciation, to ensure I understand the importance of dialect to social life here. Accordingly, I concluded it would be a dis-service to the gardeners I worked with to represent them with words that do not exist in their everyday lives; likewise, to readers, by assuming understanding and interpretation. Thus, although there are no clear-cut answers to dilemmas about representations, I decided that participants’ direct quotations in the

thesis ought to be textually represented in the way I heard them, accompanied by my interpretation of dialect.⁴³

Case selection

Multi-sited ethnography

The idiom “taken for granted” looms large in Ragin and Becker’s (1992) admonishment of the social sciences for relegating the “case” to a position of over-familiarity in research design. This thesis does concern cases: each field site is one case. Here, a case is an “object” rather than a “found case” or a “made case” (Ragin, 1992: 9). Another way of thinking about this is to consider the cases under analysis here as “empirical” and “general”, meaning that the cases existed prior to the research beginning (*ibid.*: 8). Thus, the cases under examination here can be recognised as valid units rather than being theoretically “found” during the course of the research (*ibid.*: 8).

Furthermore, underpinning this thesis is the selection of multiple cases by comparison of difference (Ragin, 1987) rather than the undertaking of a single-sited ethnography. The key intellectual aim is to extract the “implications of their [the cases] commonalities for the larger whole” having constituted the fundamental peculiarities of each of the cases (Ragin, 2012: 34). Multiple cases are, thus, studied here as an analysis of comparable instances of objects that are simultaneously both the same and different to each other (Ragin, 1992: 1). Hence, the cases in the thesis have similar characteristics, but are sufficiently different to one another to allow analysis of the same broad phenomena that is allotment gardening. The exact number of cases that count as sufficient, however, depends upon what the research seeks to understand (Ragin, 2012: 34), which here is social complexity in allotment gardening. However, practical considerations need regard too, for instance comparison of two cases might elicit rich data but have insufficient breadth for analysis, whilst six might not be within scope. Studying four cases, however, permits an intersection of breadth and depth within scope. Thus, four field sites form the cases for the study.⁴⁴

⁴³ Transcription conventions – see Appendix E.

⁴⁴ I anticipated that I might be asked to leave, or might need to withdraw, during fieldwork. Selecting additional “back-up” cases (all in place at beginning of fieldwork) provides a form of insurance – and quickly – should fieldwork become impossible at a particular case(s). Accordingly, the selection of four cases doubled to eight; four cases to actually study during fieldwork, plus four backup cases (mirroring the first four’s characteristics).

The four cases for the thesis were selected from urban, Statutory and Temporary, allotment garden sites with greater than fifty gardens, in the north east of England. Although technical instruments are not the concern of this thesis, I do need to mention that there are three legal categories of allotment garden sites in England: Statutory, Temporary, and Private (see Wiltshire and Burn, 2008), and, as mentioned in Chapter 1, secondary data about allotment sites and allotment gardeners in England is both scant and unreliable. Hence, to retain the scope of the study, I chose to select only allotment sites provided by the local State, via Statutory and Temporary provision, because (firstly) some secondary data does exist about these forms of allotment sites and (secondly) I knew it was likely I could access this data because of my privileged employment background. Hence, Private sites were not included, simply because there is no secondary data present. Although, I cannot justify my decision to exclude Private allotment sites (in terms of researching particular allotment gardeners and allotment gardening practices), had I actually included Private sites in this study it would have meant an over-emphasis on desk-based searches for sites which would have delayed (or even prevented) entry to the field. Urban allotment sites were chosen because, again via my previous experience, I am aware that allotment garden sites in rural areas usually have far fewer than 50 allotment gardens; studying allotment sites with fewer than fifty allotment gardens might have meant insufficient people present regularly, or force me to over-present on sites, or might be analytically idiosyncratic.

Secondary data: forms of knowledge

In order to select cases, without the presence of a coherent secondary data set, I tapped into a variety of seams of knowledge about both allotment gardening sites and allotment gardeners in the north east of England. “Knowledge” stems from particular social contexts (Fairhead and Leach, 1996: 14) and, in the social sciences, knowledge is often explained via a spectrum of “expert-lay knowledge divides” in which the “scientist” or “public official” is placed at one end and (at the other) the knowledge acquired by indigenous peoples from their lived experiences (Phillimore and Moffatt, 1999; Wynne, 1998: 45). The knowledge I relied upon to select cases was located at various and intersecting points on this spectrum, but is discernible via three general categories. Firstly, unpredictable and scattered data, gathered and presented by public officials on local council websites as a form of “expert-knowledge” (Bush *et al*, 2005: 661). Secondly, my own indigenous geographical and cultural knowledge, accumulated as a woman attuned to a particular locality (Sillitoe, 2000: 4); along

with my own critical “expert knowledge” as a woman with a “professional” background in allotment gardens nationally. Thirdly, the “expert-knowledge(s)” of individual public officials in the north east of England, but which is not actually presented as data in the public domain, such as the numbers of women allotment garden tenants on individual allotment sites. Via a variety of forms of knowledge I thus gathered social, demographic, and geographic, secondary data for case selection; this occurred in spite of and as means to bypass the absence of a coherently presented secondary data set.⁴⁵ The data I gathered by this process provided 56 Statutory and Temporary allotment garden sites in urban areas, with more than fifty allotment gardens, from which to select potential cases for the fieldwork.

Social and spatial characteristics

Although allotment gardening is still mostly done by older men in these localities, I purposely sought a variety of perspectives because allotment gardening has recently undergone at least some social transformation (Degnen, 2009; Buckingham, 2005). Accordingly, cases were sought that reflected these recent changes but which did not ignore the fact that (firstly) it remains mostly older men who practice allotment gardening in the north east of England, and (secondly) that there are highly distinct spatial practices on allotment gardens in these localities (I discuss the latter below).

During case selection, I was already aware that commonplace social divisions (such as age, class, gender, and race) are present on allotment sites. But, most notably, gender and social class are present in a very particular way on allotment sites in these localities: at the time of case selection (year 2013) there were actually far fewer women allotment gardeners present than the social imaginaries (that I discussed in Chapter 1) suggested *and*, via secondary data (outlined above), I learned that allotment sites populated by gardeners with working class characteristics have the least women, whilst allotment sites populated by gardeners with middle class characteristics have the most women. Thus, on allotment garden sites in these localities, social class actually triangulates with gender.

⁴⁵ To corroborate spatial information gathered via all of these knowledges, I also found it useful to consult satellite imagery in Google Maps™ (Taylor and Lovell, 2012).

What is more, in some locales of former heavy industry in Britain (such as the north east of England) some allotment sites with a majority of gardeners with working class characteristics tend to present highly distinct spatial practices in the form of high fences and locked gates forming a high boundary between each individual allotment garden, and which may (or may not) affect sociality. Hence, as I have outlined, allotment gardens in these localities are populated by distinct groups of people practicing highly distinct forms of allotment gardening. Thus, pinpointing a variety of perspectives in these localities required paying particular regard to spatial distinctions within allotment gardening *and* recognising that here social class triangulates with gender. Clearly, selecting four cases representing all of these social and spatial factors is not mathematically possible; for example, a wide variety of ages, genders, social classes, and accompanying spatial distinctions, and so on. However, identifying cases featuring intersections of these factors was possible.

Advantageously however, and as noted above, social class triangulates gender in these localities which, accordingly, provides access to a research population that reflects both the older men who form the majority of allotment gardeners, *and* provides access to (scarcer) women allotment gardeners. Thus, social class was selected as *the* key characteristic for case selection – but I stress not for analysis – whilst also seeking to ensure that a range of spatial factors (such as high fences and locked gates) were not neglected. Accordingly, I sought four cases with the following characteristics: (i) a case with large numbers of allotment gardeners with working class characteristics; (ii) a case with large numbers of allotment gardeners with middle class characteristics; (iii) a case with variety of social classes (iv) a control case (discussed below).

Sociality is not a given in social life, however, yet there are some allotment gardening practices that encourage social interaction amongst allotment gardeners. Hence, I sought cases featuring maximized opportunity to socialise. For instance, the presence of an allotment association, whereby allotment gardeners may encounter one another at meetings (if they attend) or when perusing association notices onsite, or if they have a matter they wish to discuss with committee members. Or, an allotment site shop which requires collaboration and cooperation to operate plus allotment gardeners to trade with. As a control (White, 1992), I selected one case that reversed the factors I wished to maximise; thus, a wide variety of social class without an allotment association or shop.

Thus, four cases (and back-ups) were selected reflecting these social and spatial characteristics: One case with large numbers of allotment gardeners with working class characteristics (Spinham Allotments, in Marnbreck); one case with large numbers of allotment gardeners with middle class characteristics (Clooter Street Allotments, in Neadle); one case with allotment gardeners with a variety of social characteristics (Brindle Lane Allotments, in Gourseby). Each of these three cases has an allotment shop and an allotment association, as a means of maximized opportunity for allotment gardeners to socialise with one another. One control case was selected, with gardeners with a variety of social characteristics but without an allotment shop or allotment association, meaning minimal opportunity to socialise (Leontonby Allotments, in Byworth). As noted, the four cases were selected from Statutory and Temporary allotment garden sites in urban areas and have greater than fifty gardens; all are located in the north east of England. The geographic distance between the four cases is approximately 25 miles (maximum) and ten miles (minimum). A detailed description of the distinct characteristics of the four cases is provided later in this chapter.⁴⁶

Negotiating access

Negotiating access with public officials

As the gardeners I wished to study were practicing on allotment sites provided by local councils, access was initially negotiated via public officials. Contact was made with a relevant public official in each council of the local State in the locality and a written outline given of the proposed study. These particular public officials are gatekeepers to knowledge of, and access to, allotment gardeners in their municipality.⁴⁷ Whilst eight of the ten public officials I contacted replied immediately and welcomed the study, two never responded at all, despite a reminder being sent. Whilst this reduced the number of available cases, the social and spatial characteristics of cases I sought were retained.

When introducing the study to public officials, I took time to carefully explain my (new) identity; a PhD student seeking information from public officials as part of research being

⁴⁶ I had visited one of the field sites previously, for less than one hour a decade earlier within a group of public officials. The secretary could recall me, to my knowledge no one else did.

⁴⁷ Alternatively, I could have approached gardeners on four allotment sites and attempted to obtain permission from everyone present, only approaching public officials in the final instance. From my own experiences, I was aware that this would be less likely to succeed.

undertaken in a university. I did this because I am familiar to some of these public officials because of my previous role and I did not wish to mislead them. Public officials (whose elected councillors agreed to an expression of interest in the study) then made time to meet with me and provided detailed spatial and social-demographic information. They also agreed to put me in touch with (at early stages, numerous) potential cases I was interested in, so that I could make contact and gauge suitability and interest.⁴⁸ We agreed during these meetings that, when I selected the four cases (and backups), I should submit a written request to undertake research to the relevant public official, who would then recommend acceptance to elected councillors. For the four cases selected, each relevant local council agreed to respect the anonymity I requested for the people and places in the study.

Negotiating access with allotment gardeners

This stage of negotiating access took many (sometimes highly improvisational) forms. There were chats on the phone; email conversations (one of which came with a warning from a secretary not to take up too much of her time); meetings in person with committee members. I was given whirlwind tours of sites in torrential downpours, by busy committee members on their morning off work; a serendipitous interaction at a leek-show removed weeks of leg-work, after repeatedly trying to connect with a busy secretary. Finally, just when I thought I could detect a pattern, I was subjected to a “tomato tasting test” that scrutinised my ability to appreciate the sensuous taste of, and make social distinctions about, allotment-grown-food in order to judge my suitability to undertake fieldwork.

The tasting test came about during a hot afternoon, being shown around every nook and cranny of a potential case by a highly fastidious allotment secretary who bombarded me gruffly with questions. When we eventually got to his allotment garden he picked ripening tomatoes and passed them to me, explaining that he hoped I might recognise the plant variety and be able to comment on flavour. At every stage of this tasting, a range of questions was fired at me about anything and everything to do with allotment gardening practice. I interpreted this as a valuation of my allotment gardening knowledge and skill, but also about my ability to actually do the fieldwork. Eventually, the secretary grudgingly

⁴⁸ I mention “suitability”, as I was aware there could be occurrences public officials were unaware of that might deem a case unsuitable for study at that time; committees are oftentimes cautious about what they reveal to public officials. In some instances, this was reversed; public officials made time to explain to me that particular case(s) I was interested in were presently unsuitable, in one example the site had been turned over to grazing.

admitted that I had been an allotment gardener *longer than him* adding that he had concluded that I did know what I was talking about and could “manage” to do the fieldwork.

After this process, during spring and early summer 2013, I had sufficient information to select four cases and four backups. As agreed, I applied in writing to each relevant public official and requested permission to study, taking care to include a reminder about anonymity. Permission was granted by each within one week of my request being submitted and fieldwork began.

The field sites

Spinham Allotments, Marnbreck

Marnbreck is a small town doused in the histories and cultures of the former heavy industries that once employed the majority of its resident men. Senses of extreme localness and connectedness flow through the social clubs, pubs, churches, and the busy High Street; as Bruce (a bricoleur age late-sixties) explains, “...everybody knows *everybody* [chuckles]...when you're talking to somebody, you probably end up being related [laughs]...”. However, Marnbreck is also a town that is growing steadily, with new-build homes on former industrial locations filling quickly with people from out of town. These changes waft more slowly into Spinham, where most allotment gardeners are men with working class characteristics. Consequently the site has a rich seam of bricoleurs, show-growers, leekmen, pigeonmen, and keepers of fancy birds.

Even days after rain, water fills muddy puddles on the rammed-earth hauling ways at Spinham. Originally laid for horse and cart, now it is cars and vans slowly plodding round these tracks, bringing found objects to be bricolaged into sheds, greenhouses, and heating systems. Most gardens are bounded to the haulingways by high fences and locked gates. But, through gaps in the bricolaged corrugated metal and wooden fences, are glimpses of lower and more transparent boundaries between gardens, permitting daylight for plants and socialising for gardeners. Cultivated (weed-free) gardens with rod-straight rows of vegetables are the order of the day here and there are few empty gardens awaiting a new arrival. Daily life begins at around 7.30am on weekdays; garden gates are propped open, with cuppas and socialising on the go and possibly an (illicit) bacon sandwich being eaten as bricoleurs are often placed on enforced diets at home. Wives and partners do visit Spinham,

but carefully laid plans are made for their arrival and inspection of the gardens their husbands spend most of their time at. Away from the rules of domestic life, bricoleurs at Spinham spend their days doing (and chatting about) their highly skilled practices relating to the raising of plants and animals, and the making of objects; even Christmas Day is not a day off, as giant-leeks and animals require attention 365 days per year.

Also present are a small number of new arrivals with middle class characteristics and different intentions to bricoleurs. Sara (a middle class woman age early-forties), for instance, doesn't like the look of the place at all, but she does not have a home garden and so thought an allotment garden might suit her gardening plans. She desires (and is labouring to produce) "a country cottage garden style...the kind of garden that Peter Rabbit would feel welcome in...".⁴⁹ She is not at all keen on the muddy paths and bricoleurs, preferring instead to "keep myself to myself", always closing and locking her gate behind her when she is present. Thus, there are the beginnings of change and social distancing at Spinham but at present remains a bricoleur's domain.

Clooter Street Allotments, Neadle

The high street is seldom without a traffic-jam in Neadle – a densely urbanised inner-city locale – where cars and buses crawl until (almost) midnight. Layer upon layer of varieties of people reside in Neadle: working class people, first and second generation immigrant Asian people, middle class people with "professional" occupations, and students seeking cheap(er) digs in shared houses. Some residents are transient and live here for only a short time, whilst some have been present throughout their lifetimes and recall quieter paces. Housing is high density, mainly terraced houses or flats, with tiny home gardens to the front and small (often shared) concrete courtyards with high brick walls to the rear.

It can take several years to reach the top of the waiting list at Clooter Street. Demand is always high and Wilf (a middle class man age late-sixties) notes that "certain types of people" are attracted, for instance younger people without experience of gardening who he claims believe "it's cool to have an allotment and they don't really make a big go of it...". Yet, despite Neadle's wide variety of residents, it is actually middle class people who at first

⁴⁹ "Peter Rabbit": a fictional character in a Beatrix Potter children's storybook in which animals are clothed as humans and lead lives within Victorian-era expectations of morality.

glance appear to form the majority of allotment gardeners at Clooter Street. As Wilf explains “...you know how it is, people get together, then they get a house, then they get married, then they get kids, then they get an allotment, it's such a middle class thing”. Accordingly, allotment gardening can appear to be a very white, very middle class practice in Needle. Yet, also present at Clooter Street are bricoleurs and leekmen, along with first and second generation Asian immigrants. But most prominent of all at Clooter Street are the very high numbers of women gardeners with a variety of social characteristics.

Buried deep in the stories of these allotment gardens, the local council said “no internal fences, no sheds” and, hence, there is an “open” aspect inside Clooter Street. Thus, very little can be done here without being seen by somebody. Neatly trimmed grass paths serve as haulingways and cars are discouraged so as not to spoil the grass. Flowers are in abundance here, as are less-commonplace plants (to the north east of England) that remind people of homes left behind on distant shores, all of which mingle with show flowers and vegetables, giant-leeks, and bricolage. Recently, sheds have become permissible at Clooter Street and opinions amongst gardeners are *most certainly* divided as to whether this is “right” or “spoils the look of the place”. Some older gardeners view sheds as the beginning of the end of the Clooter Street aesthetic that really matters to them: neat, tidy, ordered. At present most gardens do not have a shed, hence, shelter continues to be provided by a building just inside the main gate. To bricoleurs this is “the hut”, to middle class professionals this is “the pavilion”.⁵⁰ A kettle and a large collection of (neatly filed) gardening magazines are provided by the committee. In practice, however, this building has been claimed as a bricoleurs’ domain with few other gardeners entering.

Leontonby Allotments, Byworth

It can be difficult to locate Leontonby in Byworth. Whilst gardeners with middle class social characteristics claim these gardens are located in upmarket Uptown, gardeners with working class characteristics *just know* the locality is actually Byworth: a small town steeped in working class industrial histories and cultures, that has grown and spread until it has folded and merged with its neighbouring locales. Thus, Leontonby straddles a boundary socially, economically, and physically; this is reflected by its gardeners, who have a wide variety of

⁵⁰ All new arrivals receive a key.

social characteristics. Gardeners here are, for instance retired public and private sector elites, managers, chefs, and creatives, yet also retired welders, “dinner ladies”, and road sweepers. The gardeners’ residences reflect this variety, such as large detached villas with substantial home gardens, “post-war semi’s” with home gardens, and high density terraced flats akin to those in Needle.

There are numerous gates into Leontonby (and labyrinth paths inside), then gardens of a variety of shapes and sizes co-joining and merging, concealing yet more behind. Narrow and winding paths weave their way around and, without a committee of gardeners present, public officials have ordered each gardener to be responsible for maintaining the small piece of path outside of their garden. The consequence is a variety of path surfaces and aesthetics, ranging from neatly strimmed to weedy, or bare earth next to the odd bit of carpet here and there to smoother weeds. The gardens’ perimeters are equally patchwork-like with low and high fences, along with hedges low and high neatly trimmed or left to roam, gates and no gates. So too is there wide variety in the plants grown, with highly distinct selections of vegetables and flowers alongside bricolaged sheds but also newer (manufactured) sheds purchased by middle class professionals who neither have time or skill to bricolage. However, what demarcates Leontonby from Spinham and Clooter Street is the variety in cultivation practices; by this I mean that some gardeners fully cultivate their garden (without weeds), whilst many gardens show only small signs of cultivation or little at all.

Yet these distinctions shrink instantly should the local council be raised during interactions: gardeners are in unison that public officials “never show their faces”, are distant but always too quick to collect rents. The collective of gardeners at Leontonby ebbs and flows with strong force: only a bricoleur group on weekdays, whose presence overlaps with that of middle class professionals at weekends. However, in summer there are some longer absences as retired economically secure middle class gardeners seek southern Europe for a month or two, whilst some first and second generation immigrant gardeners visit their home country.

Brindle Lane Allotments, Gourseby

Fresh air and space is not usually anticipated in cities but, on the wide-open space of the periphery, the wind whips up quickly and brings in the smells of the green-belt; a hint of horse manure and the thick exhaust fumes of trundling tractors. Brindle Lane is large and spacious, and hosts gardeners with a wide variety of social characteristics. Being on a city's edge, gardeners come here *out* of the city centre but also *into* here from the upmarket commuter villages of the green belt; as well as from "next door" which is the suburb of Gourseby that Brindle Lane neatly dovetails into. In Gourseby, residents have middle class characteristics that are as "neat" and "tidy" and "well appointed" as their homes when described by local estate agents. Accordingly, dialects and life's priorities vary enormously within the collective of gardeners at Brindle Lane. Bricoleurs here claim connectedness to the city and its histories of heavy industry, whilst gardeners with middle class characteristics claim distinction by proudly boasting of a child's achievements at gymkhana and how much house prices have increased in their (not so distant) "village".

There is no shortage of horse manure at Brindle Lane; riding horses is so popular in the green-belt that tractors regularly deposit steaming piles of fresh manure free of charge for gardeners. And tractors certainly have room to manoeuvre at Brindle Lane, because wide and smooth asphalt lanes serve these gardens. Consequently, there is an open aspect even though there is a mixture of high and low fences. Like Leontonby, Brindle Lane has variety in cultivation; some gardeners present their garden as cultivated (without weeds), however, many gardens show only small signs of cultivation or little at all. Gardeners can drive in and park in a bay next to their garden here and this has resulted in the continuing presence of a large group of gardeners in later life who are able to continue practicing gardening despite experiencing illness in later life. Meanwhile, cyclists of all ages freewheel slightly downhill to the gates, glad of the camber after a day's digging. The clip-clop of hooves is never far away either, as an occasional horse-rider takes a short-cut. Hence, above all else at Brindle Lane, a key norm and rule is obeying the speed limit of 10 miles per hour no matter the mode of transport. Unlike Spinham, Clooter Street, and Leontonby, the pedestrian gate is never locked at Brindle Lane and local dog owners are welcome to enter to exercise their pets and socialise with gardeners.

Participant observation in the field

Drinking cuppas and dodging rain showers

Scholarly discourse about continua of participation-versus-observation and subjectivity-versus-objectivity (and which have been critiqued, *see e.g.* Fabian (1983)) serve only to over-emphasise that the major (and privileged) element of scientific knowledge is that undertaken via the eyes (Okely, 2012: 80). But actually, during participant observation, the ethnographer surrenders to the full experience of being in the social world she is studying and does not rely solely upon – nor privilege – ocular data (Okely, 2001: 104). She has her full sensory capacities at work resulting in her “experiential seeing” rather than merely “looking” (*ibid.*: 103). Thus, the fieldworker is receptive, rather than undertaking panopticon surveillance of the people she encounters (*ibid.*: 103). The privileging of vision, over total bodily sensory experience, is an enlightenment idea that continues to shroud participant observation as both understood and undertaken in the field (*ibid.*: 102). People in the West reproduce Enlightenment metaphors of the “mind as machine” (Degnen, 2009: 152), rather than the “telling by hand” (Ingold, 2013: 124) that means being attuned to the full range of bodily senses that flow through us. Had I ignored the sensory totality of social life, in my participant observation, I would have “omitted dimensions of experience” (*ibid.*) and, thus, forms of data would have been obscured. By engaging all of my senses, various forms of data were available to me, such as the the sound of spade splitting earth behind a high fence;⁵¹ the whiff of a hen-coop (and wondering why it had not been cleaned yet that day); Betty (a working class woman age mid-seventies) being quiet and deep in thought rather than her usual talkative self, leading to a discussion about her current inability to practice gardening due to ill-health in later life.⁵² Thus, as I have noted, an ethnographic approach to data collection in the field is methodological pluralism (Lamont and Swidler, 2014).

Between September 2013 and September 2014,⁵³ I was present at the field sites throughout the four seasons of the northern hemisphere, seven days per week across daylight hours

⁵¹ Some fences are more than 7 feet high, therefore, I relied on sounds to alert me to the presence of a gardener behind a high fence, such as voices, radios, hammering.

⁵² Discussed in Chapter 5.

⁵³ My reasons for choosing to arrive in September: leekmen fiercely guard the privacy of their giant-leeks, an “unknown” arriving in high summer (just prior to competition time) might be regarded as a potential saboteur; spring is a busy period and, thus, I might be rejected; August is a school holiday period when people can be away; winter has a lower amount of gardeners present; September provides greater opportunity to meet everyone because this is the final harvesting period in the locale. If I undertook the study again, I would repeat this.

available from sunrise to sunset.⁵⁴ Gardeners come and go as they choose and so I varied the days, timings, and length, of my visits and spent time doing whatever happened to be occurring. I chatted with Betty, whilst we harvested and tasted mange tout and debated the merits of freezing her crop. Sharing a cuppa with Ronnie (a bricoleur age late-sixties) and Bruce in their shed, I heard reminisces about recent holidays, their worries about relatives' health, and plans for today's gardening and socialising. If anyone asked for my opinion on when to sow particular seeds I gave it and, thus, entered into long and enduring discourses over varieties, sowing, and cuttings, for various vegetables, fruits, and flowers, which often began with me being asked "What do you think of...?". Shona asked me to show her how I prefer to sow carrot seeds and we then spent hours poring over seed packets and preparing soil, whilst we weighed up different approaches to deterring carrot fly. Over several months, Terry (a working class man age mid-sixties) showed me how to build a greenhouse without spending any money and, throughout, we constantly "agreed to disagree" about how much ventilation he needed to incorporate. I hunted freshly-laid hen eggs with Michelle in her hen-house and was terrified when Gary (a bricoleur age mid-fifties) could not work out how to return a python (a temporary lodger in his warm shed) to a terrarium, when realising that he and the snake were between me and the exit. Leekmen showed me how to seed a giant-leek, transplant giant-leek cuttings, how to water them, how to improve their colour, and constantly and repeatedly told me what *not* to feed them. I was taken to meet pigeons and to admire fancy birds, was captivated by goslings, and played with children. Throughout the year, I sat in allotment shops and listened to enquiries about the price of seed trays and chicken feed, drinking cuppas with (volunteer) staff while they rolled their eyes when asked (yet again) by a customer for an item they *just knew* did not suit the gardener (or garden) in question.

Chilly rain soaked my waterproof clothing, meanwhile I baked in heat during interviews in greenhouses registering over 100°C on the minimum/maximum thermometer dangling over my head. Always, I was accompanied by my fieldwork "kit" that mushroomed into a large amount of small objects relating to the accurate recording of field notes and interviews, to keeping myself warm and dry in winter and cool and dry in summer, with food to nibble and

⁵⁴ In Britain, allotment gardeners are not permitted to reside at their allotments. Electricity is not provided, hence, there is little light after sunset which hinders spatial orientation. As sunset approaches, gardeners begin to leave.

share, and an ever-present thermos mug of tea in my hand to drink and socialise with. The length of my individual visits was mostly dictated by combinations of weather (if no one was about to offer me shelter in a shed during sudden chilly downpours or snow flurries), toilet breaks off-site, and whatever happened to be going on that particular day. Sometimes sites were packed full of gardeners, sometimes they were quite empty. But mostly, there were gardeners gardening and socialising with each other and that is what I participated in.

An important lesson learned: who is an allotment gardener?

In research, “nothing is more productive than surprise” (Stark, 2009: xvii) with the most stunning being those that completely go against the grain of research design (*ibid.*). In the very first few days of fieldwork, at all of the field sites, I was indeed surprised by something and learned a very important lesson: in research design one cannot anticipate everything prior to entering the field. This surprise had implications upon both (what I believed to be) population size on each field site and who I believed I was actually studying in the first instance.

What surprised me is that “plothead” and “allotment gardener” have different meanings at the field sites: some allotment gardeners have signed a Tenancy Agreement⁵⁵ for the allotment garden they practice gardening upon (“plothead”), yet I was also meeting many, many, allotment gardeners who explained they are not actually a tenant at all.⁵⁶ Thus, it is nigh on impossible to easily conclude who the tenant is – should one wish to know – unless one is specifically told. Accordingly, the population size I had anticipated (that is, one person per allotment garden per field site) – and which had been corroborated by public officials

⁵⁵ A technical instrument (administered by public officials and allotment committees) giving legal status to one person to garden on a specific allotment garden for a year; this agreement rolls on year-on-year.

⁵⁶ This practice (which I call “allotment-garden-sharing”) is undertaken and arrived at for a variety of reasons and by various means at the field sites. By “allotment-garden-sharing” I mean more than one person gardening upon one garden, sharing tasks and harvests; or, more than one person gardening on one garden, having previously agreed upon distinct portions, with each person gardening on their own portion and keeping everything harvested from it, but cooperating to keep all of the garden going during holidays or times of trouble. Some people practice allotment-garden-sharing from outset, because they want to garden with friends and/or family; others do so in times of trouble, such as sharing with a person troubled by lack of time or ill-health in later life (described in Chapter 6). However, the State counts only the tenant as being present; this creates an incorrect representation of how many people actually practice allotment gardening in Britain. Although at each of the field sites there is a bureaucratic means by which one person can become “registered” as a “sharer” and inherit the tenancy, this process is fraught with rationalization, uncertainty, bureaucracy, and is without guarantee.

during research design – instantly transformed into a fluctuating incalculable amount of allotment gardeners who might (or might not be) the person holding the tenancy.

However, all of these people are practicing allotment gardening at the field sites and, as the focus of this study is the social life of allotment gardens, it would have been impossible in ethical, methodological, and practical, terms to ignore an entire group of people simply because they have not signed a piece of paper. Whilst I had anticipated some tenants might have people who gardened with them, I had grossly underestimated that actually almost everyone had somebody who did some gardening with them at some point or another.

There is a tendency in the (limited) allotment gardening literature to focus upon tenants only and (secondly) not to make any commentary about who else might be present and practicing allotment gardening (*see e.g.* Buckingham, 2005: 172, or Crouch, 2003: 19); with the exception of Ellen and Platten (2011: 566) who note briefly that allotment garden cultivation is undertaken by “family and friends”. I believe my poor judgement in this matter (during pre-fieldwork research design) related to experiences in my previous role; I had usually visited allotment sites in the company of a public official and/or allotment committee member and a conversation was simply not being had about the vast numbers of people actually gardening on allotment sites (and not being counted by local government) and doing so as enjoyable and meaningful forms of social interaction and cooperation.

Thus, in the first few days of fieldwork I learned that in allotment gardening – as in most aspects of social life – people seldom act within the context the State expects them to. My response was immediate; adjusting my repertoire to explain that I was keen to chat and spend time with *anyone* gardening at a field site and to ensure this word got around.⁵⁷

Accordingly, I encountered and participated with a population of gardeners that was larger than anticipated, which constantly fluctuated, and which was larger than the total number of allotment gardens across field sites.

⁵⁷ Were I to undertake the fieldwork research again, I would publicise the study to “anyone who gardens here” rather than to “any plothead” so that everyone gardening at a field site is aware that I am interested in them, that I do not delineate between allotment gardeners, and that everyone has opportunity to participate in the study.

Serendipity in data collection

The actual hours available for participation varied, depending upon the season and daylight hours, as short as 8.10am – 3.00pm in winter and as long as 5.00am – 10.00pm in summer. Gardening takes place across these hours, but I could not be at four field sites simultaneously.⁵⁸ I kept very careful track of (and constantly questioned myself about) how many hours I was spending, where, and with whom. Who had I not seen for a while? Were there gardens I had not yet met anyone upon? Had I been to all field sites, for instance, on a Sunday recently? Was there a field site where I was struggling to meet novices or younger gardeners? And what would my “regulars” say if I didn’t see them for up to a week? But, actually, my inability to be at all field sites simultaneously became serendipitous in data collection, permitting me to develop a useful heuristic tool in the field, which I now explain. Had I not been present at a field site for a few days or up to a week, my reappearance was regularly greeted with a joking “Hello Stranger!”, or “And *where* have you been?”. As such, I found that I needed to remind gardeners that I was studying *four* field sites; that if I was absent from their site then I was most likely at another. This explanation was accepted and apologies for forgetfulness given before a commencement of “catch-up” stories about what I had “missed”. Stories can expose social processes to sociologists and, when legitimated, produce social transformation but also new territories of contention; hence, whilst stories may maintain existing inequalities they can also threaten them (Polletta, 2006: 11). Storytelling is also a social process and the telling of a tale can enable sense-making of the atypical, channels emotions, and maintains individual and collective identities (*ibid.*: 7). Via this way of hearing, I was placed in a serendipitous position: I heard via “catch up” stories what had been occurring during my absence. Thus, some days after an event, I heard the same story repeated by a variety of gardeners but with different content, emphases, meaning, and, hence, varying valuations. This served as a method by which I could better understand the social complexity I was experiencing. Thus, the problematic of timeous presence at the field sites actually brought about an unanticipated form of researcher multi-positionality, affording me, a deeper richer data set than originally envisaged during earlier research design stages.

⁵⁸ I would, however, retain the number of cases studied were I to undertake the fieldwork again because this approach brought a depth and breadth of comparative difference that a lower number would not have illustrated.

Developing research relationships

Self-definition in autobiography: tests in the field

Before entering the field, I memorised the informal text on my poster to enable the presentation of an introductory repertoire during introductory encounters, commencing with “Hi, I’m Deb, the student doing a project here...” and, after quickly imparting that I have an allotment garden too, questions were fired at me so that I could be located, evaluated, and categorised. Over days and weeks, encounters became less about introductions and (at times) more about me receiving instructions such as “Here’s something for your notebook” or “you should put that in your report”.⁵⁹ Thus, I was being accepted as a researcher; the poster informed gardeners that a researcher was present but I was startled at just how quickly fieldwork began and the depth to which participation developed so quickly.⁶⁰ Accordingly, I needed to adapt quickly and responsively: moving from being a new arrival to developing research relationships, which are essential for identification, making and building connections, and for rapport (Tyler, 2012: 31). Without any sense of this connect it might not have been possible for the gardeners encountered to share details of their lives with me, a researcher (*ibid.*).

A crucial component of this stage was being subjected to tests by gardeners in full view of other gardeners. Tests are a process of “self-definition” in autobiography rather than a *rite de passage* involving liminality (Okely, 1986: 35). At Spinham, where the majority of gardeners are men with working class characteristics, a test was made on my first day (regarding my strength of character) in which I had to quickly think on my feet.⁶¹ I am in the site shop immediately after putting up my posters. Danny (a working class man age late-forties) is behind the counter in the shop. Also labouring in the shop is Suzanne (a working class woman age late-thirties), along with eight customers present. All customers are tightly packed into a small confined serving area. And me. It is a cold and wet day and everyone

⁵⁹ Notebook and daily field note recording are discussed later.

⁶⁰ Whilst negotiating access, I did not request a key to each field site because (sometimes) access to non-members of the collective can be contentious and trust would likely need to be developed first. Thus, my presence in the first week was at pre-arranged times. After several days, I suggested to committee members and public officials that I might be given key entry, citing practicalities, safety, and/or my need to leave to toilet; it was revealed in response that these needs were being discussed before I had asked. I then quickly received keys for all field sites and was informed I could be present at times of my choosing. All keys were returned when I left the field.

⁶¹ All of the people in this vignette have working class characteristics and, with the exception of Danny and Suzanne, are bricoleurs.

has crowded away from the wide open door to take shelter. I am hanging about at the entrance, not wishing to get in anyone's way. A man enters the shop and starts telling everyone he has been up all night shooting ducks. Many months later I learn he is called Vincent (a working class man age late-fifties) but, at present, he is busy telling everyone that he isn't going to his garden today because he has been up all night, when suddenly he notices me and stops mid-sentence. "WHO'S THIS THEN?" he says loudly and everyone else shuts up. Silence. "I'm Deb, I'm a student. Going to be doing a project here." He walks over to me and looks critically into my face, his own face sweating only inches away from mine as he peers at me blatantly. "MY, *you're* a bonny lass!" he exclaims loudly. Silence. Everyone waiting for my response. As a woman raised in the cultures of this locale, I feel there is only one means of reply in order to survive, so just as loud I exclaim "AYE [yes] and *you're* a bonny lad!". Everyone bursts out laughing. In the north east of England, "bonny" means a feminised delicate prettiness and is often used to describe babies or someone with an innocent-looking baby-like face. "Bonny lad" is, thus, also a joking insult of sorts when directed towards men, unless said to a man by an elderly woman; women certainly do not tell men older than themselves they are "bonny" unless in jest, or as a put-down. Everyone is still laughing, and Vincent joins in laughing heartily, but I note that he immediately heads back to where he was standing previously before he starts asking me more about the study. He's actually quite affable now and wishes me all the best. But he's certainly done something: everyone in the shop now knows that the student can hold her own with men like Vincent.

Meanwhile, Anne (a working class woman, age late seventies) avoided me for several months, because she did not trust me; informing a gardener in her friendship group that she was not going to be "telling tales" to some student. After months of my working with some members of her friendship group, however, Anne did introduce herself, explaining "I've heard all about you..." and thereafter became a "regular". Much later, she told me she had been cautious of talking with a student because, several years previously, there had been a personal disagreement (unrelated to allotment gardening) between two members of her friendship group at the allotment. As a result, trusted friendships had been forced into renegotiation, some gardeners had moved gardens, and a very good friendship lost forever to Anne. She had, therefore, been cautious of participating in case I construed her data as "gossip". Although, what we discussed was confidential, Anne may have been interpreted

by her allotment neighbours as “gossiping” with me about that situation, however, she was prepared to take this risk and had clearly reflected upon it deeply before beginning a research relationship with me. I believe researchers ought to give time to the gardeners around them in the field, like Anne, to process their own position as a (potential) research participant and to draw their own conclusions whether the outcome benefits either party or not.⁶²

Ebb, flow, and pace

The population at the field sites fluctuates, with some gardeners present only during particular seasons; this affected the pace at which research relationships could be developed and maintained. Upon my arrival in September, most gardeners were present to do final harvesting and, hence, I was able to introduce myself and begin developing research relationships. Then, during winter, bricoleurs and leekmen were often the only gardeners present but (in early spring) a huge influx of “returners” – who were not present in winter – reappeared as the seasons changed; they remained at the allotment until the end of September.⁶³ But, field sites became somewhat bereft of gardeners during August when many gardeners took holidays and/or did child-care for family and friends; before everyone reappeared in September to do final harvesting prior to the end of the growing season. Additionally, throughout the fieldwork year, gardeners left the population completely and new arrivals appeared and took their place.⁶⁴ Accordingly, developing research relationships was undertaken within the constant ebb, flow, and pace, of gardeners; some of whom were present all year, some of whom were absent for days, weeks, or months at a time, or simply never returned.⁶⁵

Within this context of a fluctuating population of gardeners, I press home the point that gardeners always present as “being busy”. Hence, allotment gardening is something that – whilst part of gardeners’ everyday lives – is a practice done *in addition to* participation in

⁶² With the benefit of hindsight, I would not use the words “allotment stories” as part of the publicity were I undertake this fieldwork again. Clearly, Anne’s example highlights that “story” can be interpreted as “gossip”. Instead, “allotment chat” might impart elements of the mundane in everyday life and may be less likely interpreted as “gossip”.

⁶³ Bricoleurs refer to allotment gardeners returning in spring as “fair weather gardeners” as a means of creating distinction and worth to their own group; I examine valuation in Chapter 5.

⁶⁴ I discuss “coming and going” at the allotment in Chapter 4.

⁶⁵ For instance, I never again met the couple dressed in high-viz clothing who were rushing off to work, mentioned at the start of this chapter.

other social spheres, such as domestic or employment. “Making time” to be present is discussed in Chapter 5, but for now I emphasise that everyone present is always “busy” and making time to be at the allotment, when considered in the context of ethnographer seeking research relationships. To suddenly have a student turn up and request time was a big ask, too big an ask for some gardeners who (even though they gave me approval and would stop for a few minutes chat) said they were simply too busy to get involved any further.⁶⁶

Thus, following arrival in September, I began developing research relationships with gardeners at different points in time and at various paces. Fluctuation of gardeners’ presence affected the size of the research population, the sample of gardeners I was able to work with, and the data I was able to collect, in three ways. Firstly, as I was present for a year, I spent more time with gardeners who were present all year too and these are mainly bricoleurs. Accordingly, I collected more data about bricoleurs than any other gardeners. Secondly, some gardeners were present for only part of the year, hence, I cannot claim to have worked with all participants for a full calendar year. Finally, I cannot claim to have met every single person who gardens at the field sites, such is the fluctuating manner in which gardeners are present.

Research participants

Research sample

During the fieldwork year I encountered most of the hundreds of gardeners at the field sites and all of which is data and is privileged as such. However, I did work intensively (on a detailed, one-to-one basis) with a smaller number of allotment gardeners whom I refer to in this section as the “research participants”; although that does not mean that gardeners not included in this group did not participate in some form or another, or that their contribution is less valuable. As mentioned, I purposely sought a range of perspectives because in studies based on cases it is essential to ensure the inclusion of particularly “right” participants in order that the thesis meets the needs of answering the research questions (Brannen, 2012: 16). Thus, in the field, I worked intensively with a research sample of 64 allotment

⁶⁶ And, of course, some allotment gardeners were simply not interested in the project at all, but were cordial to me and did not (to my knowledge) attempt to prevent my being there.

gardeners ($n = 64$), age 31 to 82 years during fieldwork,⁶⁷ and equally dispersed across the field sites. Of these 64 gardeners, 28 took part in interviews; discussed later in this chapter. These 64 allotment gardeners represent a cross-section of the research population of allotment gardeners I encountered at the four field sites.

There is a form of social distinction at the field sites relating to allotment gardening skill; who has skill, who does not, who is labouring to enskill. In the research sample, there is a broad spectrum of allotment gardening skill ranging from skilled master to novice although the majority of participants are skilled. The majority of allotment gardeners in the research sample had practiced at least one form of gardening (either home gardening or allotment gardening) prior to obtaining an allotment garden as an adult, including two allotment gardeners who hold educational qualifications in horticulture; as such, a minority had not done any form of gardening prior to obtaining an allotment garden. Although sociological literature provides guidance on how to assess certain social characteristics of research participants (for instance, social class), to my knowledge there is no such guidance for researchers seeking to assess and categorise research participants via their level of skill in a practice the researcher is enskilled in. Instead, I relied upon my own gardening knowledge gained via my own practice, and field visits to a wide variety of allotment garden sites throughout Britain in my previous role, to assess if an allotment gardener has allotment gardening skill.

Most allotment gardeners in the research sample live in the immediate vicinity of where they practice allotment gardening and within 15-20 minutes walking distance, however, a minority travel (up to 20 miles) to do so; for instance because they have chosen to have an allotment garden closer to their workplace than domestic home. All gardeners in the research sample reside in domestic households, with and without home gardens; some are tenants renting from private and social landlords, some are owner-occupiers. Homes are high-rise flats, terraced flats or houses, semi-detached and detached houses and bungalows, and large villas with substantial home gardens.

⁶⁷ Difficulty was encountered locating allotment gardeners under age 30 who were able to participate on a detailed and one-to-one basis. Gardeners in this age group did not tend to remain at the allotment for long because they had difficulty enskilling (and I specifically discuss this instance in Chapter 4). Those gardeners under age 30 who did remain cited pressures of work and sporadic presence as reasons for non-participation, but did actually make time to inform me of this situation; this in itself is a datum.

The social class and gender characteristics of each case (which I anticipated in pre-fieldwork research design) were found to be as such in the field. Accordingly, a research sample was sought in the field to reflect the social class and gender characteristics of each case. Hence, the research sample has more allotment gardeners with working class characteristics than middle class, and more older men than women, in a research population where the majority are older men with working class characteristics. By social class I mean a categorisation of people and by which they are socially positioned (Savage, 2000; Savage *et al*, 2000, *both in* Taylor, 2008: 128). As such, it remains important to consider social class as, even though it is not something “announced” as a means of identification, it remains deeply embedded in a person’s “sense of self value” (Savage, 2000; Savage *et al*, 2000, *both in* Taylor, 2008: 128).

Thus, I purposely sought out the self-reported social class of gardeners in the research sample; this information was gleaned via a variety of means with an emphasis placed on waiting to see if the topic was raised rather than initiated by me. Confronting people about their social class can threaten their dignity, their sense of self, and self respect (Sennett and Cobb, 1972 *in* Savage *et al*, 2001: 878). Accordingly, sociologists need to be not only alert to this, but also to look carefully behind what is stated when asking people about social class (Savage *et al*, 2001: 878) and hearing interactions about social class. As such, no matter who (that is, me or the gardener) had initiated a discussion about class, I would carefully examine what had been stated, seen, and heard (*ibid.*). This assessment of social class is an analysis by a sociologist and not a moral judgment of the people she is studying (Skeggs, 1997: 30) and, thus, does not necessarily declare endorsement or condemnation (Sayer, 2005: 951); this latter point, I suggest, can also be said of a sociologist assessing skill.

However, social class was actually raised as a topic by gardeners during my one-to-one interactions with them, and often in the form of claims that people with middle class characteristics are attracted to allotment gardening now because they believe it is “trendy” or “cool”. Or, during wider group interactions in which I was present (or could overhear) gardeners would express a facet of their identity by claiming a “working class” identity. This was particularly the case during interactions amongst bricoleurs about bricolage and how the practice is enskilled. And, various social distinctions are formed by allotment gardeners which (although not the focus of this thesis) prove useful because gardeners then indicated to me what they believed to be the social class of a gardener. Thus, these means provided

an opportunity for social class to be further opened up as a topic of conversation, rather than me initiating the topic. In some cases, however, this opening up did not occur and I would attempt to raise the topic of social class, via mentioning one or more of the social distinctions I had heard. Should this fail, I asked the gardener about their own social class identity. Accordingly, claims in this thesis about individual gardeners' social class position is the consequence of my sociological interpretation of a variety of intersecting facets of social identity via which social class can be analysed, for instance self-identification, norms of comportment, accent, clothing, residence and tenure, income, and so on, thus attending to highly complex social realities in Britain .

The majority of allotment gardeners in the population are white (Tyler, 2012) and the research sample reflects this, as such a minority of the gardeners in the research sample are from a wider variety of social (racial) backgrounds (*ibid.*). The majority of allotment gardeners in the population present as living heteronormative lives and the majority of the research sample reflects this. Although I did not seek to ask about sexuality – because I was not seeking to analyse social identity – a minority of women in the research sample self-identified as lesbian to me, however, no other sexuality was disclosed to me.

The research sample is comprised of allotment gardeners who are, and are not, active in the economic sphere. Those currently engaged in the economic sphere include bricklayers, self-employed plumbers, administrators, engineers, medical professionals, skilled and unskilled manual workers, public officials, academics, and small to medium sized business owners. Those not currently engaged in the economic sphere include people practicing care-giving and child-rearing, people on long-term sick leave, and retired people; some of these participants have previously been engaged in the economic sphere, for instance as nannies, senior managerial engineers, skilled and unskilled manual workers, people who had always worn uniforms (armed and public services), politicians, pitmen, and painter-decorators.⁶⁸ Accordingly, and as planned, the research sample of 64 allotment gardeners (dispersed across four cases) represents a range of perspectives within the research population in the four cases.

⁶⁸ Pitman: a coal miner.

Interviews in the field

As I have noted, ethnographic data is far more than what is seen and heard (Hastrup and Hervik, 1994: 5, *in* Hockey, 2002: 211), however, interviews can permit a deeper understanding of what is being sensed by the ethnographer during everyday interactions in the field (Schensul *et al*, 1999: 56). As such, I chose to undertake interviews as a component of ethnographic fieldwork. When seeking gardeners to interview, I sought a range of the perspectives I encountered at the field sites; indeed some allotment gardeners actually offered to be interviewed. During the fieldwork year, 28 of the 64 allotment gardeners in the research sample (and evenly dispersed across field sites), participated in face-to-face, semi-structured, interviews with me (*see e.g.* Lamont and Swidler, 2014; Pini, 2005; Hockey, 2002). Of these 28 allotment gardeners, 13 were re-interviewed via follow-up interviews, resulting in a total of 41 face-to-face, semi-structured, interviews.

Careful attention was paid to interview design (prior to and during fieldwork), selecting gardeners to interview in the field, and actually doing interviews (Edwards and Holland, 2013). A series of second (follow-up) interviews was undertaken to ensure consistency and enable further probing and clarification of key points with gardeners; a minimum gap of at least four weeks was inserted between an initial and follow-up interview, but usually considerably more. I ensured the two digital recorders I used to tape voices (Speer and Hutchby, 2003) could be relied upon outdoors, and that the professional transcription service I appointed was able to interpret relevant dialects, cope with background noise, and guarantee confidentiality. To enable confidentiality, I ensured recording equipment and consent paperwork was hidden from view in my bag on my way to/from interviews on allotment sites.

In addition to preparing and using an interview schedule,⁶⁹ I chose to include props in interviews. Packets of plant seeds were selected as a prop; to provide an icebreaker and contribute to augmenting ease in an interview setting (Irwin and Johnson, 2005: 824). This stance was particularly important considering my aforementioned researcher positionality and the distance from the academy of the majority of gardeners. Chatting whilst perusing seed packets, has always appeared to me to be an instigator of very relaxed gardening chat

⁶⁹ See Appendix F.

in allotment gardening practice, and this was what I aimed to reproduce in interviews. This form of prop aided elicitation of deep meanings and rich data, with several gardeners mentioning post interview that the prop had enabled their relaxation during interview.

A variety of packets of seeds was acquired specifically for this purpose, encompassing a range of seed typologies chosen because I believe that to allotment gardeners this combination might be familiar or unknown, untried or popular, classed, gendered, racialized, and historicised.⁷⁰ I was able to introduce the seed packets at a different point in each interview, depending upon circumstances, because part of the value of semi-structured interviews is that the interviewer may incorporate questions relating to the particular discussion in hand during an interview (Rubin and Rubin, 2005: 4). Everyone interviewed was simply asked “I’ve brought some seeds along, I wonder if we could look at them together and chat about them? There are no right or wrong answers, I’m only using the seeds to stimulate chat...”. Each gardener interviewed appeared relieved to be doing something familiar, and examined the packets whilst chatting with me in ways that tangentially led to subjects that otherwise might not have easily been elicited in an interview. The inclusion of a sweet pea variety (“Old Fashioned Mix”), for instance, evoked deep and enduring memory of gardening practice enskillment (Nadel-Klein, 2010a: 166; Francis, 1995). Many gardeners recalled gardeners who had grown sweet peas, the scent of the flower lingering in memory.⁷¹ Thus, applying seed packets as a prop in interviews is extremely useful for drilling-down to social processes such as enskillment, and is a research method I would most certainly reproduce were I to repeat the fieldwork.

So that gardeners were not separated from the routines and practices of their everyday contexts, the majority of interviews took place on the gardener’s own allotment garden; in sheds, greenhouses, and anywhere on the garden we happened to end up on the day (*see e.g.* Tilley, 2009: 188; Kusenbach, 2003 *in* Carpiano, 2009: 267). Most interviews were done “sitting down”, however, Paul (a middle class man, age mid-fifties) did two interviews as a “go along” (Ginn, 2014a: 233; Carpiano, 2009) whilst gardening: ten minutes harvesting kale,

⁷⁰ List available on request. Plant material is used to make social distinctions, *see* Pitcher (2014), Degnen (2009), Taylor (2008). However, I chose to include seed packets not because I wanted to analyse social distinctions but because I simply wanted to get allotment gardeners to chat, to open up to me, to tell me about their social world.

⁷¹ Ginn (2014a: 233) also notices this flower evokes this memory.

half an hour in the greenhouse whilst checking and watering tomatoes, and the remainder of time the two of us leaning against his gate whilst Paul enjoyed a cigarette. A minority of interviews were in the gardener's domestic home, or a private meeting room on university campus. Interview settings on gardens were affected by external factors, such as weather, noise, animals, and other people. Morris' interview, for instance, was repeatedly interrupted by members of his friendship group calling in to socialise and, in particular, by an exciting announcement that "the fish man" would arrive shortly on his monthly visit to sell his freshly landed catch.

Leaving the field

Leaving the field is a distinct process in ethnographic fieldwork that is about respect, trust, and relations, and involves the transition of both ethnographer and the people she has worked with into a new phase where she is not present (Wulff, 2008: 84). Responses to my leaving repertoire came in several forms, for instance joking from Stan that it was about time I left! And, sadness from Jimmy, because he would miss "our little chats", and a firm request from several gardeners to keep in touch and to return to their allotment sites.

Like Degnen (2012; 2009), I was gifted plant material during fieldwork with gardener participants, in the form of seeds, cuttings, and plants. In my case, there were self-saved verbascum seeds from Marty, and a clump of "Aunty Freda's Irises" from Margaret (a working class woman age late-seventies)⁷² that have been gifted through her family for over 50 years and which are discussed in Chapter 4. Meanwhile, several gardeners at Spinham insisted I depart on my final day with a giant-leek to cook for my family and friends.⁷³ These examples of plants I was gifted during fieldwork have their own biography and deep meaning for the gardeners who gifted them to me and now have deep meaning for me.

I reciprocated throughout the fieldwork year (*see e.g.* Mollona, 2009: 14) by a number of means, for instance as mentioned I demonstrated to Shona various ways to sow carrots, provided Marty with photocopies from a book on pruning apple trees, and all gardeners

⁷² I located a small group of less than ten women allotment gardeners (all working class women over the age of seventy) who have been allotment gardening at Brindle Lane for almost 30 years, forming long and enduring social relations with one another. And, although in smaller numbers, I also located women at other field sites who had been present for a significant amount of time. All are skilled allotment gardeners; their presence clearly counters ideas of women as recent arrivals to the allotment.

⁷³ Implications of gifting giant-leeks is discussed in Chapter 6.

doing interviews were offered any packets of seeds they wanted from the seed selection prop they had browsed. However, I also chose to use plant material as a form of reciprocation via the gifting of a specific plant I had carefully selected for this purpose, because it is edible, hardy, very easy to grow, and propagates for further gifting.⁷⁴ Thus, I now have several plants growing in my own allotment garden that were gifted to me, serving as a reminder of the gardeners I worked with, their biographies, and often those of their family (Degnen, 2012); at the field sites, the plants I gifted can now be seen thriving.

Whilst leaving the field, however, I was critically aware that many of the gardeners I worked with were becoming troubled by ill-health in later life; I had become particularly attached to the oldest of all gardeners, learning greatly from them about allotment gardening practice and how to live and be. I found farewells after a year difficult to cope with and felt fractured in terms of having gotten to know someone and learn from them, but then having to say goodbye without knowing if they would still be alive by the time I returned or submitted my thesis. Indeed, at the time of writing, one man has died and I remember him by the plant material he gifted me. This has forced me to further reflect on representation of research participants, my respect for these people, and how to act with a sense of duty when representing their lives in my work (Degnen, 2012: 140).⁷⁵

Field notes and daily analysis

I am a walking archive (Okely, 2008: 58) of my experiences in the field but I did record daily field notes after each field site visit, prompted by handwritten notes made *in situ*. I was struck, however, during initial weeks in the field that no comments were made about my notetaking. I wondered if this action was being politely ignored, or if this silence meant the practice was intimidating. This concerned me, as I had anticipated gardeners might joke about (or even challenge) the appearance of an ethnographer's notebook and her practice. Some reassurances came, however, when gardeners started adding during our chats "...and you can put that in your notebook!" or "I saw you scribbling the other day". Accordingly, my notebook was made light of for a very brief period only and then politely ignored, and no challenges were made about what I wrote or why. When I was leaving the field, however,

⁷⁴ I chose a very specific and much sought after plant only recently available to non-commercial growers in Britain, which I do not name here as part of my commitment to the anonymity of field sites.

⁷⁵ After leaving the field, I wrote a note of thanks to each committee at the field sites and (re)provided contact details should I need to be contacted again.

Vincent (who had called me a “bonny lass” on my first day), stated that everyone would miss seeing me and “writing in your little notebook”. Thus, the notebook might have been accepted, but it also continued to be a visible marker of my identity as a researcher.

Recording accurate field notes *in situ* at field sites, however, was often fraught with difficulty because of the practice of “anonymous introductions” in which introductions do not include the interlocutor’s name, as a method of boundary-making (Candea, 2010). After such, I had become acquainted with a gardener but was bereft of their name, having revealed my own. Such instances led to uncertainty and (at times) utter confusion for me when chatting with other gardeners and writing my field notes. Later (sometimes after a considerable amount of time), I might find out in passing from another gardener the names of those I had met previously. My field notes, thus, contained references to “striped-jumper-woman, garden 3” or “Tesco-bag-man-with-chickens” as I sought ways in which to identify and remind myself of gardeners I had met, but who had not yet revealed their name to me. I backtracked through my field notes, adding actual names when revealed.

My memory, body, and senses, are repositories for the “vastness, unpredictability, and creative turbulence” that was my ethnographic fieldwork experience at the field sites (Okely, 1994: 21). Although I had *a priori* theories, such as social cooperation, I followed Okely’s (2008: 56) lead and recorded *everything* as a verbatim narrative stream in my daily field notes, which had two advantages. Firstly, this enabled me to record all of my sensory experiences in the field: what I saw, listened to, smelled, tasted, and felt (physically and emotionally), was recorded. Secondly, the verbatim narrative stream was a practical heuristic device that permitted me intellectual freedom and space to evoke analytical processes and to arouse new musings about emergent themes. As such, my daily field notes became an outpouring of experiences *and* a record of methodological developments, emergent themes, and analysis. Rather than analysis commencing only after fieldwork ended, my data analysis began when I entered field, becoming a constant serendipitous analytical framework giving rise to a multitude of possibilities. Thus, writing in a narrative stream allowed me to commit to paper not only what I had experienced, but also to begin toying with analytical frames in a speculative manner.

Writing daily field notes, however, was challenging because of some ill-health I was experiencing. At the suggestion of my supervisors, I began recording my field notes into a voice recorder (*see e.g.* Allen-Collinson and Hockey, 2007: 386) and arranged for a transcription company to undertake verbatim transcription. I felt uncomfortable initially, however, feeling that ethnographic field notes are a deeply personal and intimate practice that I did not wish to share beyond the supervisory team. However, I developed a trusting relationship with a transcription company and conclude that recording (rather than writing) one's field notes is an extremely liberating method of putting ones thoughts into text. Additionally, dictating notes on my way home from field sites (because voice recorders look not unlike mobile phones when held to the ear), whilst discreetly parked in busy car-parks a few miles from the field site(s) I had just left, resulted in field notes being recorded within 30 minutes of a field visit ending and before very fresh memories might fade.

Analysis of the full data set

An ethnographer ought to have an awareness of her own reflexivity and autobiography when analysing data gathered during fieldwork (Okely, 2008: 67), so as to avoid “cultural assumptions” (Ryan and Bernard, 2003: 93). In addition, social scientists should disclose their means of analysis to ensure that this process becomes an enskilled, robust, practice (Attride-Sterling, 2001: 386). After completion of fieldwork and over a period of three months, I chose to identify themes in the data (Ryan and Bernard, 2003) because this method of data analysis informs both what the data is about *and* what it means (Saldana, 2013: 175). A theme is a concept we are seeking to understand, interpret, and describe, it is also abstract and often fuzzy (Ryan and Bernard, *ibid.*: 87). When one can answer the question “What is this an example of?” then a theme has been elicited from data (*ibid.*).

Thematic analysis began initially with a rereading of all field notes and a re-listening to interview recordings, so as to re-familiarise myself with events and encounters that had occurred sometimes a year earlier. Interview recordings were compared with transcriptions, which involved making corrections and listening and re-listening several times to ensure the text contained phonetic, lexical, and grammatical, representation as well as serving as an aide memoire as to speaker's attitudes, postures, and mood (Fabian, 2010: 21). Re-listening to all interviews, hence, formed an important part of analysis of the full data set. Actually handling the data in the analysis was important too, however, because this enables

additional data to be evoked from memory and into the analysis (Graue and Walsh, 1998: 145, in Saldana, *ibid.*). I chose to *manually* handle data, via printed copies of interviews and field notes, as I find that reading from paper (rather than a computer screen) promotes my analytical thinking; post-it notes and highlighter pens became my constant companion along with a large table in a private room onto which to sort, pile, and think about, the contents of data. Hence, it was not only after the first rereading and re-listening that manual analysis of the complete data set began; analysis began the moment I printed off and began reading and listening to field notes and interviews. Alongside, I purposely made lists, charts, and mind maps, to keep track of this process and to move myself on from simply reading into analysis and then to early conceptualisations of themes. During this analytical process and in view of the aims of the thesis, I paid particular attention to social processes being constant, endless and fluctuating rather than singular categories (Powell and Dépelteau, 2013: 2), and I took care to seek absences in the data (Ryan and Bernard, 2003) because, for instance, economic markets are less prominent in this distinct social world.

In this chapter, I have reflexively explained the process, pitfalls, and successes, of ethnographic fieldwork on field sites in the north east of England. Along the way, I have noted areas of the fieldwork I would repeat or reject should I conduct this particular fieldwork again. As such, taking these decisions into account, I recommend ethnographic fieldwork for the study of allotment gardening practice, but with the caveat that a fully autobiographical undertaking is performed from outset; without autobiography, ethnography fails to address natural science approaches to studying social life or cultural assumptions (Okely and Callaway, 1992: 2). Having described the research methodology, this thesis now turns to the discussion of data collected. Like the fieldwork process, it is actually the selective and specific interests of the ethnographer that influence the production of the final text (*ibid.*: xi). As such, the following chapters signify the outcome of my series of choices about representing the social world of allotment gardens (*ibid.*).

Chapter 4. Adding the grit: Skill at the allotment

Bang bang bang

Arrive at the allotment on any morning, Monday to Saturday, and you can expect to hear the thud of hammer hitting wood. Not just once, but repeatedly. Not just on one garden, but on many. Not just on one field site but on all four of them. *Bang bang bang*. This is accompanied by the sounds of physical exertion, grunts and moans as heavy paving slabs are lifted, moved, and heaved into position. The motor engine ticking over, the doors and hatches of vehicles slamming shut, as wood, bags of compost and animal feed, bricks, pallets, and oddments, arrive and are heaved to gardens. Accompanying the background sounds of the allotment as a place of labour (DeSilvey, 2003: 444) are commands, instructions, an occasional argument (as well as hollered invitations for a cuppa), all of which are shouted within, between, and across gardens. The culmination of these sounds does not necessarily evoke ideas of peace and tranquillity to me, but I also meet gardeners who claim the allotment to be just that: a peaceful and tranquil place, of an immensely intimate subjectivity (Bhatti *et al*, 2009). Accordingly, the allotment is somewhere to busy oneself with the labour(s) described above *and* somewhere to relax, to escape from other social worlds; to potter and daydream and (occasionally) to drift off to sleep in a deck-chair. In seeking to understand this very stark contradiction – and to understand why certain days of the week accounted for different levels of sounds – I come to recognise the allotment as simultaneously both a very public place and a very private place.

Thinking about the garden as simultaneously both public *and* private is not new to the social sciences (*see e.g.* Bhatti *et al*, 2014; Longhurst, 2006; Bhatti and Church, 2000) and echoes ideas that spaces can be paradoxical and multivalent (Rose, 1993, *in* Longhurst, 2006: 581). I do not claim an alternative view when analysing social life at the field sites (*see also*, Moore *et al*, 2014; Degnen, 2009), but add that the allotment is an unusual instance of a gardening setting that is both public *and* private; especially so when compared with home gardens. The “private” is a complex area of social theory, contested across liberal, citizenship, historical, and kinship, conceptions of what it means to be private, have privacy, and demand a right to it (Baghai, 2012; McCarthy and Edwards, 2001: 767). Cultural norms in Britain can include a strong sense of privacy that is finely balanced with sociality and

neighbourliness and, hence, is fraught with norms and rules about what is the private domain, who has autonomy over it, who may enter and when (Miller, 2015: 341; Cockayne, 2012; Crow *et al*, 2002). Although Longhurst (2006: 581) describes the public-private of the garden as “dualist”, actually, social life is seldom as neat and tidy as binary oppositions might suggest. Hence, caution is required when analysing social worlds that are public *and* private. Indeed, social life at the field sites fluctuates at all times, between both public and private in a messy, non-binary, fashion. Like finely balanced scales ready to tip, the public-private setting of the allotment is ever-present yet both public and private can also be apart or cloyingly intermingled.

Of more concern here, however, is what it means to seek to claim the “private” within a conceptual “public” (see *e.g.* Crow *et al*, 2002), which I refer to henceforth as the “public-private setting of the allotment”.⁷⁶ Studying public-private settings in Britain cuts across intersecting senses of what it means to be private, sociable, and neighbourly, in contemporary social life (Miller, 2015; Cockayne, 2012; Crow *et al*, 2002). Ideas of “social redundancy” and individualized lifestyles that break down sociality and social cooperation have become commonplace in sociological analyses, however, this is not necessarily always the case in everyday life in which use of space is shared (Crow *et al*, 2002: 131). In other words, we all have neighbours (Abrams and Bulmer, 1986); flowing around us in the domestic world, placed next to us in the workplace, and pushed against us on public transport. Accordingly, allotment gardeners are (and have) “allotment neighbours”. The forms of social interaction (Adams and Sydie, 2001; Simmel, 1908) in allotment gardening practice are shaped within this public-private setting, with consequences for social life there. When not actually interacting, for instance, gardeners can see what others are doing, overhear conversations, gaze at and monitor the gardening practices occurring around them. Thus, privacy at the allotment is a highly particular privacy, not about being completely alone in a private domain, or un-monitored. Instead, privacy here is a distinct form of subjectivity in which being private is done in a very public setting.

⁷⁶ There is discourse regarding textual representation of “public” and “private” when analysing their simultaneous presence in social life and particularly in gardening (*e.g.* Moore *et al*, 2014). However, as this is not the central topic of this thesis, I resist entering the debate and instead use “public-private setting of the allotment” as a simple and unsophisticated textual descriptor.

This chapter explains the social process of skill (Gieser, 2014; O'Connor, 2007) in allotment gardening practice; how skill is made and what skill does at the allotment, but also what the consequences are if enskillment in allotment gardening practice has not yet occurred or is inhibited in some way (Gieser, 2014; Platten, 2013). Allotment gardening practice, as a site of skilled practice, is framed here as a public-private setting throughout which the majority group of bricoleurs is ever-present at each of the field sites. It is within these ideas of allotment gardening as a multi-layered setting in which one group (the bricoleur group) can always be located and situated in everyday notions of what public and private might mean, that skill is explained. As noted in Chapter 1, allotment gardeners are present at the field sites to produce the sensuous taste of allotment-grown-food which, as discussed in Chapter 2, is a distinct form of skilled gardening practice. As such, this chapter examines how skill in allotment gardening practice is formed and operates at the public-private allotment.

Three specific aspects of social complexity in skill are illustrated in this chapter; skill as currency, inequality in skill, and enskillment inhibited. However, in order for the reader to understand the ways in which one group of gardeners forms the majority group at the allotment everyday, an introduction to the allotment gardeners that I call the “bricoleur group” is provided as a point of departure. Then, by examining the ways in which social relations with bricoleurs are avoided by some gardeners, but embraced by others, the forms of social interaction (Simmel, 1908) and normative ordering at the public-private allotment are sketched. This highlights not only how members of the bricoleur group navigate the allotment, but how they themselves are navigated by allotment gardeners who do not share the bricoleur group’s social characteristics. And it is in this latter respect that the role of skill as a social process at the allotment begins to reveal its face as a form of currency: intertwining through social relations and interactions and central to the ways in which the bricoleur group is perceived by the rest of the collective at the allotment.

Secondly, by paying regard to memories of gardening enskillment (Nadel-Klein, 2010a: 166, Francis, 1995) and distinctly different forms of gardening in Britain (Franklin, 2002), the consequences of arriving at the allotment with different forms of gardening skill is illustrated. Via the avenue of detailed differences in personal and social memory (Smart, 2011; Degnen, 2005; Misztal, 2003), the reader’s attention is drawn to a consistent and comparable incidence of gender difference in allotment gardeners’ memories of gardening

enskillment, and the consequences of this inequality for men and women who are now allotment gardeners but who grew up in and around the standardised home garden in Britain (Franklin, 2002). Here, a counter example in the data is noted; this exception is discussed within the context of womens' active participation(s) in the home garden in the 20th Century not being neat and tidy packets of data from which firm rules can be extracted (Bhatti, 2014). Finally, by reference to a single case study of a novice allotment gardener without any social connections at the allotment, the idea that gardening enskillment can be inhibited (Gieser, 2014; Platten, 2013) is examined. Here, evidence is provided that allotment gardening practice is an outermost instance of socially situated learning (Wenger, 1998; Lave and Wenger, 1991) without a formal master-apprentice relationship. And as such, it is documented that there are risks for novices wishing to enskill in allotment gardening practice; noting that younger novices in particular can be simply left to their own devices to attempt to enskill.

As a sociologist, I am concerned with the way in which the public-private setting of the allotment creates and influences cultural rules and norms in what is a distinct and skilled practice, undertaken contiguously by allotment gardeners in close proximity to one another; these are legitimate areas of analysis for sociologists. However, when considering questions such as these, it is vital to meet and understand the majority group of gardeners present at the field sites in this thesis. Gardens and gardening can be an important part of narrating the self (Bhatti, 2014; Raisborough and Bhatti, 2007) and act as a symbolic identity marker (Taylor, 2008: 76). The men I describe as bricoleurs – for heuristic purposes only – are a group of gardeners who present a highly distinct allotment gardening identity and are the majority group of gardeners present at the field sites. The *bang bang bang* of labour emanates from these people and it is their interactions, skills, memories, and practices, that are most commonplace.

Selecting the right screw for the job: allotment gardening with bricoleurs

Bricoleurs and bricolage

Bricoleurs share some distinct social characteristics in that these people are men with working class characteristics, skilled in manual and/or heavy industry labour practices, who are not engaged in the economic sphere and whose working lives span post-industrial social transformations. Direct social cooperation is ubiquitous within this group; bricoleurs

cooperate in the form of joint enterprises (Becker, 2008 [1982]), making time to be present at the allotment to do things together that they consider valuable (Becker, 1986) across all seasons, no matter the weather. This enables efficacy in their (shared) skill, forges and legitimates the group's identity, thus, building solidarity in (and affiliations to) the group. However, it is what bricoleurs do at the allotment in addition to gardening practices with plants that demarcates this group. Via practices enskilled during skilled manual employment labour and/or in heavy industry, bricoleurs use found objects to make (what they consider to be) valuable objects for their allotment gardens, such as sheds, greenhouses, heating systems, paths, and fences (Ingold, 2013; Harper, 1987). This is a material process of *bricolage* (Leach and Wilson, 2014: 12; Mark, 1994; Harper, 1987), undertaken externally to the cash nexus (Dant, 2000), and within a weak social network (Granovetter, 1973).⁷⁷

Specific to time and place, cultures' permit their men "hegemonic masculinity scripts" with which to attach the social clocks of a man's life course (Spector-Mersel, 2006: 67). However, in Western masculinity scripts, this social clock often stops at middle-age and, accordingly, older men can find it difficult to narrate "acceptable" identities (*ibid.*). Notably, some men who have been forced from employment may have fewer resources with which to construct masculine identities, because engagement with the economic sphere is legitimated (Willott & Griffin, 2004). Accordingly, bricoleurs narrate their time and actions at the allotment as "labour" in order to weave a continuing element of value (via work) into the self.

Pete, for instance, was forced into retirement from a "unformed service" in which discipline, neatness, and tidiness, are (literally) the order of the day.⁷⁸ Susan, married to Pete, decided he should retire to the allotment; thinking ahead, she planned for two years that he would get an allotment and secretly added his name to an allotment garden waiting list. Pete recalls that (later) Susan informed their friends "... *he'll need to be occupied, he needs a project' ...*". Now, with their (adult) children having left home, Susan is the only person in employment in their household; when she goes to work Pete goes to the allotment.

⁷⁷ The concept of "the strength of weak ties" (Granovetter, 1973): weak ties denote a strong network and strong ties denote a weak network. Bricoleurs social ties are (mainly) with men with working class characteristics and, whilst those bonds are extremely strong emotionally, they are weak regarding association with people who have different social characteristics. However, their ability to step outside the cash nexus and practice bricolage, legitimates bricoleurs at the allotment.

⁷⁸ In "unformed service" (for instance, military service such as army, or public uniformed service such as ambulance), people in "front line" duties are forced to retire around 5-10 years prior to statutory retirement age.

However, in retirement, Pete identifies himself via a classic trope and expressive discursive frame of men with working class characteristics, in (former) industrialized areas: “I am a retired [uniformed services] man... ..I left school on the Friday and started work on the Monday... ..I've worked for forty years.” That he says “I’ve worked...” suggests Pete continues to narrate labour into his post-retirement self. Without labour, Pete and his fellow bricoleurs might not have a valuable identity to perform; the allotment provides a site for their meaningful labour.

Bricoleurs present their allotment gardens as cultivated (weed-free) and into which neatness, tidiness, and order, is *very* firmly embedded; this is the normative-allotment-garden-aesthetic described in Chapter 2. Paths are meticulously laid in a perfectly straight line, leading past rod-straight rows of vegetables growing in weed-free and finely sieved soil,⁷⁹ towards sheds and greenhouses bricolaged from found objects. I asked Dennis (a bricoleur, age late-seventies) “What is all this being neat and tidy all about?”. Dennis pointed out individual allotment gardens to me, reeling off skilled occupations as his extended finger wove its way around Clooter Street. “That one: senior draughtsman. Those two: engineers. Me: engineer...” as he repeated by rote the former occupations of neighbouring bricoleurs, before adding “...there is nothing like the satisfaction of work, it’s all about the precision... ..anyone who has worked in engineering will tell you that.” Accordingly, labour practices from a lifetime of skilled employment come to the allotment with bricoleurs.

Pete’s clockwork-like presence at the allotment emphasises this point, for instance he has set a pattern which conforms to the standard British working day of (generally) 9 – 5 with around 45 minutes for lunch. Thus, although bricoleurs will potter and take rest at the allotment, even this is framed within the confines of “work”. Wearing an industrial “uniform” of sorts to the allotment hints at these former industrial lives, such as a boiler suit as an outer layer to keep clothes clean; tracksuit bottoms or “workwear” trousers for easy bending and stretching; heavy boots and thick clothing to keep warm and protect the body from hammers, nails, and the weight of paving slabs. Accordingly, if I happen to catch Pete

⁷⁹ Sieving soil to a fine tilth is a long and repetitive task; this practice is of debate in gardening discourse as to whether it improves or degrades soil and cultivation conditions. Sieving is performed, throughout the bricoleur group at all field sites, as tiring and time-consuming *labour*.

having a cuppa, he will be “dressed for work” and he will inform me that he is on a timed “break” from his “jobs”. Thus, for a bricoleur, retirement at the allotment is collective labour amongst other men just like him, usually away from the woman he is married to, and with the vocabulary of a form of labour that is as neat and tidy and orderly as his allotment garden.

However, the normative-allotment-garden-aesthetic presented by bricoleurs is framed not only by the ordered method by which they work with plants (and sometimes animals), but also via their labours with found objects; this is what most clearly demarcates bricoleurs *and* their allotment gardens from other gardeners at the allotment. Bricoleurs find and transform (what they consider to be) value in found objects. Thus, oddments of wood, bricks and rubble; scraps of roofing felt and tiles; various metal components (pipes, joints, flues), football goal posts, old buckets, and transparent plastic freezer drawers, are all highly acceptable.⁸⁰ What bricoleurs do with these objects is a form of *bricolage*, with no direct equivalent in English language the term bricolage comes from the French to mean the assemblage of something useful or valuable from found or acquired objects (Leach and Wilson, 2014: 12). In his classic text on bricolage as “working knowledge”, Harper (1987) defines this skilled practice further as the unprecedented repairing or construction with what is on hand. This emphasises that what bricoleurs *do* is not from written instruction or by rote, but is “emergent” and made with the hands (Ingold, 2013 Harper, 1987).⁸¹

But, bricolage is not simply time spent making objects to transform; bricolage can be a practice motivated by an opportunity to reinscribe the past, through objects and by their offering (Mark, 1994: 63). Thus, at the allotment, bricoleurs negotiate the transformation of their lives following (enforced) post-industrial social transformations, and do so to cope and deal with those changes (Dawson, 2002: 116). This is a seeking, reclamation, and continuity, of working class skilled practice status via the reproduction of bricoleurs’ (now) redundant skilled practice. Such a process is alluded to by bricoleurs’ skilled practice and their lack of

⁸⁰ Football posts combined with netting are used for pea plants to cling to and climb; transparent objects are used as cloches to prevent frost damage to plants.

⁸¹ Bricolage is not directly translatable into English and the word “bodge” in English is not comparable. Bodge is similar to assemblage, however, is more often associated with unskilled labour and practices. The bricolage presented at the field sites is highly skilled practice and presents evidence of a lifetime of skilled practice, usually via apprenticeship. For instance, whilst none of the bricoleur group have worked in the manufacture of greenhouses or sheds, these men transform (via bricolage) found objects into sheds and greenhouses (and incumbent piped heating systems) with skill.

need for money in doing so. Thus, as Dawson (*ibid.*) suggests, the allotment is a locality in which bricolage enables change to be examined and processed by men who have experienced post-industrial social transformations in these localities.

An alternative way of thinking about bricoleurs is to consider who they are *not* at the allotment, via a (brief) contrast with retired men with middle class characteristics who are thinner on the ground and differ from bricoleurs in two specific ways. Firstly, for retired men with middle class characteristics, the allotment is “leisure” not “labour” and, secondly, serves as only a small component of their multifaceted retirement identity. For instance, Lance (a middle class man age late-sixties) strolls into the allotment slowly and with a leisurely demeanour, only a few times per week at unpredictable times for short duration and hardly ever in winter. Lance does not dress for practical labour, preferring “smart-casual”: chino trousers, a polo shirt, and (always) a pair of designer sunglasses somewhere about his person. He only grows plants that do not require daily attendance, spends a little time watering or weeding, chats with the young woman who gardens near him, and departs to do non-allotment activities. Lance socialises with his wife in retirement with little gender division; local day trips in their car, meeting up with a wide circle of friends in restaurants at lunchtime and evening. Thus, Lance is different to bricoleurs in presentation, comportment, and regularity, in allotment gardening practice. He is as busy as bricoleurs but with less gendered division of labour and time, and more financially secure means that also involve a strong social network. Consequently the allotment is not the centre of Lance’s social world, he likes to spend time there but his being in the world is about leisurely practice. Bricoleurs, by contrast, are not just the largest group at the allotment, they are also unavoidable and I soon learned that hearing, meeting, and interacting, with bricoleurs is an important starting point for anyone new to allotment gardening at the field sites.

Allotment neighbours: normative ordering

Developing a sociological understanding of bricoleurs’ unfolding and dynamic social relations within their group and with the wider collective of allotment gardeners, can be acquired via analysis of the forms of social interaction at the allotment (Simmel, 1908). This approach enables sociological understanding of the consequences of bricoleurs being the majority group, providing early glimpses of the way in which skill is a key social process in allotment gardening practice. The forms of social interaction (*ibid.*) can be found in all interactions

amongst people, but in a variety of contexts (content), with the constant uniformity of exchange (reciprocity) present in all forms, for instance cooperation, conflict, adaptation (Adams and Sydie, 2001: 200).⁸² Via a vignette, this section explores the forms of social interaction at the allotment in two ways. Firstly, the forms of social interaction occurring *amongst* bricoleurs and which are at the very core of their everyday life at the field sites. Secondly, the consequences of members of the collective overhearing bricoleurs' social interactions, within the public-private setting of the allotment.

Space does matter at the allotment, the way people use space and arrange objects and buildings (and other people) within and around space creates and reproduces social relations, hierarchies, and inequalities (Tickamyer, 2000: 806). Social interactions amongst allotment gardeners are enacted at all locations within the public-private setting of the allotment: in the garden, across boundaries between gardens, at shared water taps, entrance gates, communal paths, and in the allotment shop if there is one. Accordingly, everyone present within this public-private setting can see, (over)hear, and draw conclusions about social interactions. Within senses of privacy, sociality, and neighbourliness, operating in Britain an overheard conversation can create dissonance and affect relating to what is (and is not) appropriate to "know" about ones neighbours' private lives, and this can lead to uncertainties and misunderstandings (*see e.g.* Miller, 2015; Cockayne, 2012; Crow *et al*, 2002).

Frequently, interactions and conversations amongst allotment gardeners occur in the public-private setting of a shed or greenhouse. Although these may appear to be similar to a private domain, they are not necessarily so in the public-private setting of the allotment. Thin walls and spatial positioning do not shield conversations from ears of people on neighbouring gardens or passing by; hearing can surpass vision and come to personify our understanding of a given situation (Ingold, 2000: 246). As such, a newcomer to the allotment will find it nigh on impossible not to encounter or overhear bricoleurs; newcomers might also overhear interactions that they might not understand, or which may cause uncertainty to them. Thus, bricoleurs are a group that everyone at the allotment becomes acquainted with in one way or another. Hence, what can one assume when overhearing

⁸² In the social complexity of allotment gardening practice, social interaction is not merely human-only interaction (Cerulo, 2009: 533), however, I specifically focus on human interaction here.

bricoleurs go about their everyday lives at the allotment? I turn to a chilly August morning at Spinham to illustrate these matters. The location is inside Bruce and Ronnie's shed, located immediately behind a 7ft high fence (gated and locked) which serves as a boundary between this garden and the rest.⁸³ If Bruce and/or Ronnie are present, however, their gate is always unlocked and propped open and visitors are welcome; inside the shed this morning are Bruce, Adam (a working class man, age early-forties), and me. We are having a cuppa and chatting about cultivating oca⁸⁴ when Chuck (a bricoleur estimated to be age early-sixties) walks in on us.

Chuck likes to remind people that he was the boss at work. At any given opportunity, no matter what the topic of conversation, Chuck will skilfully drop in the line "...what with me used to being a gaffer like..."⁸⁵ in order to ensure everyone present is reminded of his pre-retirement status as a manager and his reputation of being a tough one. Other bricoleurs find him tedious and tiresome, most were not bosses and say they had enough of that at work without Chuck doing it here. Today's excuse for bringing up his former occupation reputation is that Chuck wants something from Bruce. Chuck strides into Bruce and Ronnie's allotment garden unannounced as if he owns it, his eyes scanning around as though he is checking for men shirking from a task, ready to snarl and sanction anyone who is not pulling their weight. What he finds instead is Bruce, Adam, and me, sitting in the shed drinking tea and chatting about how to grow oca. Chuck looks disgusted. We are not even *working*. It is only 9.15am and there we are sitting around *drinking tea*. "Aye Chuck, what can we do you for?" asks Bruce.⁸⁶ Chuck responds in a booming and authoritative voice, he wants some two and a half inch screws because he is fixing some seats for Bob (a bricoleur age early-eighties) further down the lane.⁸⁷ "Of course ah divent [I don't] usually gan [go] near seats..." he pauses, drawing in his breath before booming "...*in fact* what with me being a

⁸³ Ronnie is not present today; all of the men in this vignette are known to both Bruce and Ronnie and the latter's absence does not affect this interaction. Bruce has recently recommenced allotment gardening, after a break of several years, and has come to share a garden with Ronnie (discussed in Chapter 6).

⁸⁴ Oca, not to be confused with Okra, is a plant with edible tubers only recently available to non-commercial growers in Britain.

⁸⁵ "gaffer" – a manager, a boss, a person with oversight over other people.

⁸⁶ A joking play on words: "What can I do for you?" means a welcome and an offer of favour, here distorted into "do you" as in being tricked into doing something. It is a jovial way of greeting an arrival.

⁸⁷ All measurements in the bricoleur group are made and communicated in British Imperial Standard. Bricoleurs commenced working life and became enskilled in employment practices before sanctions were introduced by the State for anyone using the British Imperial Standard, in the late 1970s. Accordingly, these men refuse to use Metric Standard unless *absolutely* necessary.

gaffer an all that, am used to having seats bricked up rather than making them- cos you divent want men off the job do you, like?".⁸⁸ There is a pause. Bruce sort of mumbles something as if he is sick of hearing this repertoire again and again. Adam looks sideways out of the shed and onto the allotment, rolling his eyes.

Remaining seated, Bruce slowly turns in his seat and opens a cupboard door next to him. The cupboard is an old kitchen unit fitted to the shed wall, stuffed full with boxes of this and bags of that. He rustles around in there and produces a small white cardboard box and opens the lid. Bruce peers into the box and then immediately starts prodding a finger into it, stirring the contents around and around. Finally, Bruce lifts out a screw and hands it to Chuck. Chuck points out that this is a three and a half inch screw. He reminds Bruce that he asked for a two and a half inch screw. Bruce looks at Chuck impassively. Bruce says nothing. Chuck wonders out loud if he could "drill a hole in the screw and then saw off the end off it", if Bruce knows what he means? Bruce nods, as does Adam who has become a bystander. Silence. Chuck places the screw back in the box and Bruce puts the box back in the cupboard and fetches out another. "No" says Chuck "these screws are too short." Silence. And then Bruce says "Well a cannit [I cannot] help you there, a cannit make them any longer." Adam does a little snorting noise through his nose and tries to stop himself laughing. Chuck says he'll take the first box. Bruce hands it to him "take what you want and then just bring it back". Chuck says he'll do just that. Chuck leaves the garden. Bruce and Adam roll their eyes at each other and laugh, then immediately return to talking about oca as if Chuck had never been there.

When considering Chuck's interaction with Bruce and Adam in the shed, it is helpful to note that there is an expectation in Britain that neighbours should be both friendly and cooperative, but simultaneously should retain a social distance that relates to British senses of privacy and sociality (Miller, 2015: 341; Crow *et al*, 2002: 135). Where it can be difficult to achieve privacy within close quarters of neighbours, "distancing mechanisms" are used; a method by which neighbours traverse private lives (Crow *et al*, 2002: 135). Distancing mechanisms involve setting boundaries around both social interactions and the use of physical spaces, in order to maintain a degree of privacy with neighbours (*ibid.*). Above all, a

⁸⁸ In many of the dialects in the north east of England, the addition of "like?" at the end of a sentence seeks affirmation of the statement immediately prior; similar to "...yes?".

neighbour in Britain must avoid *at all costs* being perceived as over-inquisitive or imposing (Miller, 2015: 342).

Yet, Chuck's interaction with Bruce transgresses such norms and rules; he has neither knocked at Bruce's gate nor waited to be invited into his garden, let alone his shed. He has interrupted the conversation taking place, but has not made any attempt at an introductory repertoire nor enquired about his interlocutors wellbeing. He has assumed a right to Bruce's property, albeit a few screws of which Bruce has many, yet an assumption is clear. And all has been undertaken in a tone and volume that forces an impression of seniority and superiority. I stress that I regularly (over)heard this sort of exchange amongst bricoleurs; it is their own norm, their own rules, and how they interact with one another *at the allotment*.⁸⁹ Accordingly, bricoleurs have created their own normative order at the allotment.

However, allotment gardeners who do not share bricoleurs' social characteristics do not transgress norms relating to privacy, sociality, and neighbourliness, operating in Britain. Instead, they bring elements of the everyday normative order of the domestic social world to the allotment. This is evidenced by the use of distancing mechanisms (usually applied at home) at the allotment, such as a polite cough to draw the attention of a gardener engaged in activity on their garden; a garden or shed is not entered without a verbal invitation to do so and, even then, an apology is offered for "interrupting" the privacy of another person's garden; eyes are averted during the removal of an outer layer of clothing and only returned when the observer is *absolutely certain* everything is "in order". Thus, gardeners who are not members of the bricoleur group bring a variety of norms and rules from the domestic sphere to the allotment. Indeed, they expect that this will be the norm across allotment gardening practice, however, this is not the case because bricoleurs perform their own normative order. There are consequences to two distinct sets of norms and rules present in this social world; newcomers to the allotment not only need to grasp an understanding of the unusual public-private setting of the allotment, but also recognise that two divergent sets of norms and rules are present. Subsequently, misunderstanding, uncertainty, and dissonance, are present at the allotment.

⁸⁹ Bricoleurs do conform to expected norms in the domestic sphere. Although I did not spend time in those social situations with these people, bricoleurs did not give me (via detailed descriptions, examples, and explanations) any indication that they breached any rules or norms relating to how men with working class characteristics interact in the domestic sphere in Britain.

Within this context of a public-private allotment, with two divergent sets of norms and rules, overhearing Chuck's interaction with Bruce (and the form it takes) can lead to mistaking the form of social interaction as conflict, via reference to Chuck's brusqueness and the way in which he barges in. By "conflict", I mean "divergent experiences of social situations" (Wagner-Pacifici and Hall: 2012: 182). However, the form is actually social cooperation in which the action of one person benefits a collective or group; in this social situation, the bricoleur group (Sennett, 2012). Thus, at the allotment, forms of social interaction and social cooperation also "mirror" (and are also obscured by) both the public-private setting and the reproduction and transgression of certain set of norms and rules that are group dependent, that act as significant cultural divides to distinct forms of social cooperation, social interactions, and ways of feeling. This all serves to produce the locality within which skilled practice takes place.

That little lot: bricoleurs' skill as currency

Some gardeners tend to keep interactions with bricoleurs to a minimum, rolling their eyes or shrugging their shoulders when I raise the subject of the bricoleur group. I eventually learn that what could possibly be dismissed as disconnect between people who do not share similar social characteristics – social class, age, gender – is actually far more complex and actually relates to the public-private setting of the allotment, and who is considered to have skill. Before I discuss these latter points, however, a note on commonplace social divisions, because these are important in relation to my conclusion about the form of interaction between bricoleurs and non-members of their group.

Laura (a middle class woman age early-forties) clearly has different social characteristics to bricoleurs, however, she explains to me that she believes it is gender division that prevents her from saying nothing more than a brief "Hi" to bricoleurs at the allotment. She steps back and leaves more detailed social interactions with bricoleurs to her husband, Charles (a middle class man age early-forties). I am taken aback by Laura's stance, as I have found her to be a strong presence at the allotment; a woman with a fiercely independent attitude to social life, who does not hide in her husband's shadow. Keen to learn why she leaves social relations with bricoleurs to Charles, I ask Laura about this during an interview. After paying great attention to thinking about why, she struggles to justify. After humming and ha'ing for a few minutes, she finally looks downwards and sighs "It's just a bloke thing, I think."

Meanwhile, social distance from bricoleurs is still felt by Christine (a middle class woman age mid-sixties), who has been allotment gardening for more than ten years and who (by now) actually knows bricoleurs quite well. However, the “affective lexicon of class” (Reay, 2005: 913) generates complex and problematic psycho-social dynamics, within which class is both felt and practiced (*ibid.*: 914), leading to a cultural chasm between Christine and bricoleurs. Her feeling of class distance is expressed, via her emotion work, as she continuously struggles with ongoing interactions with bricoleurs. Christine speaks to me of feelings of frustration that push against her own levels of tolerance toward other people and her desire to maintain her usual “reserve” when interacting with bricoleurs, and which is situated within her own quiet and introverted middle class femininity. Christine assures me she has tried hard to relate to bricoleurs but, both then and now, she believes that they are just *different* to her because “Well they wouldn't talk about their emotions much, put it that way- just very matter-of-fact, you know?”. She finds bricoleurs to be “a puzzle” and has developed a certain tolerance of them, but I note that out of earshot to bricoleurs she refers to them scathingly as “that little lot” when interacting with people who share her own social characteristics; a valuation highlighting the vast social differences between her and bricoleurs. Ten years on and bricoleurs are still a problematic for Christine, thus, I wondered why she tolerated them if she felt so uncomfortable about them? Why did she bother to converse with bricoleurs at all? However, these cultural divides are not solely about commonplace social divisions, such as the gender and social class examples outlined above. The situation in allotment gardening practice is actually more complex, with commonplace social divisions serving only to obscure a more nuanced set of social relations that act as cultural divides.

However, not everyone has a problem with bricoleurs or perceives a cultural divide. Regular friendly interactions take place amongst bricoleurs and the rest of the collective, not all of whom necessarily share bricoleurs' gender, age group, or social class. Accordingly, there are frequent comings and goings between gardens; bricoleurs may have very strong social ties within their group, but they also have weak ties with other social networks present at the allotment, all of which contribute to a web of social relations (Granovetter, 1973). And so, because of the interconnectivity of social processes that I mentioned in Chapter 2, prior social connections and membership of external social networks course through allotment gardening practice. Quite simply, some gardeners know bricoleurs anyway and so seek them

out, or they already know people just like bricoleurs and so can relate to them. For instance, Belle (a working class woman age mid-seventies) has bricoleurs in her friendship group at the allotment and makes cuppas on a gas stove in her shed for bricoleurs near to her garden. Belle always interacts with bricoleurs whenever she is present, even though she was not acquainted with any prior to her arrival. However, as she tells me, she has lived all her life surrounded by men like bricoleurs and, therefore, she can (unlike Laura and Christine) relate and connect to them, as well as tolerate them. Hence, in as much the same way that Bruce and Adam tolerate Chuck (within the strong ties of the bricoleur group), Belle can relate to and connect with bricoleurs. This is not only about tolerating a particular persona (such as Chuck), but is also about how Chuck and the wider group of bricoleurs fit into the shared cultural knowledge and expectations of the norms of comportment and interaction of men with working class characteristics that contextualises their kind of behaviour in these localities. This in itself is both classed and part of the cultural schemas that people bring with them to allotment gardening practice.

Furthermore, bricoleurs are held in high esteem by some gardeners to the point of protection. Margaret (a working class woman age late 70s), for instance, claims she could not have navigated the allotment without bricoleurs when she arrived twenty five years ago. Social navigation is a vernacular social process, via which people map out and actualise their position within a social milieu with the overall aim of increasing their potential (Vigh, 2006: 11). We all navigate and do so in ever-changing and overlapping social worlds in order to get to where we want to be (Vigh, 2009: 430). Key to the idea of navigation is that it is a struggle of sorts in order to gain control in getting to where we want to be (*ibid.*); thus, a new arrival must navigate and learn to do so quickly upon arrival at the allotment. Margaret cites bricoleurs tips and advice as vital to the progression of her allotment gardening enskillment upon arrival. Indeed, Margaret's greenhouse was made by a bricoleur and she tells me the group is "priceless". She seeks to protect bricoleurs (and, thus strengthen her ties with them) if, as they get older, they cannot garden and bricolage with as much vigour as previously. For instance, she raises her voice when she tells me in her greenhouse "I mean if you [the committee] think you're going to throw old so-and-so off just because his garden isn't immaculate- well, I mean, he's been here *for fifty years* for God's sake." Meanwhile, Amelia (a middle class woman age mid-thirties), enjoys the company of bricoleurs and regularly seeks them out for a chat, explaining "I admire those *skills* erm I

admire the old boy- the people... ...for the dedication they put into it- it's something that erm is just beyond me..”.

Hence, not all gardeners perceive the cultural divide that Laura and Christine do. And so, why should some middle class gardeners feel a cultural divide and not others? And why should bricoleurs be admired, respected, sought out for socialising, and protected, by only some gardeners in what is a very clear outcome of a social process of valuation? The basis of this problematic actually relates to the public-private setting of the allotment and varied interpretation of “quietness” sought there by gardeners of different ages, classes, and genders. Particularly, via two means of in-group interaction, bricoleurs create unease. Firstly, the sounds of bricolage: hammering, shouting, and constant moving of materials. Secondly, brusque, loud, tones during in-group interactions. Both are considered to be “interruptions”; although expectations of what privacy ought to be are classed, aged, and gendered, and gardeners reflected such in the way they expressed to me what privacy means to them. The interruption of privacy is *the* reason proffered about why bricoleurs are a problem to some allotment gardeners.

Paul, for instance, finds that bricoleurs and their practices often get in the way of the peace and tranquillity he seeks when allotment gardening. He generally has a cordial relationship with bricoleurs who garden near him, but he finds them to be “a bit too much at times.” Apart from going to the pub a couple of times per week, what Paul likes to do most of all is come to the allotment on Saturday mornings. As he works weekdays in a managerial desk job, he denotes his allotment gardening practice as time away from the structures, hierarchies, noises, and commands, of paid labour. Paul finds the brusque and work-like content of bricoleurs’ social interactions challenging, when seeking this solace, citing one bricoleur at Leontonby in particular:

- Paul Erm- he's been in [a position of authority] for most of his life so he's quite, er- what would you say? Er- authoritative guy? You know, he's er- there's er? [pauses]
- Deb In what way is he authoritative?
- Paul Well- just he *tells* you. He doesn't- he doesn't- he wouldn't say '*No I wouldn't do that, I'll show you how I would do it*' he would tell you that what you were doing was bloody stupid and this is what you should be doing. If you know what I mean?

Consequently, Paul departs the allotment and returns home when he cannot tolerate social life with bricoleurs'. And, as he travels several miles from his home to his allotment garden, departing (sometimes shortly after arrival) forces a cleave between Paul and his allotment gardening practice. Hence, I wondered why he did not ask bricoleurs to "keep the noise down"? Meanwhile, Russell (a working class man, age mid-forties), also located close to bricoleurs, echoes Paul's sentiments about seeking (his interpretation of) quietness. Russell chooses to attend the allotment only at very specific times, knowing just when he will encounter the level of quietness he seeks. Russell tells me "Well, I think erm you- by experience you know what the quiet times and erm what the busy times are and I- I do adapt to that...". Thus, whilst social complexity is intersected by commonplace social divisions, pre-existing social ties, and locally specific norms of comportment, it is actually the public-private element of allotment gardening practice that resonates most prominently with gardeners' expectations and perceptions of their world at the allotment, and their willingness and ability to steer through and around it.

Yet, why do bricoleurs interact (and continue to do so) by means that cause problems for some gardeners? When I ask Bruce about this, he explains that I have to understand that he and Chuck and other bricoleurs have known each other for many years and have always communicated in this way. Indeed, Bruce tells me bricoleurs are not arguing at all, it is just their way:

“...you see, we're all at the age where we used to gan [go] to school together or something you know? Because we're all around about- about the same age mark you know? Around about... ...from fifty to seventy. We're all- we're all either at the same school or- you know? And you get to know- nearly everybody around here's known each other, most of them, you know? [chuckles]... ...I think that's what most of them have gardens for, it's for the catch up, never mind the work [chuckles] not bothered about the gardens it's just the crack! [chuckles]”⁹⁰

Hence, bricoleurs are so very familiar to one another and what they do together is actually a reproduction of what they have always done together throughout the lifecourse; via prior social connections and membership of social networks external to the allotment, dating as far back as childhood, schooldays, and in some cases shared work places. They have laboured and socialised at work and taken leisure in the social club, pub, and on the sports field, whilst experiencing post-industrial social transformations. Now, in later-life, the ties of their enduring male friendships (Waitt and Warren, 2008; Walker, 1995) at the allotment reproduce elements of the social interactions that have partly constituted their working lives.

There are several consequences of this iteration, one of which is how bricoleurs' reputation(s) from their former employment came to be reproduced; such as Chuck replicating his brusque, loud, managerial, manner wherever he goes at the allotment. Through this form of interaction and the way in which it is framed around bricolage, these retired men with working class characteristics, from skilled manual and/or heavy industry employment occupations, accurately reproduce the routines, connections and networks, hierarchies, and skilled practices, present in their lives in the economic sphere prior to retirement. This serves to replicate the self before retirement and supplies a reminder to each other, and everyone else, of their social status before they were rendered economically inactive. Hence, from Bruce's perspective, this is just how bricoleurs are (and have always been) in the world; they simply do not consider themselves to be “noisy”.

Thus, bricoleurs seek to reproduce the status and reputations of their former, economically valuable, lives prior to retirement. But, via intersection with the public-private setting of the

⁹⁰ “The crack” means to chat. Not to be confused with the word “craic” which means the same but is an Irish spelling of the word. In the north east of England, the Irish spelling is considered to be a word that has been adopted in Britain by people in London and, as such, is mocked as a misunderstanding of the unique (and intensely local) dialects of the north east of England; a north east regional event listings magazine proudly boasts the title of “The Crack”.

allotment, this creates social difference between bricoleurs and gardeners who do not share their social characteristics. And, the consequences of the brusqueness, the in-jokes from years of working and socialising together, the very close social connections, and the relentless *bang bang bang* of the hammer, results in the creation of the parallel narrative told by Paul, Christine, and Laura, outlined above. Noting this exasperation, bricoleurs' social distancing, and a desire for a certain privacy and quietness, why continue to interact, to *bother*, with bricoleurs at all? Why not ask bricoleurs to be quieter and less brusque? And why does conflict not arise as the form of social interaction instead? In answering these questions, the skilled practices of bricoleurs serve as a form of *currency* at the allotment.

The form of social interaction amongst bricoleurs and allotment gardeners who do not share their gender, age, class, or notions of privacy, actually takes the form of *adaptation* rather than conflict; the method by which gardeners adapt is *compromise*. Although compromise can be a means of terminating conflict (Wagner-Pacifici and Hall, 2012: 187), in this situation adapting via compromise is a means of avoiding escalation of conflict. For instance, Paul will stop what he is doing and leave the allotment, if what he considers "noise" becomes intolerable to him; Laura changes her presentation of self (Goffman, 1959), from forthright to quiet, around bricoleurs; Christine carefully selects the times she is present, as does Russell. Via these perspectives, bricoleurs could be regarded as a group that causes conflict at the allotment, however, this is not the case at all. Instead, bricoleurs' skills are actually a form of currency that is in high demand at the field sites; justified as valuable enough to compromise for.

Quite simply, bricoleurs are considered exceptionally good at what they do, with plants, animals, and objects. They are skilled in various layers of allotment gardening practice and ever-present. As Amelia pointed out earlier, they have *skill*. These skills are a form of valuable currency for new arrivals yet to enskill in allotment gardening practices, such as when Laura, Russell, and Christine, arrived at the allotment. Or, for gardeners with little time to spend at the allotment, such as Paul, the regularity of bricoleurs' presence is valuable currency. Hence, bricoleurs are on the one hand a (subjectively) "noisy" problematic, but on the other a source of skill and time; currency that is in desperate need at the allotment. Laura and Charles, for instance, need manure but lack contacts; Charles asks bricoleurs, a phone number changes hands, a pile of horse manure arrives quickly. Paul

seeks to further enskill in growing vegetables and needs his tomatoes watered when he is at work; he receives a steady stream of advice, guidance, and instructions (along with self-saved broad bean seeds), plus a bricoleur to water his greenhouse plants on weekdays. Christine wants to grow more fruit, but is unsure of varieties; bricoleurs provide advice pertinent to the soil and aspect of her garden. Thus, a form of exchange (of knowledge, goods, and services) is a reason for compromising rather than conflicting in social interactions with bricoleurs. As such, commonplace social divisions are regularly bridged and social relations finessed rather than serving as rationales for conflict.

Inequalities in gardening skill

Aunty Freda's irises

It is mid-August at Brindle Lane, early on a chilly and cloudy Saturday morning. Margaret and I are trying to warm up in her greenhouse, which a bricoleur made for her several years ago. The temperature is slightly warmer in here than outside, the thick plastic traps the sun's rays and we are grateful for relief from the sharp cool temperature outside where faint hints of autumn are on the breeze. We are surrounded by mature tomato plants in large pots, neatly organised in a line around the inside edge of the semi-transparent plastic walls. Tomatoes hang on the plants, ripening from darkest green into vibrant shades of colour, in this greenhouse and many others at the field sites.

Margaret is busy telling me the story of her Aunty Freda's irises. When Freda's husband, Albert, was a military prisoner of war in the 1940s he wrote to her at their home in Gourseby saying that if he were able to return to her he would plant irises in their home garden; and he did just that. Subsequently the irises, along with Freda and Albert's extended family, grew on in more peaceable times. Margaret, then a girl, particularly loved visiting their home garden and hearing the story of this ornamental plant. She would spend time in this home garden with Freda, watching and helping her aunty gardening with flowers. Many years after Uncle Albert's homecoming (a now adult) Margaret transferred a piece of this iris to her own home garden in Gourseby, because she "wanted to remember learning to garden with Aunty Freda."⁹¹ Then, when Margaret first set foot at Brindle Lane thirty years ago, she brought a piece of Aunty Freda's irises with her to plant in the soil on her allotment garden.

⁹¹ The social life of plant material, see Ellen and Komáromi (2013); Ellen and Platten (2011).

There the plant remains in a prominent position and forming a row that is highly visible to passers-by.

The story of Aunty Freda's irises illustrates that Margaret already had some gardening skill before she got her allotment garden; for instance, she knew how to recognise, transplant, and cultivate, irises when she arrived. Allotment gardeners at the field sites are able to identify newcomers as knowledgeable and skilled in gardening practice; this process of valuation legitimates newcomers' entry into the new social networks they encounter at the allotment and is an important point of entry into processes of social cooperation. Yet, how is it established that newcomers have gardening knowledge and skill, especially without having previously seen a newcomer practicing gardening? A good way to think about this is to ask what a "good" or "proper" gardener is; adjectives commonly used at the field sites to describe allotment gardeners legitimated for having knowledge and skill. However, like most allotment gardeners I ask about this, Marty struggles and eventually, I use my presentation in the field ("Deb the gardener") as a provocative means of encouraging Marty to further mull the question:

Deb	Am I a proper gardener?
Marty	I've never seen your garden but you- I think you are.
Deb	..Why do you think I am?
Marty	We've had little chats- stuff you've been growing and what-not. I- I think you're a gardener, yeah.
Deb	So, it's not just about the growing then?
Marty	No! It's nowt [nothing] to do with that.

Hence, knowledge of gardening vocabulary is used to initially assess a newcomer's knowledge and skill; "the ability to talk a good garden is at least as important as actually growing one" (Dawson, 2002: 107). Thus, allotment gardeners are able to interact with newcomers and converse about types of plants, techniques, and tips, to establish the presence of knowledge and skill; one process of the legitimation of a "proper" gardener.

As explained in Chapter 2, skill is an embodied practice and knowledge embedded in social relations and needs to be learned (Gieser, 2014: 134; O'Connor, 2007: 126; Ingold, 2000). Like Margaret, all of the allotment gardeners represented in this chapter section are over the age of 30 years. Hence, these allotment gardeners have lived through the period prior to

(and during) the destandardisation of British home gardens, that I described in Chapter 2. Thus, these allotment gardeners have grown up in and around home gardens in which *both* edible and ornamental plants were grown.⁹² Accordingly, these gardeners' enskillment is situated in distinct times and places within gardening in Britain; growing-up in, or at least spending their early childhoods in, a period when home gardens had not yet begun to destandardise.⁹³ Taking this into account one could anticipate that, upon arrival, these allotment gardeners might at least have some enskillment in the cultivation of both edible and ornamental plants. But this is not actually the case and a clear gender difference is present.

"We had a lot in common really, when I look back about it now", Margaret reflects when she recalls chatting with the allotment gardeners she met when she first arrived, however, as much as such stories provide a narrative account of social navigation by skilled gardeners, there is something that does not quite align with gardening enskillment accounts from women and gardening enskillment accounts from men. Of course, generally, all of the men and women allotment gardeners at the field sites can be located via a variety of gardening histories and cultivation experiences, thus, it is very difficult to cast them into tight and immovable analytical categories. Nor would I wish to do so, such is the individual way in which each brings their identity to their own allotment gardening practice; each is a unique allotment gardener, corresponding with the plants around them in their own way and at their own seasonal pace. But, between men and women, there are consistently some gendered comparable differences in gardening enskillment. This gender difference is identifiable analytically via their recounting of childhood memories of gardening.

It is now generally agreed in the social sciences that gender roles were understood to be reinforced in the home garden across the 20th Century and that this narrative then seeped into analyses, consequently, the home garden became depicted as the domain of men, especially in working class locales (Bhatti and Church, 2000: 190). Accordingly, the home garden was also portrayed as a setting of masculine sources of pleasure and relaxation,

⁹² People in this age group of allotment gardeners confirmed to me they had grown up in and around "standardised" home gardens, where both ornamental and edible plants were grown.

⁹³ As per Chapter 3, the youngest person in the research sample is 31 years of age. Therefore, I do not claim that this instance can be applied to people under age 30 because I did not engage on a sustained basis with anyone below age 30.

whilst women were considered inactive and secluded therein (*ibid.*). It is now more generally accepted that this is not the full story of gender in the garden; Bhatti and Church (*ibid.*: 191) critically point out that the very idea of women as inactive passive inhabitants of the home garden has been a gross analytical failure. Instead, it is suggested now that women have (and still do) perform actively in the home garden (Bhatti, 2014; Taylor, 2008; Raisborough and Bhatti, 2007; Bhatti and Church, 2000). I agree that ideas of absolute gender binary in the garden are too neat, too tidy, to permit sociological understanding of social processes in gardening in Britain. This conceptual repositioning permits a metaphorical slate to be wiped clean; gender in the garden can now be analysed afresh, allowing for less-static analyses of gender in both past and present gardens.

Gendered memories of gardening enskillment

Gardens are good to think with but also to remember with (Nadel-Klein, 2010a: 166, Francis, 1995); memory is an active processual everyday storytelling about experiences rather than commemoration (Degnen, 2005; Misztal, 2003). Hence, memory is less about what actually happened in pasts and more about what we consider valuable enough to choose to remember, or jettison, both as individuals via personal memory and as groups via collective memory (Conway, 2010: 443). As such, memory is also a process of contestation in which recounting is undertaken as an active fluid practice and at multiple levels in the social worlds we participate in (Degnen, 2005: 734). The temporal, moving back and forth, of memory enables the transformation of (what we consider to be) our significant memories, thus, creating bonds between our adulthood memory with childhood memory to produce our understandings of the world (Smart, 2011: 543). Accordingly, the garden(s) of the present are scattered with memories and absences, of both past lives and past gardeners (Ginn, 2014a: 231).

Like the gardeners in studies by Nadel-Klein (2010a) and Degnen (2009), the allotment gardeners in this thesis mesh personal and social memory of gardens and gardening, both in their recounting of stories and their actions in the garden. Specifically, they remember gardening enskillment as children, via the deeply intimate, affective, and very personal memory of being in the garden when they were girls and boys (Nadel-Klein, 2010a; Francis, 1995). These boys and girls, remembered now by an adult self at the allotment, engaged in active, visceral, material, processes of gardening enskillment in their childhoods. Their

hands had been in soil, working directly with plants whilst clothing had gotten wet and muddy. Sean (a working class man age mid-forties), for instance, remembers being immersed in “riddling [sieving soil]... ..getting the stones out- spent a lot of time doing that...” with his father “...who got us [me] first interested in gardening, like.” Whilst Beverley recalls “...going to the sand dunes and getting a bucket of sand...” with her grandmother to grow gladioli and how “...you had to dig a hole and put a little bit of sand in the bottom so the corm didn’t rot...”. Thus, these accounts of gardening enskillment mirror the expectations of contemporary social science scholars writing about gardening as described above; no gender division in the garden, both boys and girls active participants in the gardens of their childhoods. However, running through these accounts are clear indications that, in the times and places of these particular gardening enskillment processes, some distinctions between boys and girls in the garden are present. What is more, these enskillment processes affected the way in which men and women with gardening skill were able to navigate the present-day allotment upon arrival. Thus, between men and women at the allotment (who had already learned to garden prior to arrival) there are consistent comparable gender differences in processes of gardening enskillment.

Allotment gardening practice features often and prominently in the memories of men at the field sites, and as a clearly demarcated male domain within their family. Indeed, men often berate me for needing to ask in the first place about the site of their memories of gardening enskillment, for instance, Jimmy tells me dryly and slowly that “My dad *o-b-v-i-o-u-s-l-y* had an allotment.” He continues, “I was just a young lad when I started... ..that was all down to my dad... ..following in me father's- me dad's footsteps.” As boys, these men had regularly attended the allotment to watch and help, becoming enskilled in the growing of edible plants in the masculinized company of fathers and male relatives. They would also be sent to the allotment on their own, by their mothers, to purchase⁹⁴ vegetables from gardeners for family meals; and (some) boys would play truant from school to go to the allotment.

Men with middle class characteristics and men not indigenous to the north east of England also shared this gendered memory with me; for instance, Hugh (a middle class man age mid-

⁹⁴ Allotment gardeners are only permitted to sell their *surplus* allotment-grown-food, although I did not encounter this at the field sites.

thirties)⁹⁵ had a very different boyhood to Jimmy and in a different part of Britain, but his father too had an allotment garden. Thus, many men, like Jimmy and Hugh, have spent parts of their boyhood at the allotment. Accordingly, these boys became culturally acquainted with the social milieu of allotment gardening practice, as well as enskilling in growing edible plants. Paul recognises this as a process of enskillment, telling me "...I think I picked up a lot from him [his father] [pauses] even if I didn't sort of consciously realise it...". After continuing to reflect throughout the fieldwork year on becoming enskilled (rather than "taught"), Paul concluded in late summer:

"...So he was forever digging things. Planting things. He would never have had show winners but he would've always had some potatoes, some broad beans, some beetroots- but, erm, you know, just the fact that, er, there's somebody in the family doing that means that, er, you're getting to see how to do it even if you're not actually doing it."

Thus, the boys' enskillment at the allotment led to a skilled understanding of the social complexity of allotment gardening and the cultivation of edible plants. The allotment has been part of their lives since boyhood; consequently, remaining (or re-arriving) as adults they were already adept at the nuances of skill and vocabulary involved in allotment gardening practice and understood the norms and rules of the social world. They might have been novices as boys first entering the allotment years ago, but now they are skilled adults oozing self-assurance and confidence in the social world. But, I located a very different (and somewhat concealed) narrative of gardening enskillment when I listened to women.

Although women allotment gardeners share girlhood memories of gardening enskillment with me, they do not share memories of being at the allotment. This is because they had not been there.⁹⁶ Although patterns can be discerned in the data about women with gardening enskillment, these womens' memories are not as analytically "neat and tidy" as the mens' memories of gardening enskillment and for two reasons. Firstly, their gardening enskillment only ever took place in the home garden (not the allotment garden) and related only to growing ornamental plants, such as Beverley's example of gladioli and Margaret's example

⁹⁵ Hugh is married to Amelia, mentioned earlier; that these two allotment gardeners are in a personal relationship becomes relevant in Chapters 5 and 6.

⁹⁶ There is one allotment gardener who is a counter to this claim, Holly, who I discuss shortly.

of irises. Secondly, tasks in the (standardised) home gardens of these womens' girlhoods were strictly gendered; for instance Jill (a working class woman age late-fifties) recalled a girlhood abundant with vegetables and fruits grown in the home garden. However, whilst she was active (via childhood play) in this garden, she did not interact with edible plants until harvesting. Then, she was required to join her mother and female relatives in the domestic kitchen, making jam and other preserves; thus, Jill became enskilled in making jam. However, it was not these girls or their mothers who were growing the edible plants for jam ingredients; it was their fathers' domain and *skilled practice* to grow edible plants in the standardised home garden.

Accordingly, the standardised home garden of these girlhoods was a different kind of productive space to that of the boys. Although women like Margaret and Beverley were viscerally and materially present in the home garden as girls, they were absent from becoming enskilled in growing the edible plants which are the mainstay of the allotment. Now adults, women such as Jill describe themselves as having been "keen" (amateur) home gardeners for many years and speak of a constant correspondence with ornamental plants throughout adulthood in their own home gardens. But, these women arrived at the present-day allotment without skill in growing edible plants and felt the consequences. Thus, via gender difference in childhood gardening enskillment, women arriving at the allotment with ornamental gardening skill only, have an inequality of allotment gardening skill when compared with men.

But, it is impossible to simply lock this evidence into tidy arguments about a gender division binary in the garden, because there is a counter example. Holly (a middle class woman aged mid-forties) contradicted this evidence (about women experiencing an inequality of gardening enskillment) although she was the only woman to do so. When Holly was a girl, both her father *and* mother "...grew about 30% of what we ate..." from their allotment garden, in addition to their standardised home garden. Thus, in girlhood, Holly spent time at her parents' allotment garden, becoming enskilled in the cultivation of both ornamental *and* edible plants as well as developing familiarity with the social milieu. Accordingly, Holly's very clear example in the data highlights and corroborates that women's active participation(s) in the home garden in the 20th Century are not neat and tidy packets of data from which firm rules can be extracted and assembled into theory in the 21st Century (Bhatti,

2014). As such, Holly stands out to me as an analytical “conundrum” amongst my data about women allotment gardeners. Holly echoes my thoughts, by intimating that upon arrival (at the present-day) allotment both herself and allotment gardeners considered her to be “different”. “I guess... ..I was an *unusual* gardener...” she told me as she remembered how she surprised men when she arrived because she was already enskilled in growing edible plants and familiar with the social milieu. Accordingly, Holly is a counter to my argument and her gardening biography serves as a reminder that the history of women in the garden is not as static as once believed and demands further study.

Thus, when women such as Margaret, Beverley and Jill (with the exception of Holly) got allotment gardens they were skilled at gardening with ornamental plants, but did not have a skilled understanding of the social milieu of the allotment and the cultivation of edible plants that the men (I describe above) had. Nor could these women enter The Bar of local social clubs and, hence, could not participate in networks of found objects; neither did they have the manual labour skills with which to do bricolage. Allotment gardening practice was not already part and parcel of these womens’ lives; they could not immediately translate the nuances of skill and vocabulary relating to edible plants, required to commence practicing allotment gardening. Thus, these particular women did not have the self-assurance and confidence that men enskilled in allotment gardening had upon arrival. Margaret laughs now with the benefit of hindsight, “I don't think I realised what was involved...” she explains, remembering that she felt “odd” being suddenly immersed into a world “...full of men and their vegetables!”. Thus women at the allotment, despite having some gardening enskillment, were at a disadvantage to men on arrival.

She knows the names of all the plants

Although lacking the cultural resources required to immediately commence allotment gardening practice, their enskillment (in growing ornamental plants) enabled the women described above to begin the process of knowledge formation in the cultivation of edible plants, via two routes. Firstly, via improvisation and experimentation (trial and error), all of which are led by imitation (Ellen and Fischer, 2013; Gieser, 2008). Jill explains to me how this operates in allotment gardening practice, sharing her experiences with me whilst we sit on a wooden bench watching swallows swooping and diving downwards towards us on a hot and blustery day at Brindle Lane. Jill is pointing out to me what she finds most pleasurable

about her allotment garden, but one area I ask about elicits a frown. She tells me that when she first arrived, this area “...really needed a lot of attention because the- the soil was just thick clay. Yeah, really bad... ..very wet.” Asking Jill how she brought this particular area into cultivation, she explains that she “...dug it all over, dug it over. I've put grit in erm loads of manure.” However, my curiosity is aroused as to how Jill, recently new to allotment gardening knew what to do. She tells me:

“Well I didn't really [laughs] it was just a case of *think*, right, how do we get drainage into it? Because I know at home, I've put grit in, you know, for various different types of plants, you know alpines and that, so *it's just trial and error really.*”

Thus, Jill and women like her described above adapt their skilled practice in growing ornamental plants to become enskilled in cultivating edible plants at the allotment. Their (inhibited) skill (Gieser, 2014) accompanies these women to the allotment and this serves to enable each of them personally to move beyond the gender difference highlighted above and to actually commence allotment gardening practice.

Secondly, despite the gender difference outlined, there is actually commonality between the men and women I have been describing. The men (already skilled in allotment gardening) and the women (skilled, upon arrival, in growing ornamental plants) have one form or another of gardening skill and, accordingly, hold one another in mutual respect. This respect enables mobilization of processes of social cooperation because trust – confidence that our vulnerability will not be exploited (Miszta, 2011: 362) – can be founded upon respect for competence in skill (Sennett, 2012: 170).

Mutual respect is enacted and performed in social life, however, it does require expressive labour (Sennett, 2003: 59) and these enskilled gardeners are not shy in revealing that they hold each other's gardening skills in high esteem. “She knows the names of all the plants, you know” is a regular refrain when men at Brindle Lane notice I have been chatting with Margaret and women like her; likewise across the other field sites, as men evidence their respect for skilled women gardeners. Thus, this recognition of skill permits an elasticity in social relations between these two very different groups of skilled gardeners. As Margaret said earlier, they actually have a lot in common. Mutual respect, coupled with existing social connections – especially with bricoleurs, as mentioned earlier – enables social cooperation;

meaning that upon arrival, women such as Margaret, Beverley, and Jill, *can* enter into social interactions and relations framed around allotment gardening practice, and begin doing some allotment gardening, in spite of being at an unequal disadvantage when they arrive.

I've never known anyone with an allotment: enskilling as a novice

They haven't got a clue!

Throughout the fieldwork year, skilled allotment gardeners tell me that younger newcomers do not have skill in any form of gardening. Marty, summarises sharply just how skilled gardeners feel about younger novices: “They haven't got a clue! They're- you know they're *trying*... ...Ninety nine percent [of younger newcomers] haven't got a clue!” he exclaims, throwing his arms up in the air in frustration. Likewise, Paul sighs “...it amazes me how absolutely clueless [younger novices] are”. Various explanations are offered to me as to why this might be the case, ranging from an attempt at forgetting one's own inadequacy in gardening upon arrival, to a scathing demolition of TV gardening programmes; skilled allotment gardeners claim these misinform audiences of how much skill is required for allotment gardening (Platten, 2013: 315). Thus, skilled allotment gardeners believe newcomers arrive with unrealistic expectations. As noted in Chapter 2, gardening is situated in a variety of social contexts and, hence, the distinctions and inequalities that are present in much of social life are also ever-present in and around gardens and gardening. However, this alone might not be why gardening skill is absent; gardening enskillment can be inhibited, for instance, via a “craft's institutionalized practices” (Gieser, 2014: 146), such as allotment gardening's presence in the social imaginary (for much of the 20th Century) as a masculinized working class locality with a specific aesthetic. This may, for instance, deter the participation of some women and/or people who do not value the aesthetic or social position of allotment gardening (Taylor, 2008).

There is an emerging scholarship about inhibited enskillment in gardening practice, however, this literature focuses upon gardening as paid labour (*e.g.* Gieser, 2014).⁹⁷ Indeed, longstanding discourse on “deskilling” attends only to the effects of mechanization within paid labour (*ibid.*: 132); gardening at the allotment is neither paid nor mechanized labour.

⁹⁷ In addition to Platten's (2013: 305) discussion of absence of gardening skill in allotment gardening practice, this topic has also been illustrated by non-governmental organisations as a “horticultural skills deficit” or “horticultural skills gap” (*see e.g.* Royal Horticultural Society, 2014; Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society, 2007).

Yet, some young(er) newcomers arrive at the allotment not only minus gardening skill but also without prior social connections, meaning these people not only lack skill but also do not know anyone at the allotment. I remind the reader that enskillment in allotment gardening is an outermost instance of socially situated learning (Wenger, 1998; Lave and Wenger, 1991), without a formal master-apprentice relationship, as discussed in Chapter 2. Hence, novices are left to their own devices to attempt to enskill in allotment gardening practice. One such novice without prior social connections at the allotment is Erin (a working class woman age early-thirties) who is focussed upon here to illustrate the uncertainties, emotional anxieties, risks and consequences, of arriving at the allotment without skill or prior social connections.

Erin got her allotment garden when the previous gardener had to leave the allotment as his caring commitments increased.⁹⁸ Who gardens where and on which particular garden changes through time; the allotment is not static, but temporal. Hence, people come and people go at the allotment, for instance newcomers arrive to begin gardening on gardens that have become available because someone else is no longer present. Gardeners speculate about and monitor what becomes of a recently-become-vacant allotment garden, just as at home we might well wonder who will replace recently-departed neighbours, perhaps hoping it will be people meeting our expectations of domesticity and neighbourliness (*see Crow et al, 2002: 137*); this is yet another domestic norm brought to allotment gardening practice. Thus, the skills of new arrivals are scrutinized and monitored as part of valuation processes.

Turbulent learning

Erin moved to Byworth several years ago and co-habits with her partner Josh (a working class man age early-thirties) in a small flat with a high-walled “back yard”.⁹⁹ She is a new arrival at Leontonby, never having done any gardening previously and without prior connections there; hence, Erin reflects who Marty’s means by “they haven't got a clue!”. Erin was, however, on the waiting list for seven years and desired allotment gardening for two reasons. Firstly, without a home garden, Erin thought “it would just be nice to have a bit

⁹⁸ Other examples of why people depart include an increase in employment commitments; a disagreement with the person one shares with; being told to leave (by public officials and allotment committees); and, ultimately, by death.

⁹⁹ Paved courtyard.

of outdoor space.” Secondly, she felt a sense of domestic imbalance at home because Josh does all cooking (a practice she simply does not enjoy) and so Erin hoped she could redress this by producing allotment-grown-food for their meals. Having now got her allotment garden, she believes it also helps her deal with her full-time stressful white collar job; she is “...not going to the gym as much, but I'm coming here... ...it's benefiting us [me], I think, just as much as going to the gym... ...it's good.” Thus, Erin is keen to remain at Leontonby and is present whenever possible; Josh far less so and the couple consider the allotment as Erin's solo venture. Consequently, I have often have encountered Erin alone on her allotment garden at weekends.¹⁰⁰

Emotion is integral to socially situated learning and it is usual for a novice to have corresponding feelings to their learning experience, such as uncertainty, fear, and anxiety; likewise, successes in the learning process can correspond to feelings of euphoria (Gieser, 2008: 306). Although enthusiastic and active in seeking to become enskilled, Erin finds the process of learning allotment gardening practice to be challenging and full of uncertainties. Consequently, she is experiencing a raft of emotions. Her recently deceased rosemary plant, she tells me, is an example of this situation as she has “...this special skill where you buy rosemary and it dies within a month...” but she doesn't understand why. “...I haven't actually done anything to it... ...what- w-w-what is wrong?” she asks me anxiously, her brow furrowed. She has noticed, enviously, that “...going past peoples' gardens they've got massive big rosemary bushes... ...I don't know what it is” she sighs. This otherwise confident independent and self-assured woman has arrived in a social world where much of what she encounters is new to her. For instance, everything at the allotment is outdoors and she's used to being indoors at a desk job; pigeons eat her plants, but she does not have a domestic pet let alone know how alter a wild animal's behaviour.

There are a lot of men present too (including bricoleurs) and although Erin is accustomed to men in her social network she actually spends most of her time around women in an office environment. Thus, she struggles to understand her experiences because “...nobody in my family has ever had an allotment. I've never known anyone with an allotment.” What is

¹⁰⁰ I met Erin during her first week at the allotment in October 2013. I reciprocated by answering Erin's questions about how to practice allotment gardening, throughout the fieldwork year. I have taken into account in my analysis quite how much my reciprocation enabled Erin's enskillment in allotment gardening practice.

more, she has no social connections at Leontonby. Thus, allotment gardening can differ markedly to the life experiences of a newly arrived novice, creating uncertainty and emotive responses. Yet, in spite of these uncertainties, Erin views learning allotment gardening practice to be a positive process. She actually enjoys learning, telling me “I’m learning loads about it... ..and so I like that aspect of it”; a novice’s own recognition of their need to learn is an important first step in the process of enskillment.

Enskillment inhibited

Although she enjoys learning, Erin’s enskillment has become inhibited and for three reasons. These relate to the social process of trust, identifying a master, and enskilling alone. Firstly, her enskillment process began counter-intuitively, when she learned who not to trust. Who we trust (Sasaki and Marsh, 2012; Misztal, 2011; Khodyakov, 2007) can be thought of as confidence that a person will not exploit our vulnerability (Misztal, 2011: 362). As part of her process of enskillment, Erin has taken advice from gardeners at Leontonby but this has created problems for her. In short, she has learned that advice varies and is not always adequate.

Someone – Erin won’t name names – “...said that this side gets more sun” and told her to plant right there where her half a dozen sweetcorn plants are now struggling to grow and flower in shade despite bright August sunshine shining on the rest her garden.¹⁰¹ “I’ve been quite disappointed...” about the advice given as she had keenly followed it to the letter, she tells me. Erin is being more cautious now about whose advice she takes, even though some gardeners are “...dead friendly... ..welcoming” and “...keen to, kind of, share their tips with us [me].”¹⁰² But, advice has been given to Erin on the basis that, within the “in-group” of skilled allotment gardeners at Leontonby, knowledge and skill is of a level sufficient to be able to understand and interpret advice and guidance coherently (Schutz, 1964: 95, in Weigert, 2012: 175). However, at this stage of enskillment, Erin cannot act meaningfully upon advice because she does not yet share the in-group’s knowledge (*ibid.*), which is *how to practice allotment gardening*. Trust must be “actively produced and maintained” (Steensland, 1999: 343), however, Erin is not yet able to enter into processes of trust at the allotment because she has insufficient valuation skills regarding assessment of gardening

¹⁰¹ Sweetcorn plants require a warm, sunny, situation to produce corn cobs.

¹⁰² Here “dead” is as a positive intensifier in everyday discourse.

advice. As such she remains vulnerable and is “prone to or susceptible to damage or injury” (Wisner *et al*, 2006: 13, *in* Misztal, 2011: 360). Erin has, therefore, learned that recognising skilled practice in allotment gardening involves an intersection of enskillment and valuation processes and can be fraught with difficulty and anxiety.

Secondly, after this set-back, and as a means of remaining at the allotment and learning in this turbulent situation, Erin negotiates and takes advantage of offers of affordances or “invitational qualities” (Billett, 2008: 25). These are “the degree by which individuals are invited into the social practices in which they participate, and how that participation and subsequent learning is supported...” (*ibid.*). Learning via this method is not uniform, however, but is negotiated as a social process in which the novice grasps whatever skills and knowledge they can negotiate from a master(s) (*ibid.*: 29) via social skill (Fligstein, 2001). In Erin’s case, she has identified Bernard (a middle class man, age estimated to be late-seventies), who has been allotment gardening since before Erin was born. Bernard is a retired “show grower” with 50 years of experience at the allotment and has won numerous competitive vegetable shows. In particular, Erin is awestruck by the carrots Bernard grows, but she also points to me out that “...he's- he's very humble about it, 'oh I just threw a few- a couple of seed packet in'” he replies when she praises him. But she is puzzled by his modesty, which she finds odd, and is yet another occurrence she cannot make sense of in becoming enskilled. Yet, Erin has actually begun the process of becoming proficient in valuation and enskillment processes, at the allotment, evidenced here by her being able to identify a master in Bernard. Recognising who is skilled in allotment gardening practice is important within this outermost instance of informal learning, undertaken in a vacuum without a formal master-apprentice relationship.

What is more, Erin finds Bernard to be sociable and happy to give her advice, unlike bricoleurs gardening nearby. She explains that they’ve only spoken to her only a couple of times (over the course of the fieldwork year), but that on the rare occasions when Josh accompanies her they always chat to *him*. Erin believes bricoleurs avoid her, offering no more than a brief “Hello” to her despite some bricoleurs being only a matter of several feet away. Thus, Erin’s gender creates distance between bricoleurs and herself at the public-private allotment. She is a woman they have not encountered previously in this locale, who is not part of their existing social network, and whom no one else knows. And, from the

skilled position of a bricoleur, it is difficult to place faith in a person you believe is incompetent (Sennett, 2012: 170). But not every allotment gardener presents in this way, and the spectrum of sociality is as broad here as it is elsewhere in social life in Britain: quite simply, some people are more sociable than others. But I stress that a new arrival cannot expect allotment gardeners to be open-armed and welcoming, to be willing (and able) to devote a lot of time to new arrivals, and might simply not be at all interested. Thus, the intersection of sociality, privacy, neighbourliness, and gender, in a locale of intense localness, contributes to the inhibiting of Erin's enskillment.

Thirdly, Bernard's visits are sporadic because, although he is now retired, he has had a sudden and totally unavoidable increase in domestic commitments. Plus, Erin works full time and commutes out of Byworth on weekdays. Hence, Bernard and Erin encounter one another at the allotment perhaps once every few weeks, but he is always in a rush and she would like to spend more time learning from him; there aren't many people here when she can be present at weekends. Thus, private life intersects with the public-private of the allotment and further inhibits Erin's enskillment. Accordingly, in allotment gardening practice, novices might actually identify a master to learn from – with both having sufficient social skill to induce cooperation (Fligstein, 2001) – but have no guarantee that they will each be simultaneously present at the allotment.

Hence, without prior social connections at Leontonby to enskill with, and not knowing who to trust, along with the sporadic nature of Bernard's visits, Erin resorts to enskilling herself. She does so by making use of "monitoring" and "imitation" (Gieser, 2008), for instance she gazes at allotment gardens and watches gardeners, imitating their bodily movements and practices.¹⁰³ Erin practices by this means with the aim of replicating the cultivated (weed-free) aesthetic she sees presented at Leontonby; she has learned quickly that producing this will legitimate her within the collective. However, this outermost instance of socially situated learning is a process that is both sporadic and unstructured, without guarantee of

¹⁰³ Erin has also sought external sources of enskillment, such as social media, online blogs, and TV gardening programmes. However, she finds these sources overwhelming because "...watching lots of gardening programmes doesn't help because you got... ...[chuckles] loads of ideas." Additionally, taking advice from gardeners participating in social media became emotive because "I don't think I kind of, er, know enough" to reciprocate and post her own advice. So, although active in the sense that she could initiate her own search for knowledge and skill to imitate at the allotment, Erin was also passive when using sources of learning away from the allotment because she could not enter into processes of social cooperation online.

success. Thus, this is how I frequently encounter Erin: alone, prone to accepting poor advice, and always quite uncertain as to whether she is going to have success in her practice. And ultimately, as there are sanctions at the allotment, novices like Erin risk being ordered to leave (being “thrown off”) the allotment if they do not present the cultivated (weed-free) aesthetic. Thus, for a novice, it is of the essence that intersections of enskillment, valuation, and cooperation, not only occur but do so quickly so that she may ascertain who she can learn from.

When I come to leave the field, Erin remains present having “passed” a recent inspection (by public officials) of all allotment gardens at Leontonby; she has not been “thrown off” the allotment. I ask Erin how things are going and she tells me she is starting to feel more settled, recalling “...when I first started planting things out, I was nervous... ..because I just thought, like, they'd fail and they wouldn't be very good.” However, she is now very pleased to tell me she has had some successes, excitedly describing how she has recently taken a packed lunch to work containing salad ingredients she has grown herself. And, as the fieldwork year had progressed, I noticed Erin began to develop deeper social relations with the gardeners around her, although a distance remains between herself and bricoleurs. She concludes “...so it's just kind of- not how easy it is but the fact that I've been able to do it [chuckles] has been a bit of a surprise.” But, from my work with novices like Erin, I emphasise that there are people arriving at the allotment who do not have any of the cultural resources and connections required to commence skilled allotment gardening practice. Unlike Erin, many simply give up and leave.

Conclusion: a post-bricoleur allotment?

As I navigated allotment gardening practice for the first time as an ethnographer, finding my way and seeking social connections, I understood the allotment as an extreme instance of a public-private setting. Privacy at the allotment is a very certain kind of privacy, which is about being observed and monitored. Within this setting, one group of working class retired men (bricoleurs) form the majority group at the allotment. These gardeners are identifiable as knowledgeable and skilled, not only in growing plants and raising animals but in bricolage, through which the former economically valuable self is reproduced post-retirement at the allotment via labour. Although the daily activities of bricoleurs appear to cause conflict, the actual form of social interaction amongst bricoleurs and the rest of the collective is

adaptation. This form of compromise is enacted because bricoleurs' skill and presence is considered a form of currency, to gardeners who are becoming enskilled or who lack time to attend the allotment regularly.

Within these ideas of knowledge, skill and enskillment, however, emerge patterns of inequality that have appeared at the intersection of gender and the role of the garden in Britain in the 20th Century and which remain apparent now in the 21st Century. Accordingly, although some women arriving at the allotment now with some home gardening skill have inhibited enskillment in the cultivation of edible plants, the social processes of mutual respect, prior connections, and improvisation, enable them to navigate the allotment successfully. However, within the hustle and bustle of these social interactions, the rhythmic *bang* of the hammer, and people simply relaxing, I also caught sight of a group struggling to come to terms with the realities of being outdoors, trying to grow edible plants, and interacting with bricoleurs. They are younger novices who arrive without gardening skill or prior connections. Novices are anxious about not being good enough at gardening, vulnerable to poor advice, and uncertain about who to trust and learn from within the public-private setting of the allotment where there is not a formal master-apprentice relationship, yet where sanctions are present for those who do not perform to a certain "standard". So, just who is a "proper" gardener at the field sites? Are all of these people allotment gardeners, or does one need to arrive with skilled practice in a form of gardening? And does this affect how social cooperation is formed? I revisit these questions of valuation and legitimation in the next chapter.

These findings raise questions about change and social transformation at the allotment of the future. Integral to all of the ideas outlined in this chapter are bricoleurs, who are central to the allotment via their numbers and as a form of currency. However, bricoleurs are a finite resource at the allotment, they are after all men in later-life who continue to age and in a decade or so many will be gone. Hence, what will a post-bricoleur allotment look like? We know that their finely-honed skills are not being replicated in employment sectors of the present, so whose (and what type of skill) will have meaning at the post-bricoleur allotment, where the know-how to build a shed or greenhouse for free no longer exists? What effect will that change have upon the normative-allotment-garden-aesthetic, and the allotment as a site of production rather than consumption? Who will be the people with gardening

knowledge and skill and what form(s) will that take, how will transmission occur, and via which form of social interaction? The allotment will be a more empty place without bricoleurs, literally so through the week, and so who will water plants during the week for gardeners who can only be present at weekends? I suggest that, without bricoleurs, the allotment of the future will become a very different social world that functions in a very different way than at present.

Chapter 5. "It's The Taste!" Valuation at the allotment

Betty's feet

Betty has hurt her feet. Not once, but three times in one week. First there was the paving slab she dropped onto her right foot, whilst building a patio on her allotment garden; then she trod on a rusty nail that pierced her left foot. Finally, whilst laughing at a joke told to her by her sister over the 'phone, she dropped a tea tray onto *both* feet. She had screamed out loud at the first instance, told herself she "deserved it" for wearing the "wrong" shoes to the allotment in the second, and then heavily berated her sister for the third. And, on top of these everyday misadventures, Betty is waiting for a medical operation, thus, she is now unable to do digging and weeding and this is most likely to continue into coming months. She is, however, still driving to the allotment most days, to socialise and harvest plants. So, at this very moment, Betty can be found sitting in her allotment shed, persuading me to taste sweetcorn fresh from the cob; harvested only a few moments ago from Betty's garden, the ripe kernels of corn burst in our mouths leaving behind a cool and milky juice as we bite down and participate in the intensely social, sensuous, act of sharing food. "Oh God that's *gorgeous!*" Betty exclaims, before going on to reveal that, even though it was painful to drive here, it is the right thing to come to the allotment. Had she stayed at home "...oh I'd be bored to tears, I'd be sitting watching the television, I'd probably cook too much and then I'd be fat as anything."

Although plants are harvested year round at the field sites, an abundance are picked in late summer before seasonal changes bring cooler weather. During these times many allotment gardeners do what Betty and I were doing that day. Sweetcorn, tomatoes, peas, blackcurrants, and strawberries, for instance, can be eaten raw from the plant, providing an opportunity whilst at the allotment for gardeners to share and taste what each other has grown. There is a feeling of a slower pace than in spring and gardeners are socialising via tasting food, as well as doing (the ever-present) weeding. Deftly woven into these social interactions is valuation: what tastes best, who grew it (and how); what the best and worst crop is this year; whose garden is meeting expectations and whose is not (and why). Accordingly, valuation in allotment gardening is intensely social and physical and it plays an active role in the formation of social cooperation via its intersection with skilled practice.

As discussed in Chapter 2, when valuation is studied as a social process understanding can be garnered of how value is produced and “diffused, assessed, and institutionalized” in a variety of settings (Lamont, 2012: 203). Acts of valuation are important to sociologists, because valuation is ubiquitous and its outcomes contribute to the making of social worlds (Helgesson and Muniesa, 2013: 3). This chapter analyses processes of valuation (Berthoin Antal *et al*, 2015; Helgesson and Muniesa, 2013; Lamont, 2012) in allotment gardening practice. Although the valuation process of legitimation (Lamont, 2012; Bourdieu, 1993) is focussed upon in particular here, a variety of forms of valuation are alluded to throughout the chapter – such as justification (Boltanski and Thevenot, 2006) and worth (Sayer, 2005; Skeggs and Wood, 2008; Skeggs, 1997) – in order to impart how these forms actively contribute to the social world.¹⁰⁴ Hence, in this discussion, distinct forms of valuation are clearly demarcated, illustrating that valuation is neither static nor isolated; it is only via reference to the multiple pathways within valuation that it can be understood as fluid, interdependent, contested, and thus processual.

This chapter is presented in three sections where, firstly, the focus is on *sensuous taste* (Vannini *et al*, 2010; Chau, 2008; Stoller, 1989), which is a pervasive token of value (Zelizer, 1989) accumulating symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Via reference to two groups of people – those internal to the allotment (allotment gardeners) and those external to the allotment – I explain that allotment gardening is valued not only by allotment gardeners but also beyond the allotment gates. Furthermore, because this analysis considers how allotment gardening is diffused externally, this section considers what form of “goods” (Fourcade, 2011; Haglund, 2010) the practice can be defined as in the social imaginary. Secondly, an illustration of the “rules of the game” (Bourdieu, 1990), via the expectations of the presentation of (what I call) a normative-allotment-garden-aesthetic [“the aesthetic”] (Wohl, 2015; Bourdieu, 1984). Allotment gardeners accumulate this form of symbolic capital if they are able to present this aesthetic, which is a strong expectation at the field sites; revealing what is legitimated and for whom, but also how this expectation *devalues* some allotment gardeners and what that feels like. Finally, a consideration of absences in

¹⁰⁴ It could be argued that the distinctions I note here (between varieties of valuation) are extremely fine, for a thesis that is more broadly focussed upon revealing the social complexity of a particular social world, rather than being solely devoted to valuation. However, this approach is valid because each is a form of valuation in its own right. To disregard this variety would ignore the minutiae and intersections of the complex valuations undertaken in this social world, and would devalue the distinctions in valuation explained by scholars.

allotment gardening practice notes (firstly) the legitimization of certain gardeners because they do not spend money on allotment gardening practice (Dant, 2000); (secondly) that some allotment gardeners are considered unworthy for not having signed a particular piece of paper. This data thus illustrates the means by which valuation circulates within (and what forms of value are accorded to) distinct groups of allotment gardeners. With stark evidence of absences in allotment gardening practice, these are important examples relating to the full value accorded to this practice in the social imaginary. Together, these three sections represent how valuation circulates and intersects with processes of skill and cooperation in allotment gardening practice. In order to commence these discussions, I turn firstly to why allotment gardeners value allotment gardening.

Legitimising “The Taste!”

Tokens of value

So far in the thesis, justifications (Boltanski and Thevenot, 2006) for practicing allotment gardening have been elicited, such as Paul relishing escape from paid labour, and bricoleurs enjoying “the crack”. In turn, these justifications give insight into the social basis of life that is not easily economically quantifiable (Fourcade, 2011); “tokens of value” (Zelizer, 2005; 1989) which are closely interwoven with economic exchange, but which also have their own processes of non-economic value. Here, the focus is on one such token justified at the allotment and diffused beyond. Indeed, allotment gardeners from all social backgrounds, and across all skill levels, justify this distinct token as *the* reason why they are (and remain) present in this social world. This token of value is the sensuous taste of allotment-grown-food.

At the field sites, edible plants are harvested and eaten and, accordingly, become *food*. What we make of food, the social life it has, who has privileged access to it, and the social distinctions and forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1986) associated with it, are of concern to sociologists not only because food is important to human existence, but because it is as socially mediated as any other part of life (*see e.g.* Purdam *et al*, 2015; Holtzman, 2006; Mintz and Du Bois, 2002). Specifically, the focus here is on the sensuous (Vannini *et al*, 2010; Chau, 2008) taste of allotment-grown-food (Tilley, 2006; Stoller, 1989);¹⁰⁵ a seasonal

¹⁰⁵ We all do sensuous tasting, materially, in our mouths (*see* Hutter and Stark, 2015: p. 3), but we also engage in the social process of taste; forming social distinctions in order to build symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1984). For

sensorial quality that affects allotment gardeners (Tilley, 2006: 312). Labour is required in both producing and interpreting sensuousness (Chau, 2008, *in* Allen-Collinson and Leledaki, 2015: 460); through this process we not only decide what we like, but also undertake relative comparison and form distinctions, to build the forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1986) that I referred to in Chapter 2.

The sensuous taste of allotment-grown-food has a social life and illustrates instances of valuation. Towards the end of my fieldwork Betty shared the sensuous taste of her sweetcorn with me, whilst my search for suitable field sites had begun a year earlier with the tomato tasting test (*see* Chapter 3). In-between, it was a rare day in the field if the sensuous taste of allotment-grown-food was not the content of gardeners' social interactions. Gardeners (and their ever-present, steady stream, of visitors) seize every opportunity to do tasting *in situ*, framed in speculation about (and anticipation of) food currently under cultivation, and comparison to what has been harvested recently and in seasons past.¹⁰⁶ Many, many, gardeners exclaim "It's the Taste!" when I ask what drew them to (and keeps them doing) allotment gardening.¹⁰⁷ But, to state that words are merely spoken when asking this question serves to under-mine the affect (Richard and Rudnykyj, 2009; Turner and Stets, 2006) and importance of sensuous taste for allotment gardeners. For instance, gardeners throw their hands up in the air, a deep breath might be taken, perhaps a moment or two lost in recalling the memory of sensuous taste, or an exclamation of "It's the Taste!" spoken loud, or emphatically, or merely sighed. Such as, when Alfie (a bricoleur age mid-seventies) describes some plums grown and tasted the previous year; he relaxes his shoulders and gazes upwards to the sky, slumps backward into his garden chair, then sighs "...I've never tasted anything like them. ...God, they were beautiful. Beautiful..." his voice trailing off and away, lost in the memory of food past (Holtzman, 2006).

However, few scholars (*see e.g.* Taylor, 2008: 92; Longhurst, 2006: 587) allude to the "sights, smells, touch and tastes of the garden" (Longhurst, 2006: 587), or what they might actually

an overview of the senses in various ontologies, beyond western notions of "the five senses", *see* Howes (2009).

¹⁰⁶ Disappointment is also encountered, however, such as when trying new varieties. Hugh tells me "...if all that hard work ends up in something that's either tasteless or bitter or not particularly nice, it's a big disappointment."

¹⁰⁷ Henceforth, I use the expression "The Taste!" when alluding to the sensuous taste of allotment-grown-food to represent the way in which allotment gardeners at the field sites regularly allude to this affect.

mean in social life. The exception is Tilley's (2006) study of both home gardeners and allotment gardeners; my argument aligns with and further develops Tilley's (*ibid.*: 326), that allotment gardeners justify the sensuous taste of food as a reason to do allotment gardening. Yet Tilley (*ibid.*) does not extend his analysis to the consequences of the sensuous taste of allotment-grown-food upon social complexity in this social world. I go further and suggest that "The Taste!" actually plays an active role in processes of valuation and, what is more, because gardeners first took up allotment gardening to experience it, suggests the value of "The Taste!" resonates beyond the allotment.

The currency of currants

"The Taste!" has a social life via informal distribution networks which commence on an allotment garden. After departure, this allotment-grown-food travels toward people the allotment gardener has strong social ties with, but also towards people with whom she has weak ties. Accordingly, "The Taste!" is an active ingredient of gift exchange (Mauss, 1990 [1925]). When sowing a seed, an allotment gardener may know – or have been told¹⁰⁸ – to whom the food will be gifted, or who might expect to receive. Reciprocity is a complex, and at times paradoxical and exclusionary, form of social interaction that binds members of social networks together (Offer, 2012; Liebersohn, 2011; Llewellyn, 2011; Laidlaw, 2000; Komter, 1996). As such, contemporary public and private life in the West is partly knitted by gift exchange (Liebersohn, 2011: 170). Thus, allotment gardening practice is a site of gifting as much as any other and, consequently, "The Taste!" has social life.

An example of the social life of "The Taste!" is Michelle's allotment-grown-food being eaten by her immediate family and domestic neighbours; these are strong ties. However, her children take her allotment-grown tomatoes and cucumbers to school in their lunchboxes to share with friends in the school canteen; these are weak ties. Likewise, "The Taste!" produced by Pete is eaten by himself and Susan, plus their extended family. However, Susan takes "The Taste!" to her place of work, sharing it with colleagues Pete has not necessarily

¹⁰⁸ Bricoleurs, for instance, are often told what to grow by their wives, because it is the woman of their household who mainly does the cooking. Rhoda (a middle class woman age late-seventies) first brings this to my attention, explaining "I know there are people who say '*well my wife doesn't like that*' or '*she doesn't want that*'..." when describing to me how much she enjoys allotment gardening *as a widow living alone* because she now chooses exactly what she wants to grow because she does no longer grows/cooks food for anyone else. I am grateful to Rhoda for bringing this to my attention, something I might not have noticed because of my biography.

met. Meanwhile, Alfie gives beetroot to men at his social club who then give it to their wives and/or their domestic neighbours. Alfie does not know the neighbours of all the men he drinks with, but they eat the beetroot he has grown.¹⁰⁹ Therefore, valuing “The Taste!” involves multiple social networks both internal and external to the allotment, via both strong and weak ties. Accordingly, “The Taste!” has currency beyond the allotment; people (with strong ties) might expect to receive regular gifts, but concurrently a person (with weak ties) might receive an unexpected gift of “The Taste!” from someone they have never met. Thus, “The Taste!” is available to some people not involved in its production. What is more, because technical instruments stipulate that an allotment garden may only be cultivated by one person for the production of food for his [sic] family only (Allotments Act, 1922 (Section 22)), it is again clear that – as in most aspects of social life – people seldom act within the context the State expects them to. Instead “The Taste!” is shared widely in the localities of the field sites.

However, distributing “The Taste!” does not always run smoothly, with uncertainty and conflict present amongst some recipients. This at times relates to provenance, contagion, and a normative expectation that all allotment-grown-food ought to appear as that purchased in greengrocers and supermarkets; washed or trimmed or preserved in plastic packaging (or all of these). For instance, Steph (Belle’s daughter-in-law) will only feed her family on “clean” and hermetically sealed vegetables; Belle resorts to mimicking supermarket presentation prior to gifting “The Taste!” to her. Belle sighs as she tells me “...I wash everything. I put it in a- a nice blue tray... ..it’s clean...” otherwise Steph will refuse “The Taste!”.¹¹⁰ A similar situation extends into the school-life of Michelle’s children; some teachers misinterpret her childrens’ lunch boxes when filled with allotment-grown-food. One child “got wrong” for “having sweets” at school, because it is misunderstood that cherry tomatoes can be eaten whole like sweets.¹¹¹ After explaining that these are actually

¹⁰⁹ Which social club(s) to join is often more to do with a man’s trade, occupation, or political leanings, than being located close to his domestic residence. Clues are presented in the generic names of social clubs, such as “The Engineers” or “The Labour Club” or “The Conservative Club”, the latter two relating to political parties in Britain.

¹¹⁰ In the West, humans have profound notions of what is “nature” and what is “culture”; here, Belle drags “The Taste!” firmly away from nature to culture (Degnen, 2009: 151). However, I add that what Belle also does here is to present “The Taste!” in a socially distinct method echoing what it means to be “respectable” (Skeggs, 1997) in Britain, such as being washed, clean, and “dressed” in accordance with strict rules of neatness, tidiness, and comportment. Noteworthy, during this move from nature (to cultural norms of respectability), “The Taste!” must finally be presented as “looking perfectly natural” in spite of entering culture.

¹¹¹ The sale of some confectionary and soft drinks is forbidden in schools in England (see Fletcher *et al*, 2014).

tomatoes, the child's lunchbox is inspected and very detailed questions asked about provenance and intentions, before "The Taste!" is permitted. A sibling has sliced cucumber confiscated because the thicker green skin of allotment-grown cucumber, compared to commercially-grown cucumber, is perceived as a potential choking hazard. Michelle grills the head teacher "I mean what does [the teacher] mean that they will choke on it? He was ten for goodness sake, he knows how to eat his food!" before "The Taste!" is readmitted into school.

Setting this problematic aside, why is "The Taste" of allotment-grown-food so important and how? I ask Pete if he can describe "The Taste!" to me:

"[Sighs] It's hard to describe. The best way of me describing it is with the strawberries... ..I grew strawberries for the first time ever and when I managed to get some home without eating them all at the allotment- er, I took some home and I took some in to work.¹¹² And everyone [at work] said '*God, they taste so much sweeter and fresher and tastier*' ...".

As noted in Chapter 2, crucial to valuation is relative comparison; people cannot accord value until they have established and ranked (negatively or positively) with other entities (Lamont, 2012: 205), believing that for something to become distinct it ought to stand out from something else (Tyler, 2012: 78). Sensuous taste is both material and symbolic (Hutter and Stark, 2015: 3), creating social distinctions (Bourdieu, 1984) and producing forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Pete indicates (above) that "The Taste!" is compared to something else, prior to justification. But to what is allotment-grown-food tastier than; what is the comparator?

Both growers and receivers, claim allotment-grown-food tastes *different* and *better* than that sold in greengrocers and supermarkets in Britain.¹¹³ For instance, Betty claims that allotment-grown-food is "...nicer than the food you buy... ..it's no comparison... ..totally different taste." Amelia concurs, suggesting that (comparatively) food bought in shops is "pretty tasteless". Paul believes this is because, compared to what he grows, "...a lot of the stuff in the supermarkets, particularly tomatoes, are forced to the point that they're all just

¹¹² Pete got his allotment garden a couple of months before retirement.

¹¹³ The global food system, which can be described as exploitative and unsustainable, is driven by profit and financial interest (Böhm, 2014: 1056), which far outrank desire for sense gratification by consumers.

water.”¹¹⁴ An allotment gardener admiring and justifying their labours is one thing, but people external to the allotment also make this claim. I am able to make this argument because messages of gratitude are sent back along the distribution network to allotment gardener(s), with very firm requests (that, at times, acquaint with commands) for more allotment-grown-food.¹¹⁵ Alfie explains he is forever receiving phone calls from friends telling him “...‘*Alfie, that beetroot's absolutely beautiful' ...*” and demanding more. Pete receives gently goading messages back from Susan’s colleagues about his tomatoes. She tells him “...‘*Oh, the lads are going mad about that stuff' ...*” and at first he balks, worried there is something wrong, but the opposite is actually the case. As Susan explains to Pete, “‘*I'm not at work tomorrow so I can't take any more in!' ...*”; but her colleagues’ gentle jibes are accompanied by instructions to inform Pete “...‘*the difference in the taste is phenomenal' ...*”. Thus, allotment gardeners and people external to the allotment (with whom they have both strong and weak ties) justify “The Taste!” via comparison to other forms of food. Accordingly, during its social life, “The Taste!” is made distinct from other forms of food (Bourdieu, 1984). As such, “The Taste!” accumulates symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986), both internally at the allotment and externally to the allotment.

Peculiar goods

The symbolic capital of “The Taste!” legitimates allotment gardening as a worthy practice. For allotment gardeners, the amount of time they spend at the allotment and the allotment as a site of productive labour are, for instance, legitimated. Thus, this further enables bricoleurs’ post-retirement identity (see previous chapter) to be legitimated as active, productive, more valuable than the dominant post-retirement identity conferred upon men in the West (Spector-Mersel, 2006; Willott and Griffin, 2004). For instance, Alfie is

¹¹⁴ That commercially produced tomatoes are over-watered is a classic trope in allotment gardening, in order to legitimate the skilled practice of producing allotment-grown-tomatoes valued for their sensuous taste rather than quantity produced. I have heard this repeatedly throughout Britain, as well as at the field sites. See Heuts and Mol (2013).

¹¹⁵ This is often in the form of oral messages and it could be interpreted that recipients are simply being polite about an unexpected gift; that the person (with the strong social ties) embellishes the message they deliver to the grower at the allotment. However, these messages contain such micro-details, about what has been done with the gift of “The Taste!”, that I argue these messages are about more than just meeting British norms of politeness in reciprocity. For instance, details of what meal has been cooked are described in detail; whom in a family had enjoyed it most of all; and a qualification that it was the first time a toddler had tasted allotment-grown-food. Accordingly, it is this depth of detail and the firmness of requests for more (that are voiced repeatedly should the grower not immediately reciprocate) that convince me that this argument is present in the data. Derek (a bricoleur age late-sixties) acknowledges that allotment gardeners are wide awake to the probability that receivers of “The Taste!” might simply be conforming to British norms of politeness, when he tells me “‘And they'll- without just being generous and kind- they do say it tastes *better* and nice.”

legitimated by “The Taste!” in the eyes of Beryl (to whom he is married) and their friends. Beryl, who *never* comes to the allotment – because, in Alfie’s opinion, she prefers spending time doing housework and cooking – praises “The Taste!”; this is something Alfie feels sorely in need of because he tells me he feels “nagged by the wife” about the amount of time he spends allotment gardening. Likewise, “The Taste!” legitimates Alfie within his friendship group of men with working class characteristics, he tells me proudly that he instructs friends to “get on the list!” when they beg for more beetroot, thus, permitting Alfie some powers in his friendship group. Allotment gardeners who are economically active also have time spent at the allotment legitimated by “The Taste!”, telling me that distributing “The Taste!” legitimates their labours. Thus, these findings align with and extend DeSilvey’s (2003: 444) theory of the allotment as a site of labour, because my data demonstrates transformation into prestigious labour.

I also noted (above) that “The Taste!” also legitimates allotment gardening practice from the perspective of those external to it; the consequences of this legitimation are twofold. Firstly, allotment gardeners are legitimated as a collective of skilled growers who can produce “The Taste!”, thus, enabling gardeners to protect and reproduce their individual social position and that of the collective. Secondly, local government decisions about allocating (and retaining) public land – often with a high economic market value in Britain – for allotment gardens are legitimated. This interplay, between allotment gardening and local government (an ever-present relationship in the social imaginary and always evident amongst social interaction at the field sites), is important to note because allotment gardens are frequently considered to be a form of economic “common goods” and whose worth to wider society is disputed.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁶ “Common [rivalrous] goods” exclusively serve only a small number of people (Haglund, 2010: 24; Ostrom, 2002: 29); “public goods” are demarcated by non-rivalry of consumption (Holzinger, 2003: 174). Allotment gardening practice is frequently defined as “common goods” in the social imaginary, thus, restricting economic investment by the state and non-State actors (see Local Government Chronicle, 2010). Yet allotment gardening practice can be regarded as “public goods with positive externalities” (Leach, 2004: 1722), because although the allotment can be regarded as an exclusive form of goods, it does also provide some value for people otherwise disconnected from the allotment, such as via “The Taste!”. At the field sites, gardeners frequently claim it is unfair that allotment gardens do not receive more investment, citing their own enduring, physical, labour, to produce and distribute “The Taste!” as justification for investment. Accordingly, although I am more concerned here with social complexity (than policy), I argue it is important to note how allotment gardens are positioned economically because this affects, and is of importance at, the field sites.

However, valuation processes can be undertaken via non-economic subjectivity (such as “The Taste!”, or the view of allotment gardens from a passing bus), which bypasses tensions between a desire in the social sciences to reconcile a positivist scientific neutrality, with a requirement in sociology to engage with social criticism (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006: 11). And in this latter sense, allotment gardening practice is what Fourcade (2011) explains as “peculiar goods”; goods (such as bodily organs or animals living in the wild) which are notoriously difficult to economically quantify, because they exist externally to the sphere of economic exchange (Fourcade, 2011: 1722). What is more, this argument aligns with and builds upon the the work of several scholars who point to forms of capital (that are not easily quantified economically) in allotment gardening practice. For instance, Wiltshire *et al* (2000) note a contribution to green space amenity and performance as “green lungs”; Turnbull and Scott (2012) point out increased biodiversity; Barthel *et al* (2010) note transmission and reproduction of social-ecological memory; and finally, Crouch and Ward (1994 [1988]) reveal a unique role in the classed histories and cultures of Britain. Thus, on the one hand (in economic senses) allotment gardens are nothing more than an exclusive club for their members, however, from a sociological perspective allotment gardening practice produces multiple and peculiar layers of worth available widely. Accordingly, allotment gardening practice – whilst not everyone may participate or wish to do so – performs useful functions for society and is legitimized by “The Taste!”.

Meeting aesthetic expectations

Have you seen the mess?

As I noted earlier, a normative-allotment-garden-aesthetic (Wohl, 2015; Bourdieu, 1984) performs an active role in processes of valuation at the field sites. Symbolic capital is accumulated by gardeners who are able to present this aesthetic which, accordingly, legitimates some allotment gardeners over others; the presentation of the aesthetic is also a matter of pride. Across the field sites, considering whether gardeners are meeting the expectations of this aesthetic is a constant, enduring, content of social interactions. To meet expectations, the aesthetic is performed via a garden that is weed-free, cultivated with edible and ornamental plants, and neat and tidy; in doing so symbolic capital is accumulated.¹¹⁷ Not doing so decreases the worth of a gardener within the collective.

¹¹⁷ The description of Pete’s allotment (in Chapter 4) is an instance of the aesthetic. This is not the sole manner in which plants can be cultivated and presented; I discuss this soon.

Bourdieu's (1990) metaphor of "the game" is a useful way to think around expectations in social life; people must understand, or are socialized into, particular practices that must be performed to meet expectations. To accumulate symbolic capital, people must engage in the rules of the game (*ibid.*); the firmest rule of the game at the field sites is that the aesthetic ought to be performed diligently and with care.¹¹⁸ Understanding of valuation in allotment gardening can be appreciated by examining who is legitimated and who is devalued; this understanding contributes to awareness of who is considered worthy enough to cooperate with.

Listening to Brian (a bricoleur age mid-sixties) chatting with Paul one Sunday afternoon, it takes only a few minutes to see and hear how legitimation of the aesthetic is enacted in social interaction in allotment gardening. Brian's garden meets the expectations of the aesthetic: soil has been sieved, not a vegetable is out of line, and there are no weeds growing. The aesthetic presented on Paul's garden, however, does not meet expectations even though he has skill. Paul's soil is not sieved and some vegetables are in (almost) straight lines, but weeds grow between them. Critical to this social interaction, Brian does not challenge Paul's aesthetic directly with him, but by alluding to the aesthetic not being presented by someone else. He asks Paul "have you seen the mess?". Paul's eyes follow Brian's pointing finger to a garden nearby although, as Paul walks past it often enough, it is not the first time he has seen it. Brian points to a derelict greenhouse, where uncultivated soil is lush with perennial weeds and paths are scant because they are overgrown. Brian states this garden is "a mess" and as the gardener has failed to meet expectations they should be "thrown off". Paul replies that he has heard the gardener is very busy at present and cannot attend. Brian ignores Paul's comment, turns his body away from "the mess" and proudly points now to his own garden, telling Paul that people should not have allotment gardens if they cannot come all the time and make them look "nice". He goes on to tell Paul that anyone who can't do this should be thrown off. Paul's gaze sinks to the ground; he knows he can't perform the expected aesthetic and so he swiftly changes the subject to the weather before bidding a retreat a few minutes later.

¹¹⁸ I do not seek to explain how the allotment gardens in this study have historically arrived at the expected aesthetic; but to understand how this presentation is active in processes of skill, valuation, and social cooperation, and what the consequences are in this social world.

Three points of valuation have occurred in this social interaction, the form of which is conflict (Wagner-Pacifci and Hall: 182); the content being the aesthetic. Firstly, Brian has reminded Paul of the rules of the game; the aesthetic is *expected*. Secondly, Brian has legitimated his own position; presenting the expected aesthetic along with articulating standards of worth to Paul that his garden (and the absent gardener's) ought to be cultivated just like Brian's. Finally, Brian has devalued Paul but indirectly; via criticism of another allotment gardener's aesthetic presentation.¹¹⁹ Thus, the expectations of the aesthetic are a means by which a gardener can be legitimated, or deemed less worthy, and be held to account by members of the collective. And some gardener's, such as Brian, derive pleasure out of performing the aesthetic and are disturbed by its absence. Expectations like Brian's were oft repeated and hung over the field sites like an angry storm cloud, throughout the fieldwork year; as did anxious concerns about being "thrown-off". And the manner by which Brian indirectly informed Paul he was not meeting expectations is a cultural norm of these social interactions. But what is it about, or within, the aesthetic that is difficult for Paul – and gardeners like him – to perform and maintain? Why can Paul – who has allotment gardening skill – not perform the aesthetic? And what is it that Brian has that enables him to perform the aesthetic, obtain pride from doing so, and legitimate himself over Paul?

Being strong and making time

The normative-allotment-garden-aesthetic is not the sole means by which plants can be cultivated and, thus, presented aesthetically in temperate zones such as Britain. For instance, "no dig" methods (popularised by Bob Flowerdew and Charles Dowding) or "forest gardening" methods (proposed by Robert Hart), do not result in the presentation of the aesthetic expected at the field sites.¹²⁰ Notably, there are two key differences, between presenting the normative-allotment-garden-aesthetic and those just mentioned, that have consequences for exactly who is legitimated in allotment gardening.

¹¹⁹ I never encountered this allotment gardener, nor had many gardeners; later in the year Brian claimed that a public official gave the absent gardener two options: leave the allotment or take a reduction in garden size, the latter being accepted.

¹²⁰ I have observed no-dig on allotment gardens in Britain, but did not find it presented at the field sites. I denote "principles" rather than "practices" of forest gardening here, because trees planted on allotment gardens can be a contentious issue with allotment site managers, but I have observed *elements* of forest gardening practiced on allotment gardens in Britain, therefore, I believe it is relevant to include here.

Firstly, it takes more *time* (Thompson, 1967) to present the normative-allotment-garden-aesthetic, compared to gardening aesthetics such as no-dig. Time for allotment gardeners at the contemporary allotment is a complex connection of ideas of forms of time. There is the “time-thrift” of modernity (*ibid.*: 38), which requires “time budgeting” (Sullivan, 2000) to deal with the demands of various forms of labour (such as employment, care-giving) and to be present at the allotment to do gardening. Additionally, women perform a “second shift” Sullivan (2000), which is recognised as limiting their ability to pursue leisure activities with the same levels of regularity and intensity as men (*see* Bhatti, 2014; Raisborough and Bhatti, 2007). Yet also present are our “own senses of time” (Pine, 2008: 106), which in allotment gardening can be different time requirements across the seasons. But, whatever the season (and particularly in spring and summer), time must be made and spent at the allotment to be able to perform the expected aesthetic; such as, daily attendance to water tomato plants.¹²¹ Accordingly, having an ability to make time (that is, to have time, to use time) to perform the expected aesthetic legitimates a gardener over one who cannot make time; thus playing a role in formations of cooperation. The (post-retirement) bricoleur, such as Brian, is an instance of a gardener who can make this kind of time; Paul is an example of one who cannot, because he also has paid labour to do.

Secondly, ability to practice (Allen-Collinson and Hockey, 2007; Wainwright and Turner, 2006) allotment gardening is required to present the normative-allotment-garden-aesthetic, compared to methods such as no-dig. That is, a person strong of body who can bend, dig, stretch, and do so repetitively and with ease in order to practice allotment gardening; for instance, to dig a trench to plant seed-potatoes into.¹²² Accordingly, having physical ability to do allotment gardening in the manner that produces the expected aesthetic legitimates a gardener over one who cannot do so. Brian is an instance of an allotment gardener who can perform these bodily movements, he is in good health and fit; Betty is an example of someone who cannot, because she is waiting for an operation and has now hurt her feet. Thus, to be able to present the expected aesthetic, an allotment gardener must not only have allotment gardening skill, but be bodily strong and flexible *and* be able to make time to

¹²¹ There are alternative water-saving and time-saving methods of cultivating plants, such as via the application of mulching materials to prevent evaporation and, thus, reduce the need for time to do watering; these in turn require particular knowledge and skill.

¹²² In comparison, in no-dig methods in which mulches are used, for instance, there is no requirement to dig a trench, thus, less bodily movement and strength is required.

be present at the allotment regularly; this valuation is reproduced in everyday social interactions at the allotment.

But, as Derek says, “the plants don't mind if they're not neat, tidy and straight”, thus, it is not necessary that plants are cultivated in the manner of the aesthetic that is expected at the field sites. I argue that ideas like Derek's, and the existence of other forms of cultivation with their own incumbent skills and aesthetics, suggest the normative-allotment-garden-aesthetic is subjective, creates social distinction, therefore, is a form of symbolic capital in allotment gardening. The accumulation of symbolic capital permits those who have it to exert status and powers (Bourdieu, 1993); accordingly, the way allotment gardeners (and public officials and allotment committees) expect an allotment garden to appear visually is less about the easiest and most productive manner in which to grow plants, but actually far more about judgements of symbolic taste relating to how the allotment garden *ought* to appear. As such, those who can perform the aesthetic are accorded status and powers over those who cannot.

However, and as I highlighted in Chapter 2, ability to practice allotment gardening – and at any stage across the life course – has not been discussed and described in gardening analyses; accordingly, there is a paucity of literature with which to align this data. For instance, although Franklin (2002: 164) claims that “Gardening requires gardeners who are reasonably fit with time on their hands...” he does not dwell on this point in his insightful study of (mostly) home gardening. Usefully though, whilst Ginn (2014a: 233) is actually discussing death, absence, and afterlife, in home gardening he does actually state that “...the body's capacities to garden do not remain constant”. When these remarks (*ibid.*) are considered in tandem with studies of ability to practice in other social worlds, strands of theory begin to weave together relating to the body(s) of allotment gardeners and the forms of capital that can be accumulated by body normalcy. For instance, Wainwright and Turner (2006: 242, citing Shilling, 1993: 142), when analysing professional ballet dancers who are no longer able to practice, emphasise that physical capital is both finite and decreases with age. Meanwhile, the toil of practice against the body is taken into account by Hallam and Ingold (2014: 9), who note that bodies age during practice, and that practice can be a toil that affects the ability of the body. Thus, despite a paucity of descriptions in gardening literature, cumulatively across disciplines and fields of literature not actually connected with gardening

practice, it is possible to begin to trace lines of connection between ability to practice allotment gardening and other scholarly work. The role of the normative-allotment-garden-aesthetic in processes of valuation in allotment gardening does, however, provoke further questions about this social world. At the field sites in this study, for instance, where the majority of gardeners are in (so-called) older age, where gardeners can experience ill-health at any age, and which has seen an influx of people who are younger (and, therefore, likely engaged in forms of time-consuming labours), one has to ask if everyone can actually perform to the expectations of the aesthetic? What happens if not, and what are the consequences for gardeners *and* the social world?

I live my life for my garden

Billy is insistent that bricoleurs have not got anywhere else to go but the allotment. He tells me this often and becomes irate when I ask him what he means, adamantly telling me “Well we haven't, NO!... I live my life for my garden!”. Enskilled by his father as a young boy, knowing it is where his friends are everyday, and that his State Pension copes with the small amount of money he spends there on chicken feed, Billy does not at all feel like giving up his allotment garden. But, for the past two years he has been experiencing ill-health in later life and (despite medical interventions) is no nearer to presenting his former healthy self. Accordingly, for two years, Billy has not been able to perform the aesthetic, because of an inability to practice allotment gardening caused by ageing and illness. Billy tells me he feels “frustrated” and “bad” about no longer being able to keep his garden “tidy”, an adjective that he – and most allotment gardeners – use to describe the aesthetic. What is more, Billy's inability to practice allotment gardening and present the aesthetic are now undergoing a process of valuation by allotment gardeners.

Billy's own sense of worth has been affected (Richard and Rudnykyj, 2009; Turner and Stets, 2006) since he became unwell, for instance, he tells me “...you realise that, you know... ..I've always been the type of person where everything I've done, I've done *meself*.” Meanwhile, the weeds on Billy's garden keep on growing; practically, it can be very difficult (if not impossible) to weed an allotment garden, then for instance dig a trench and plant seed potatoes, backfill the trench then “earth up”, as per the expected aesthetic, if one is experiencing back pain, arthritic hands, reduced lung capacity, or in the final trimester of

pregnancy, or if one does not have time to do so.¹²³ Yet, Billy feels a sense of loyalty to the aesthetic, “...because I was learnt by my dad, you know, always keep a tidy garden. And keep it on top of it. But when you're not well, I'm afraid that doesn't [happen]...”. In later life, gardeners may “mourn for the loss of [their] identity as [a] gardener” and perceive a sense of loss of control (Gross and Lane, 2007 *in* Ginn, 2014a: 233). And Billy feels shame (Sayer, 2005: 949) too, in not being able to reproduce the aesthetic his father enskilled in him. Thus, Billy grapples to make sense of his changed world at the allotment, where he can make plenty of time, but is unable to practice allotment gardening.

Through a process of valuation, the allotment committee has given Billy some leeway about not presenting the aesthetic, deciding it is acceptable for Billy not to present it for a short period of time because he is unwell.¹²⁴ However, Billy knows that the committee cannot do this indefinitely and is under pressure from the local council to ensure gardeners meet the expectations of the aesthetic. Billy is only too well aware that he is approaching a “notice to quit”; the formal note (issued by public officials and allotment committees) ordering a gardener to leave because expectations are not being met. The loss of the aesthetic, and being subjected to a valuation process that includes the possibility of being “thrown-off”, affect Billy deeply and he is now wistful about the allotment past and uncertain about the allotment present and future; he becomes evermore short tempered and unwell.

Amelia and Hugh’s allotment garden has also become less “tidy” over the past two years. However, the change in their aesthetic is not related to an ageing process (like Billy’s). Yet, Amelia has been troubled by both bodily changes and an inability to make time to be present. She has experienced the bodily changes of pregnancy, birth, and breastfeeding, over a period of 18 months and now she has returned to full-time employment whilst raising a toddler. Hugh also works in full-time employment and is deeply committed to equally

¹²³ To “earth up” potatoes in the normative-allotment-garden-aesthetic means heaping layers of soil over the shoots of potato plants as they emerge from soil. This prevents the edible part of the plant turning from pale creamy white colours to green colours; a process that renders potatoes poisonous to humans. Earthing up by this means is a skilled, physical, and processual, practice that must be undertaken regularly throughout the growing season.

¹²⁴ Committees are expected by local government to replicate its policy on allotment gardeners experiencing ill-health. This translates in practice as an allotment gardener being given “time-off” from meeting the expected aesthetic if the gardener provides a reason considered worthy enough; this is a process of valuation. This “time-off” is not indefinite; it is my understanding that this is because (a) other people might be waiting for allotment gardens and (b) weeds.

sharing their new role in raising the baby, hence, he too has an inability to make time to be present to practice allotment gardening.

Amelia encountered difficulty bending downwards to do gardening in the later stages of pregnancy then (immediately after giving birth) felt unable to do any gardening at all. Although able to make time for the allotment during later months of maternity leave, and relishing it as somewhere “...I could just sit in the evening sun and [breast]feed”, those days are now over. Gone is the opportunity for a full day spent gardening and, consequently, presenting the aesthetic is now a lower priority for her. She sums up how the couple feel about presenting the expected aesthetic:

“Yeah, so I think there is a time commitment that goes to it that has got harder since we've had [a baby]... ..now, it's quite hard to fit that [the allotment] into the schedule... ..we've just had to not be as *tidy* as we were before and, erm, stuff. And I think when you have children, you suddenly get less time... ..you have to be quite strict with yourself.”

Hence, the arrival of their baby has forced Amelia and Hugh to renegotiate the order of their priorities and, accordingly, the normative-allotment-garden-aesthetic that they were able to present has faded from their allotment. This has occurred because of a combination of bodily troubles *and* an inability to make time to practice allotment gardening. Hence, as noted in Chapter 2, an inability to practice allotment gardening can be for various reasons, such as inability to make time and/or temporary and permanent bodily troubles. As such, inability to practice allotment gardening involves complex intersections of various ideas of time and how time can (and ought to be) used, along with intersections of various bodily troubles. Thus, inability to practice is not a phenomena that can only occur to gardeners in later life.

However, as noted in Chapter 4, allotment gardening is practiced in a public-private setting, where allotment neighbours can see and hear what is going on around them. Hence, it can be difficult to conceal trouble; boundaries and “walls of affect” around the body are less fluid here than in other social worlds and gardeners are not able to rely on zoning ordinances (*see e.g.* Cahill, 2006) because of this visibility of the body in this setting. For instance, even if an allotment gardener is able to conceal their ill-health, a sudden cessation

in presenting the expected aesthetic can be noticeable: weeds begin to grow. Additionally, there is a more formal monitoring of the aesthetic (and, hence, of the body performing it), thus, the body is subject to surveillance by other gardeners, committee members, and public officials. Accordingly, trouble is not privately negotiated but is revealed to everyone at the allotment. For instance, it is felt by some that Billy's illness has now gone on for too long and that he ought to be meeting aesthetic expectations again. One gardener tells everyone (including some committee members) present in the allotment shop that it is not only about time that Billy "got well" but also "...aye, he wants to get his fucking garden done an'all [as well]." To my knowledge, Billy is not challenged directly by the man in the shop (or anyone else), but he will be able to hear this discourse if he is within earshot of such an interaction. And, via his understanding of the social milieu of the allotment (enslaved via his father), Billy will (at the very least) be aware that his troubles could be the content of social interactions.

Brian, meanwhile, stands his ground and always maintains that allotment gardeners should make time to be present and perform the aesthetic, as does Peggy (a working class woman age late-sixties) who identifies herself as "...a clean and tidy person and I think everybody should keep their allotments like that." Peggy frequently becomes agitated about this subject, telling me she believes that "...if you want to have an allotment you should be making time to do it all of the time, you can't just have one and come down when you feel like it." However, there is a counter to this valuation that is represented by Margaret (in Chapter 4) defending bricoleurs whose aesthetic is not "immaculate"; justifying this legitimation because they have been present for many years. Hence, allotment gardeners (via the aesthetic) are subject to circuits of valuation (Skeggs and Wood, 2008) and are the content of endless social interactions that take the form of conflict about playing the game. But, I argue, these instances suggest allotment gardeners experiencing trouble are considered less worthy by some, so much so that they have become disposable and, particularly, because there is (at present) a steady stream of potential replacements on waiting lists. Thus, as in all small social worlds, solidarity can both give and take away; the latter via the social exclusionary aspects of the aesthetic. However, later (in Chapter 6) I examine the other side of this coin when I explain social cooperation.

In order to emphasise how much the expectations of the aesthetic are driven by the local council directly to the allotment gates (and, as a consequence, affect gardeners such as Paul

and Billy), I return to Betty waiting for her operation and having hurt her feet. Betty becomes agitated, during summer, when she learns that her local council has launched a competition with prizes for the “tidiest plot”¹²⁵ on each allotment site in the locality, which I quote verbatim from my field notes:

7th September 2014: Although she isn't [personally] keen on Phyllis [a working class woman age early-seventies], Betty tells me she does like her garden. “It's very neat and tidy” Betty murmurs approvingly. When I explain I'm keen to meet younger women, Betty has something of a rant. She says she understands totally that they can't get here as often as other people, they have babies to care for, houses to keep, AND they go to work she tells me. Betty informs me that there is going to a “Tidiest Plot” competition on the site but that she thinks there should be more categories. For example she gives me the example of Pete's plot (“have you met him, just up from Phyllis? Good, you know who I mean.”). Betty says that Pete is retired and in his 50s so of course he can keep his plot tidy, he is still young enough to manage it to *that condition* and *he does not have to go to work or have anything else to do*. So of course his garden is *tidy* she says. But that's not fair to the young women who can't come often. What about the older people, I ask, who might not be as fit as they used to be? That exactly what I mean, explains Betty, not everyone is as fit and she is feeling it now she is in her late 70s, she needs to rest more...If there were more categories it would be better she says.

Betty's commentary is, of course, gendered because not all men (such as Paul) could make time either; however, she does push home that the expectations of the aesthetic are not solely produced within the confines of this small social world. Actually, Betty highlights that these are also expectations of how the local State believes its subjects ought to perform as allotment gardeners: neat and tidy citizens with bodily normalcy who are committed to making time to present the normative-allotment-garden-aesthetic.

There is, however, a paucity of analyses of the role of aesthetics in allotment gardening and its contribution to ideas of valuation. However, there are commentaries on other forms of gardening that can be considered in the role of aesthetics in the valuation processes I describe here. Most relevant, in terms of social complexity, Taylor (2008: 66) notes that previous gardening analyses theorise gender and social class as important players in aesthetics. Thus one could argue, on the one hand, that the expected aesthetic at the allotment is merely a reproduction of the manner by which working class people in Britain have been and are expected to perform; by which I mean they are judged and determined

¹²⁵ This is commonplace in Britain.

via comparison to middle class values and most especially in relation to norms of comportment in Britain that relate to neatness, order, and respectability (Taylor, 2008; Skeggs, 2009: 629; Skeggs, 1997, *in* Tyler, 2012: 22). Such an argument is further compounded when analysing allotment gardens, because they are often claimed to have a working class history and, thus, are embedded with (expected) working class practices aligning with middle class ideals of how working class people should perform leisure (*see* Constantine, 1981). But, at the field sites, both working class and middle class people expect the aesthetic.¹²⁶ On the other hand, it could be suggested that the neat tidy lines of the aesthetic at the allotment simply reflect the linear skills of the former occupations of bricoleurs (such as engineering) who form the largest group. Likewise, there is often an attempt, particularly in feminist histories of gardens, to differentiate between the way men and women do gardening, suggesting that men prefer growing vegetables and women prefer to grow flowers and herbs, resulting in feminized and masculinized gardening aesthetics (Taylor, 2008: 65). Yet, at the field sites, both men and women perform and expect the aesthetic.

But, actually, these ideas are irrelevant to the *contemporary* allotment, because the social demographics of the allotment have changed considerably in recent years; quite simply, it is not only bricoleurs who do allotment gardening now, but a wider variety of people. Thus, in order to ask contemporaneous questions about the aesthetic, one has to consider what is it that newcomers present in aesthetic terms when they do allotment gardening in the present; if they have different expectations of how the allotment garden ought to be presented. Recent newcomers (such as Erin, Amelia, Hugh), however, do *not* present a new or different aesthetic; newcomers *reproduce* the expected aesthetic. The allotment demographic has changed, but the aesthetic has persisted and is diffused across this social transformation. Accordingly, the pride, appreciation, expectation, and reproduction, of the aesthetic, is a social process at the allotment.

¹²⁶ Although allotment gardens were originally intended for “the working poor”, a legislative change in 1925 – a time of economic recession in Britain – permitted anyone to practice allotment gardening. Accordingly, middle class people have been practicing allotment gardening for a considerable amount of time in Britain.

Slipping through legitimization gaps

Not spending money

The valuation processes outlined in this chapter do not, of course, operate in isolation at the allotment but intersect with other overlapping processes. In order to focus on these enduring connections, here I explain how valuation circulates within (and what forms of value are accorded to) distinct groups of allotment gardeners.¹²⁷ Firstly, I discuss valuation within a group at the allotment; how group members value one another within their group. Secondly, I examine valuation of a distinct group at the allotment, by allotment gardeners who are not members of that group. By examining these two features of social life at the allotment, I am able to illustrate that valuation has its own circuits (Skeggs and Wood, 2008), which operate concurrently with others; valuation in allotment gardening practice overlaps and intersects not only with other valuation processes but also with skill and social cooperation. By doing this, I also draw attention to two distinct absences that are noticeable at the allotment. Firstly, that some allotment gardeners are expected to *not* do something in order to be legitimated. Secondly, I note a group of allotment gardeners who are missed in a particular process of valuation, but who still create value at (and for) the allotment and do as much as anyone else there to keep the social world going. This latter instance of valuation holds important messages about how allotment gardening practice of the future might be imagined, both at the allotment and beyond.

“Who’ve you been chatting with today then?” my regulars often ask me. To this, I reply casually and something akin to “Oh, you know, I’ve been looking at so-and-so’s cabbages”¹²⁸ This repertoire is of use to my interest in processes of valuation because the response from my interlocutor often elicits a revealing of their valuation of the gardener mentioned. This is particularly the case after meeting Morris for the first time, as I find the reactions of other bricoleurs (to my having met him) puzzling. Although I recognise Morris as a skilled allotment gardener, bricoleurs scoff at the mention of him and inform me “he doesn’t know his onions!”.¹²⁹ This puzzles me, however, I soon learn that the reason bricoleurs do not

¹²⁷ People who share similar social characteristics *at the allotment*; bricoleurs are an instance of such a group.

¹²⁸ Thus, I avoided steering the conversation towards revealing confidential conversations with participants; although, of course, people could see and overhear what I was doing and with whom and my interlocutors were aware of this.

¹²⁹ This is a vernacular, non-gardening, term in Britain used to describe someone who knows nothing about the subject they are engaged in; converse is “he knows his onions” and describes an expert of sorts.

consider Morris to be as worthy as themselves is because he spends money on objects for his allotment.

The majority of allotment gardeners at the field sites engage, at some point or another, in the process of bringing found objects to the allotment. What has been found, how it was acquired and transported, and what it will be made into (and used as) are a regular content of social interaction.¹³⁰ Bricoleurs are skilled and most practiced in this process; given that it is a ubiquitous (and time consuming) part of the everyday life of a bricoleur to find objects. Ronnie, for instance, chooses a particular regular walking route into the centre of Marnbreck as there is back street on this route which often hosts abandoned objects. “I stand there and look at things like cupboards and I think ‘*I could use that at the allotment’....*” he explains to me. Ronnie knows that he only need commence a mobile phone call to obtain a lift in a vehicle (with trailer, if necessary) to the allotment with an object. Having been born, raised, and lived (and worked in and around) Marnbreck all of his life, Ronnie has access to substantial chains of social networks in the locale.

The grapevine facilitates the finding of objects too, for instance when bricoleurs at Leontonby learn that the residents of a nearby large villa with a substantial home garden are having a “garden make-over” (see Taylor, 2008: 81) they immediately pay a visit; knocking on the front door and asking the occupier if they can remove the previous contents of the homegarden. After receiving a positive reply, later that day bricoleurs depart Leontonby on foot with their wheelbarrows, returning later laden-down with a dovecote, several large trellis panels, paving slabs, and large fencing panels; all are distributed amongst their network at Leontonby. The location of these particular objects – now dotted around the field site on a variety of allotment gardens – provides an indication of who bricoleurs value and associate with.

¹³⁰ A variety of approaches are taken to “find” objects. For instance, gifting occurs from a wide variety of sources in chains of social networks; “tolerated taking” (Ellen and Platten, 2011: 573), for instance from skips, or items abandoned in the street, or objects that have been removed from places of employment. Men at the field sites are more able to engage in this latter process, because social club bars provide entry into extended networks of found objects that have become mobile after being removed from places of employment.

As I noted above, however, the majority of gardeners do participate in the practice of found objects, although to a lesser extent than bricoleurs.¹³¹ Hence, this is a practice that newcomer Erin has taken-up, for instance she explains that she will enrol Josh when needed for this task and “...we’ll have a look, see if there’s anything in a skip that might be useful”, remove it and take it to the allotment.¹³² She has edged her vegetable beds from “...pallets that we’ve got from, you know, either a skip or the back of a shop or something.” However, Erin’s practice of bricolage is limited by her lack of skill, because she has not been enskilled in the making of objects; this is the case for the majority of women at the allotment and also for men who have not been occupied in manual labour.¹³³ However, this is certainly not the case for bricoleurs who (as explained previously) have skill in manual labour processes that permit them to bricolage from found objects.

Consumption, rather than production, has become a key framework within which sociologists analyse social life and, in particular, the objects that circulate within them (Dant, 2000: 655). However, that approach contextualises consumption within the social life of economic exchange, in which goods and services are exchanged for monetary currencies (*ibid.*). Rather, I found that monetary exchange is not a feature of found objects, their social life, and the bricolage that is performed with them at the allotment. Whilst money is not completely absent from allotment gardening practice, this data helps to shift ideas of conspicuous consumption (Veblen, 2005 [1899]) and invidious comparison (Sennett, 2012: 142) away from materials and objects in economic exchange and towards ideas that a person can be legitimated for engaging in non-market material processes. This is a reversal of the way valuation often works in social worlds, where being able to purchase something is often equated with other forms of capital that are valued. To illustrate legitimation via an allotment gardener’s engagement in non-market material processes, I compare Morris with Terry (a working class man age mid-sixties).

Morris reckons he has spent around £2000 buying brand new greenhouses and polytunnels for his allotment garden. He has also spent another £200 on wood, to build his shed using

¹³¹ I stress that this occurred across all genders, ages, and social classes; I do not claim that one social class in Britain is more thrifty or frugal than another.

¹³² Removing items from skips in the street is commonplace in Britain. Although (legally) permission is expected to be sought from the person who has hired the skip this is seldom expected or enacted.

¹³³ During the fieldwork I encountered only one woman who had made her greenhouse. She had purchased the material for this, rather than using found objects.

his knowledge accumulated in a lifetime of skilled labour. He justifies this approach via reference to *quality*, explaining “...you get nowt for nowt in the world and that’s the truth”, and telling me that “...if you want good produce [allotment-grown-food]” from an allotment garden you have to spend money. However, it is not that Morris does not have skill in *bricolage*, or cannot make time, or is unsociable, that leads bricoleurs to claim he does not know his onions. Instead, what devalues him in the eyes of bricoleurs is that he has fetched “bought objects” rather than “found objects” to his garden: Morris has spent money. In contrast, Terry does not spend any money on objects for his allotment garden. Terry tells me “...well you could spend money, vast amounts of money on the allotment... ...I’m tight... ...I spend nothing. If I can get nothing [something] for nothing, I’ll get it.”

What is more, Terry is in the process of becoming a bricoleur and plans to “spend all my time here” when he retires from full-time employment in a few months time. Terry, therefore, has symbolic capital to accumulate in order to be considered worthy enough to be recognised as a bricoleur within the bricoleur group and the wider collective of allotment gardeners. To do so, Terry has spent most of his time during my fieldwork year doing very little allotment gardening, instead spending every minute of his free time building a greenhouse on his allotment garden at no financial cost. A steady stream of men come to assess Terry’s labour over the months.¹³⁴ They are mostly bricoleurs, but also men not skilled in bricolage who are curious about what Terry is doing. All of them ask where did he get the wood, the metal supports, and the polycarbonate for the windows? Most of all, questions are asked about the provenance of the screws and nails for the job. Something of a trick question, from bricoleurs who are critical of buying screws, Terry has braced himself for this depth of probing. He explains he removed the screws and nails from window frames he found several months ago and, hence, “they cost nowt [nothing]”. Terry also grasps the 6ft long supporting metal beam he has incorporated into the greenhouse, then swings from it to show that it is strong sturdy and reliable just like his own physical capital. Satisfied, bricoleurs walk away and mutter that he is “doing canny [doing well]”. By mid-May the job

¹³⁴ Women did notice Terry’s activity, however, there is a general feeling amongst women at the field sites that bricolage is masculinized and something that ought not to concern women; sheds are regarded as the domain of men in Britain. I notice a generalised melancholy amongst women about their lack of skill in such matters, Belle sums this up by lamenting to Alfie that she lacks skill, ending by jovially shouting at him: “you men are *always* building sheds!”.

is finished. There is talk of how well Terry has done, how sturdy the greenhouse is compared to “bought ones”, and praise that Terry has built it without money.

During this time, however, Terry has barely performed the normative-allotment-garden-aesthetic. He has planted vegetable seedlings but they are now surrounded by weeds and piles of building materials. Hence, Terry is excused the expectations of the aesthetic because he has been labouring to produce a significant and prominent object without money. Accordingly, Terry accumulates the symbolic capital (and performs the identity) of a bricoleur via the building of this greenhouse, which represents an intersection of devaluing the role of economic capital, skilled ability to practice and make time, and sociality. As such, in certain circumstances and strongly influenced by processes of valuation, some allotment gardeners (such as Billy and Terry) are temporarily excused from meeting the expectations of the aesthetic. Meanwhile, Morris has the same resources as Terry, but is not legitimated by bricoleurs because he has not moved away from materials and objects in economic exchange. Consequently, bricoleurs cannot make their well-practiced assessment of Morris' worth and, thus, he is a puzzling uncertainty at the allotment for bricoleurs. His neighbour Bruce, slightly ahead of the game, reckons “...they [other bricoleurs] all call him [badmouth him] but he's alright once you get to know him.” Thus, instead of being able to quickly and easily assess Morris' worth, bricoleurs instead ridicule him (via reference to his onions) as a levelling mechanism, because he does not meet their expectations.

Bricoleurs are the largest group at the allotment and they are highly skilled (and connected) to be able to find and bricolage objects, but not everyone at the allotment is. As I have pointed out above, women and some men have not been enskilled in these processes and it is clear from the way in which Morris is regarded that the skilled practice of *bricolage* is highly regarded by bricoleurs. Thus, does the largest group at the allotment regard those who cannot *bricolage* as less valuable, or even incompetent? This valuation is pertinent when considering social cooperation in the next chapter.

She's just a helper

As this chapter draws to a close, I pose two rhetorical questions for the reader. Firstly, who (if anyone) might slip through legitimation gaps at the allotment? And, secondly, is allotment gardening practice being accorded maximized value in the social imaginary? To

answer these questions, I turn to the less obvious in social life. By this I mean those people who may be devalued (or missed completely) in processes of valuation, but who still create value at (and for) the allotment. There is a circuit of valuation within my data which cuts across both the legitimation of allotment gardeners by each other, *and* the legitimation of allotment gardening practice in the social imaginary. This valuation circuit is not related to skill, or the aesthetic, or having an ability to practice allotment gardening, or making time. Instead, here value is accorded to those who have signed a particular piece of paper; the “tenancy agreement”.

“Of course, it’s *Gilbert’s* garden” I am told by his allotment neighbours when they notice I have been talking to Shona. However, Gilbert (a working class man age early-eighties) and Shona actually share an allotment garden, hence, are Gilbert and Shona both “proper” allotment gardeners? And are they equal in the eyes of the collective and local government? Likewise, although Bruce and Ronnie share an allotment garden, neighbours tell me that is actually Ronnie’s allotment garden not Bruce’s. Although Sally and Richard (a married working class couple age late-seventies and early-eighties respectively) have practiced allotment gardening on the same garden for nearly 30 years, their neighbours describe Sally as merely “helping her husband” on what they regard as “*his* allotment”. This is despite Sally being highly skilled in allotment gardening, and being acknowledged as such by both her husband and their neighbours. And, when Audrey and Norma (working class women age estimated early-seventies) decide to share after many years of each having an allotment garden, I am reminded by neighbours that (despite this merging and change) “mind, it’s still *Audrey’s* allotment”.

Thus, whenever I encounter more than one gardener gardening on an allotment garden, neighbours are swift to inform me of legal technicalities regarding this particular gardening relationship; and with their legitimation accorded to the tenant. Not only do these instances indicate that allotment neighbours come to know detailed (and at times intimate) knowledge about each other, but that it is the person who has signed a “tenancy agreement” for a particular allotment garden that really *matters* in these locales; it is a very important social distinction to have signed this piece of paper.

As mentioned earlier, people share allotment gardens at the field sites for a variety of reasons and via a variety of means. However, technical devices in Britain state that an allotment garden is for use by one gardener only; this is always the gardener who signed the tenancy agreement. I suggest instead that allotment-garden-sharing is an instance of the strength of informal voluntary social cooperation (Burawoy, 1979); but at times I often hear those gardeners who share – but who are not the “tenant” – described merely as “a helper” and not as “an allotment gardener”. This delineation legitimates tenants at the expense of “helpers”.

One such instance of being described as a “helper” is Shona, who I often encounter on the allotment garden she shares with Gilbert, although he is seldom present when Shona is. Shona is confident, assertive, has existing social connections at the field site, and has allotment gardening skill. Like Paul, the allotment is a place of escape for Shona and she tells me “...well, when I come here, I’m- I’m, you know, just peacefully on my own.” One day, encountering Gilbert on his own, I ask him “what’s it like sharing with Shona?”. But he quickly chides me “No, she’s not a sharer, she’s a *helper*...”. Furthermore, Gilbert asserts that I *must* understand “...that the plot [allotment garden] is still in my [Gilbert’s] name...” and that Shona must leave should he quit. He adds that it is good to have Shona around because he has previously been “struggling” with his allotment gardening practice and he justifies “...having Shona to help” because it means “...one side of the plot is less weedy”.¹³⁵ Yet, when Gilbert and Shona are present concurrently, Shona is quiet and withdrawn in Gilbert’s presence, whispering to me “I don’t want to get in his way”. Shona justifies her change in presentation (when Gilbert is present) by explaining to me that Gilbert has been present longer than her and so she feels it is still his garden, rather than something shared equally.

Thus, is Shona a “proper” (authentic) allotment gardener? I argue that she is, because she is practicing allotment gardening and, what is more, she is contributing to the collective. But, she is also performing as a non-economic resource for Gilbert and yet is disposable should he leave. So, although her tomatoes and ability to clear weeds are valued by her allotment neighbours, she is still described as “Gilbert’s helper” by them when she comes up in

¹³⁵ I discuss how voluntary informal social cooperation was enacted within the collective to enable Gilbert and Shona to share an allotment garden, in Chapter 6.

conversation. Indeed, during one of our final chats before leaving the field, I note that Shona has began describing herself as “I’m just a helper...” and telling me “...in fact, I am acutely aware of that.”

This instance highlights the way, via social interaction, value is created and taken away at the allotment when sharing a garden. Not only does Shona’s categorisation (as a helper) legitimate Gilbert’s social position as tenant, it also legitimates the position of their neighbours who are also tenants; but Shona is consequently devalued by this legitimation. This tinge of conflict appears whenever I encounter an instance of allotment-garden-sharing; there is always a splash of legitimation accorded to the tenant. Accordingly, there is capital to be accumulated in allotment gardening practice that is out of the reach of sharers like Shona, who (in spite of presenting the aesthetic; making time; having skill) are not considered as worthy as an allotment gardener who has signed this particular piece of paper. Lamont *et al* (2014: 591) argue that valuation can be a part of the process of rationalization (Weber, 1978, *in* Lamont *et al*, 2014: 591); at the allotment, rationalization forces people into categorising one another in a construction of fairness that is focussed around bureaucracy and management of allotment gardening practice as a scarce resource, rather than recognising the benefits of informal voluntary social cooperation (Lamont *et al* 2014: 591; Burawoy, 1979). Thus, as an allotment gardener categorised as less valuable by this valuation process, Shona is not considered to be a “proper” allotment gardener by Gilbert or the collective.

I believe Shona is representative of an instance that occurs at the contemporary allotment and which will, perhaps, continue into the future; allotment-garden-sharers are not legitimated at the allotment. However, it is extremely commonplace for two – and at times several people – to share one allotment garden in these locales, in what is a steady stream of family, friends, and people with a variety of weak and strong social connections to the tenant, who come along to do gardening together; none of these people, are accorded the same value as the tenant. What is more, in a coda akin to that of Betty and the “best plot competition”, there is a shuttling between what occurs at the field sites and expectations held at the Town Hall. For, not only do allotment-garden-sharers slip through legitimation gaps at the allotment, neither do they appear in publicity nor statistics about allotment gardening in public (or policy) discourse. Accordingly, all of these “not-tenants” are slipping

through legitimation gaps *and* are obscured within the social imaginary. I alluded earlier to the allotment as a form of “peculiar goods” (Fourcade, 2011), noting that it is commonplace in public and policy discourse for allotment gardening practice to be regarded as common goods. This is often because allotment gardening is regarded as meeting only the need of one person per allotment garden in a private members club of sorts. However, the full and actual value of allotment gardening practice will not be fully legitimated (both at the allotment and in the social imaginary), as a setting of intense voluntary informal cooperation, until allotment-garden-sharers like Shona are recognised and legitimated for their contribution.

Conclusion: The maximized value of allotment gardening

Valuation at the allotment circulates in an endlessly processual manner and is diffused both within and beyond the allotment. As such, people and discourses beyond the allotment are affected by these processes of valuation as much as the allotment gardeners are. “The Taste!”, for instance, accrues symbolic capital and through its social life in informal distribution networks is an active ingredient of gift exchange. Hence, it is available both to people who practice allotment gardening and to some people not involved in its production, and both of these groups accord value to it. As such, because of its availability beyond the group at the allotment, “The Taste!” legitimates allotment gardening as a form of “peculiar” goods (Fourcade, 2011).

Meanwhile, *the* most valued social characteristic at the field sites is having sufficient skill and time to produce allotment-grown-food via the presentation of the highly distinct aesthetic of a cultivated (weed-free) allotment garden; those who can do so accumulate symbolic capital. But, when an allotment gardener becomes troubled – which can occur via complex and intersecting means across the lifecourse – this is not privately negotiated but presented to everyone at the allotment; the bodily movements and time-making abilities of allotment gardeners are monitored and assessed. Thus, an allotment gardener experiencing such troubles and unable to present the aesthetic undergoes a process of valuation in which legitimation recedes. And, this aesthetic is not only an expectation firmly *in situ* at the field sites, but is also an expectation diffused by the local State.

Valuation processes at the allotment also operate by less visible means than the aesthetic and, accordingly, the allotment is a site of absences as much as presences. Via the process of found objects and bricolage, allotment gardeners move away from materials and objects in economic exchange and towards legitimation for engagement in non-market material processes. Such findings help swerve concepts of conspicuous consumption and invidious comparison away from materials and objects in economic exchange, and towards ideas that a person can be legitimated for engagement in non-market material processes. But, bricoleurs who do not engage in this practice are a puzzle within their group and can be subject to misunderstandings, because they do not perform to the group's expectations.

In the conclusion to Chapter 4, I asked what a post-bricoleur allotment will look like. In this chapter, I have illustrated that those who do not perform bricolage are not valued quite as much as those who do; that a key facet of the production of a bricoleur's identity is not spending money. As the allotment of the future becomes less populated with bricoleurs and their skilled making of objects, what form will objects take at the allotment; what will their social life be like; what social distinctions will be formed around their presence? And how will this affect the aesthetic? Perhaps the allotment of the future will be less a site of production and more a site of consumption, as skilled practice in bricolage diminishes and more commercially-produced objects (such as sheds and greenhouses) are purchased rather than bricolaged. Thus, conspicuous consumption might well become a part of valuation processes at the allotment.

As in all valuation processes there are winners and losers and, accordingly, it is pertinent to ask why some people bother to continue to practice allotment gardening when they do not appear to be valued as much, or by the same means, as their peers? In answering this question, it is clear that allotment gardeners have affective sentiment for their practice; allotment gardening *matters* to allotment gardeners (Sayer, 2011). Meeting the expectations of the normative-allotment-garden-aesthetic, for instance, is a cultural norm and, because of the embeddedness of this norm at the allotment, there is an associated affect that is a constant companion to it. Hence, Betty is frustrated by expectations upon gardeners (and especially women and gardeners in later life) to present the aesthetic, and Paul feels that pressure too via Brian's indirect criticism; meanwhile Brian feels pride in the aesthetic he performs and both he and Peggy clearly feel agitated when it is not being

presented by everyone. And, in amongst the proud performances of the aesthetic, Billy is deeply despondent about not being able to present it any longer, whilst his senses of loyalty to the aesthetic are pulled in different directions while he worries all awhile that he will be “thrown off”. Thus, practicing allotment gardening really does matter to gardeners at the field sites who, like all social beings, endlessly seek connection, approval, and care, from others; and how people relate to one another depends on how they interpret the commonalities and differences between them (*ibid.*: 142).

Finally, and I believe most pressing, there are legitimization gaps in allotment gardening practice; gardeners can slip through these and be regarded as less valuable, both by allotment neighbours and the local council. The example of allotment-garden-sharers illustrates such legitimization gaps, suggesting that allotment gardening practice is not being fully legitimated in the social imaginary. Allotment gardeners who do not hold the tenancy for the garden they garden upon are slipping through a form of legitimization gap and as such are obscured within the social imaginary. Furthermore, until these allotment gardeners are recognised and accorded value – which mostly involves being counted quantitatively – the value of allotment gardening practice will not be maximized.

Chapter 6. Polishing the onions: Social cooperation at the allotment

Helping a mate

Neil (a leekman age late-sixties) is polishing the skins of Mack's (a leekman age late-sixties) show onions to a high sheen. This is a long and laborious process that has so far taken several weeks and, alongside, Neil has his own show-vegetables and giant-leeks to select and prepare for entry into forthcoming local shows.¹³⁶ What is more, like show-growers across the field sites, Neil is actually in direct competition with Mack; they compete in the same local shows for the same prizes. So, why is Neil cooperating with one of his competitors? Why isn't he concentrating solely on his own show-vegetables to increase his chance of winning? Surely it is better for Neil that another competitor fails? Instead, what Neil tells me is that he is dressing "me mate's onions" because Mack is encountering temporary ill-health and so cannot practice allotment gardening at present. Accordingly, social cooperation in allotment gardening practice must be understood as informal (undertaken away from the formal rules of public officials and allotment committees) *and* voluntary (without economic or institutional incentives). What is more, social cooperation in allotment gardening is frequently embedded within its polar opposite of competition, but always as an outcome of valuation processes undertaken in a social world populated with people from a variety of social backgrounds and understandings. And, in the case of allotment gardeners like Neil and Mack (who grow and show giant-leeks and other plants and animals) this includes a desire to reproduce elements of certain gardening hobbies that are claimed to be either disappearing or to have been lost entirely.¹³⁷

In the previous chapter, I described how solidarity can be both given and taken away in small social worlds, when I illustrated the exclusionary aspects of the normative-allotment-garden-aesthetic in processes of valuation. However, one of the outcomes of valuation is that people then know with whom to cooperate; this means the valuation process informs who is

¹³⁶ Like Belle's presentation of "The Taste!" for Steph (in Chapter 5), here Neil drags Mack's onions firmly away from nature and into culture. Harvested onion bulbs for entry into a vegetable competition ("show") must appear "clean" and "shiny" which is achieved by dousing the onion bulb with silica powder regularly (whilst kept in darkness) before brushing-off the silica and buffing the skin to a highly polished sheen-like appearance but all the time appearing "natural".

¹³⁷ There is a dearth of scholarship about competitive forms of gardening practices. Whilst Constantine (1981) does analyse the provenance of (so-called) "amateur" gardening shows, I urge caution that this description does not particularly consider the agency of gardeners participating in these practices.

worthy enough to be included in a community.¹³⁸ As discussed in Chapter 2, when studied as part of everyday social interactions, processes of social cooperation are revealed as ubiquitous facets of everyday social complexity, thus illustrating that much of what people do is actually done collectively for mutual benefit (Sennett, 2012: 65; Becker, 1986: 11).

Although we all cooperate because group membership is necessary in many areas of social life (Fligstein, 2001: 109), social cooperation does not occur in isolation and can be regarded as the culmination of, not only, various other social processes (such as skill) but also the actions of those who have social skill (*ibid.*) within chains of social networks which may be strong or weak. Thus, as a conjunctive (or associative) social process that draws people together (Bardis, 1979), social cooperation is of interest to sociologists not only as a key part of social life, but also because in choosing with whom to cooperate we reveal the outcome(s) of our valuations about (what we consider to be) the value of people around us; thus, reproducing those networks and valuations. Accordingly, social cooperation informs sociologists what really matters to people (Sayer, 2011), as a process that solidifies friendship networks and helps people to accomplish valued goals. But, and as I highlighted in Chapter 2, cooperation can be weakened by competition (Sennett, 2012: 65) and, thus, social cooperation can also point sociologists interested in conflict and competition towards what serves to undermine collective action. What is more, in certain circumstances, social cooperation and competition can also be mutually associated and produce “joint activities” (Becker, 2008 [1982]). Accordingly, social cooperation is both a form of social interaction and a social process not only woven throughout social life, but which also reveals who and what has value.

As noted in Chapter 2, social cooperation is seldom commented upon directly by sociologists operating within an interpretivist framework, however, this chapter provides an opportunity to illustrate social cooperation in everyday interactions. This occurrence, of a social world being reproduced through voluntary activity – via collective action and norms of reciprocity and where economic markets and social institutions rarely intrude or motivate cooperation

¹³⁸ By “community”, I mean “...a way of talking about the social configurations in which our enterprises are defined as worth pursuing and our participation is recognizable as competence” (Wenger, 1998: 4) but which also courses with affective relations (Walkerline, 2010: 94).

by the means they regularly do in other social worlds – suggests that social cooperation in allotment gardening practice is thought-provoking and quite fitting for sociological analysis.

Two forms of social cooperation are discussed in this chapter; (firstly) informal voluntary social cooperation (Burawoy, 1979), and (secondly) the joint activities (Becker, 2008 [1982]) embedded within this form of cooperation in allotment gardening practice. Before doing so, however, it is necessary to divert to a short section in which I outline the framework within which social cooperation is enacted at the allotment, via reference to the role of trust (Weber, 2012; Misztal, 2011: 362; Khodyakov, 2007) which is an ever-present companion to social cooperation in social processes. I do so in order to impart understanding that the majority group of (ever-present) bricoleurs, perform trust in a way that can be puzzling (and can create uncertainties) for new arrivals who do not share their social characteristics. To understand why bricoleurs present in this manner and the effects this has on cooperation, I explain the ways in which this group has been made vulnerable (Misztal, 2011; Furedi, 2007) by post-industrial social transformations, yet has also developed resilience (Hall and Lamont, 2013) via allotment gardening practice.

Explanation then begins of two forms of social cooperation; firstly informal voluntary social cooperation (Burawoy, 1979). This is the means by which allotment gardeners informally cooperate with (who they consider to be) valuable gardeners currently experiencing trouble in order to retain these gardeners in the collective and, thus, reproduce the social world. Within this discussion, the scope of reciprocity is illustrated and the role of socially skilled people (Fligstein, 2001) in these processes is evidenced, as well as consideration of why people chose to cooperate at all. Secondly, via reference to the skilled and formal competitive practice of giant-leek growing, the process of “joint activities” (Becker, 2008 [1982]) is illustrated. In this explanation, it is noted that it does not take an individual leekman¹³⁹ to grow giant-leeks, but that this is a process of joint activities (*ibid.*) involving many people. Thus, via reference to the allotment, the leek-club, and the locales in which

¹³⁹ All leekmen mentioned are bricoleurs unless otherwise stated; some have also practiced as judges in giant-leek competitions. All are (or have been) married to a woman and live gendered lives in settings of intense localness.

the field sites are situated, it is noted that “*it takes a village to grow a giant-leek*”.¹⁴⁰ What is more, although the practice can create uncertainties amongst some allotment gardeners, leekmen are regarded at the allotment as highly skilled allotment gardeners (and holders of “secret recipes”) who serve as a reserve of allotment gardening knowledge and skilled practice (Barthel *et al*, 2010). Thus, this chapter illustrates two discreet forms of social cooperation, however, when read as a whole suggests that the allotment is less a locality in which individual allotment gardeners tend only their own allotment garden, but is actually a site of intensive collective action that keeps allotment gardening going.

From pitman to potato-peeler: who can a bricoleur trust?

Puzzles and uncertainties

As mentioned in Chapter 4, when Christine began allotment gardening (ten years ago) she found bricoleurs puzzling. She reminds me, with a hint of frustration, that this was not least because “...they all seem to help each other out... ...I never quite- when I first was coming [I] couldn't work out which plot...” related to which exact bricoleur; this is because members of the bricoleur group frequently spend time on (and going between) each other's gardens. This, Christine had found puzzling (and created uncertainty) during navigation as a new arrival with skill in cultivating ornamental plants only and no prior social connections. Thus, when considering the processes of social cooperation outlined in this chapter, attention must again be drawn to the plethora of puzzles and uncertainties presented to the steady stream of novice newcomers arriving at the allotment; and particularly to the way in which trust (Weber, 2012; Mizralski, 2011) is presented within the bricoleur group as a very firm component of this puzzle. I have also illustrated (in Chapter 4) that trust – confidence that our vulnerability will not be exploited (Mizralski, 2011: 362) – can be founded on respect for competence in skill (Sennett, 2012: 170) and that newcomer novices such as Erin (or Christine some 10 years previously) can find trust to be a challenge when newly arrived.

When considering social cooperation as a social process, trust is a constant companion (Mizralski, 2011; Khodyakov, 2007). What is more, by regarding trust as a social process then its temporal aspects can be taken into account (Khodyakov, 2007). These two points are

¹⁴⁰ Mirroring “*It takes a village to raise a child*”, an idiom inferring child rearing is a collective (not individual) moral concern. I apply this idiom to infer that rearing a giant-leek can be regarded as joint activities, such as the pool of resources required (and called upon) (Becker, 2008 [1982]: 92).

especially relevant at the allotment, with its coming and goings through time and where some demographic social transformation has recently occurred. As part of everyday social complexity, a person (or group or community) is inclined or open to damage or injury (Wisner *et al*, 2006, *in* Misztal, 2011: 360) and, thus, we are all “vulnerable” to one another (Misztal, 2011; Furedi, 2007; Heimer, 2001: 43, *in* Misztal 2011: 363).¹⁴¹ Billy, for instance, trusts that members of his bricoleur friendship group will give food to his chickens when he is absent, rather than neglect or poison them; likewise, when planning holidays, Ronnie trusts Bruce to water plants on their shared allotment garden rather than let them die. One has to trust that another person will not seek to take advantage of our vulnerability (Baier, 1986: 235, *in* Misztal, 2011: 363) and we do so via reference to our past lived experiences (Misztal, 2011: 366). Thus, trust and vulnerability are associated and linked concepts (*ibid.*: 359) and ought to be considered together when analysing processes of social cooperation, because the two processes are tightly knitted in everyday social life (*ibid.*: 363).

The latter is a point I stress as crucial to understanding the role of trust in the life course of bricoleurs, many of whom have worked in occupations (such as heavy engineering, coal mining, roadside and railway track work) where “resilience of the cooperative and mutually responsible working relations” were required day-in-day-out to minimize danger (Dawson, 2002: 112). However, narratives of vulnerability changed significantly towards the end of the 20th century, transforming from one in which communities responded to uncertainties and disasters via resilience, to a narrative of individual vulnerability (Furedi, 2007: 236). Pertinent here to this notion are two points. Firstly, bricoleurs have encountered tests (tinged with shared uncertainties) in their own lives and that of the communities in which they live and do allotment gardening, as a consequence of post-industrial social transformations. I cannot over-emphasise how much these changes were powerful and life-changing to the bricoleurs I encountered at the field sites; each and every one has a story to tell. For instance, Ronnie’s economic capital reduced significantly after being made redundant in coal mining, from “...getting [earning] loads of money... ...a lot of money for

¹⁴¹ In everyday discourse and social science analyses, “vulnerability” is prone to indiscriminate usage (Misztal, 2011: 359). Following Furedi (2007), key to sociological understanding (and reflexive use) of this term is to view the concept of vulnerability as a very recent one, often designated by outsiders and/or so-called “experts” upon people (such as children) and communities as a label, or diagnosis, and upon them in advance as a key part of their social identity, thus, creating senses of being that are applied in advance by experts. Instead, when considering vulnerability and trust in processes of social cooperation, I note vulnerability as a ubiquitous part of everyday social interaction and, accordingly, everyone has vulnerabilities (Heimer, 2001: 43 *in* Misztal 2011: 363).

them days” to sickness benefit when his physical capital decreased because of coal mining occupational diseases. Likewise, Billy experienced identity transformation from the previous economic stability of pitman to what he described as “bits and bobs of a job”, as potato-peeler in a fast food takeaway and night-shift security work; consequently his wife then earned more than him.

Yet, resilience (Hall and Lamont, 2013) of some sort has clearly occurred within the bricoleur group during these enormous social, economic, gender, and community, changes; for instance, these men clearly *thrive* at the allotment. By resilience, I mean “social resilience” and, in this instance, members of the bricoleur group have reached an outcome in which their wellbeing is sustained against tests to it (*ibid.*). As mentioned in Chapter 1, key to post-industrial social transformation is that it is a very complex, multi-layered and not linear set of processes of social, economic, cultural and historical transformations. Yet, nestled within these layers of individual troubles such as Ronnie’s and Billy’s, remain what are vibrant, vital, and dynamic, local experiences and forms of meaning; the allotment is one such experience, with its pigeons and giant-leeks amidst the regular ebb and flow of the seasons. Secondly, bricoleurs’ adult lives span the changes to narratives of vulnerability outlined above (Furedi, 2007: 236). But, I stress that time and time again in social life, people do actually create responses to tests that challenge their wellbeing and they do so via resources layered within various and interconnecting social worlds (Sampson *et al*, 2002, *in* Hall and Lamont, 2013: 64).

Clearly, the bricoleur group is comfortable practicing allotment gardening, where members trust one another. But their trust can seem puzzling and somewhat strong, formidable, and foreboding, to newcomers; there are senses of deep and enduring trust between bricoleurs that are not found in everyday life and which can appear tough and daunting. As noted in Chapter 4, novice Erin finds that bricoleurs barely interact with her, let alone trust her to enter into cooperation, but which must also be considered in terms of her incompetence in allotment gardening practice in the eyes of bricoleurs (Sennett, 2012: 170). However, offers of collaboration from skilled allotment gardeners are also turned down by bricoleurs; Billy only trusts bricoleurs to feed his chickens if is going to be away all day at hospital, and Dennis won’t let anyone but bricoleurs water his tomatoes, despite offers from skilled members of the collective. These refusals create some frustrations, yet highlight the role of

trust in the bricoleur group; for instance, although she is on excellent terms with bricoleurs, Margaret feels she is “not allowed near” bricoleurs’ tomatoes let alone their giant-leeks. She tells me she offers frequently, but cooperation is one-directional; bricoleurs are willing to do tasks for her but reject her reciprocity. As I also learned similar from both skilled men and middle class gardeners, I suggest rejection of cooperation is less to do with the issues around skill illustrated in Chapter 4 (gender, incompetence, and so on) and more to do with a strong sense of trust in the bricoleur group and how that came about.¹⁴² There is a “relationship between trust and vulnerability” (Misztal, 2011: 358) in the bricoleur group; a consequence of bricoleurs’ shared social experiences during post-industrial social transformations in the localities in which this study was undertaken.

Interruptions at the haven

When considering bricoleurs’ trust as a social process, I align with Dawson (2002: 107) who argues that, following post-industrial social transformations, the allotment became “a haven from the vicissitudes of worldly events” for men like the bricoleurs in this thesis. A haven where the group could, via social interactions, collectively work through the changes and uncertainties flowing around them (*ibid.*). However, in relation to trust and vulnerability, throughout all of these changes the allotment continued to appear to bricoleurs as it always had in their reality; its social demographic, practices, and aesthetic, all *remained*. Thus, the allotment became a familiar site of trust, meaning, and resilience (Hall and Lamont, 2013), for bricoleurs vulnerable to the uncertainties coursing around them. I remind the reader that Billy believes that he and the bricoleur group have nowhere else to go but to the allotment and note that this is actually the crux of the matter relating to bricoleurs’ trust and vulnerability. They sought and found in the allotment “a haven” (Dawson, 2002: 107) in which to work through the uncertainties of post-industrial social transformations. Weber (2012) proposes that self is “at the heart of trust”, hence, post-industrial social transformations affected bricoleurs’ senses of self within an ever-changing social world where everything they had known became uncertain; within which the familiar narratives of resilience in the face of vulnerability in their local communities was being transformed into

¹⁴² I do not claim trust within the bricoleur group is “particularistic trust” (Khodyakov, 2007; Gambetta, 1988) because, as I have pointed out, bricoleurs do cooperate with non-members. But, nor can trust in this group be claimed as “generalised trust” (Khodyakov, 2007; Warren, 1999). My interest lies in the consequences of this strong trust upon processes of social cooperation at the allotment, rather than theorizing deterministically the form of trust bricoleurs enact. However, I suggest my findings concur with Khodyakov (2007) that trust is a social process rather than a static binary between particularistic and generalized trust.

one in which bricoleurs were expected to take individual responsibility for significant changes beyond their control (Furedi, 2007). Thus, the allotment became a locality where bricoleurs could enter into processes of nostalgia and denial, and in which they could reiterate and reconstruct their former (valued) social lives, without much interruption from women; where (as men) their employment hierarchies and status could be reproduced, and where they still mattered as people. As such, the allotment became a setting for bricoleurs to frame trusting friendship rituals (Waitt and Warren, 2008) around collective activity in the layers of skilled allotment gardening practices that bricoleurs excel in.

Thinking about Dawson's (2002) explanation of the allotment as a haven is a useful way for thinking about the contemporary allotment and the way in which trust in the bricoleur group presents as a puzzle to newcomers, along with the relationship between trust and social cooperation. However, Dawson's fieldwork actually took place at the height of these post-industrial social transformations (see Dawson, 1990). Therefore, based on my year-long conversations two decades later with bricoleurs who have been present at the allotment for many decades, the allotment Dawson (*ibid.*) located (as a haven for bricoleurs) remained just like that until the early years of the 2000s when social demographic transformations began to occur.¹⁴³

However, as Becker (1986: 13) reminds us, shared understandings are not a given when the people who form a collective come from a variety of backgrounds; although everyone may have an idea of what the matter at hand is – in this case allotment gardening – they do not all necessarily share the same social experiences, vocabulary, and practices. Hence, upon arrival at the allotment, Belle and Margaret already know bricoleurs (or men like them), however, there are also newcomers such as Erin and Christine who do not and to whom bricoleurs are unfamiliar, puzzling, and full of uncertainty. The rules of the game are reworked as an outcome of social transformations (Abramovay *et al*, 2008: 2910), and the haven that the bricoleurs made and reproduced for themselves did not remain static.

¹⁴³ Prior to social demographic changes, allotment gardening practice can be described as a gendered site where men did allotment gardening, bricolage, and enskilled their sons. As in many channels, bricoleurs have nostalgic affection for their pasts as they attempt to reiterate and reconstruct their old community. Such as, Billy frequently reminding his friendship group "You know, you used to bring the ponies out of the pit in the summer. And they would put them in the field for a fortnight while the pitmen had their holidays. And I think them days, there was a lot of good [allotment] gardeners, yeah, and the [allotment] gardens was always clean and tidy and there was never no- you didn't have a lot of problems."

Changes and uncertainties yet again came to their lives, but this time *at the allotment*; in the form of some fast moving social transformations in allotment gardening practice during the early years of the 21st Century. And, as a consequence of this second stage of social transformation in the lives of bricoleurs, their social life was again challenged, but this time *at their haven*. Consequently, for the steady stream of newcomers – excited at the possibilities the allotment has to offer – but who do not share the social characteristics of bricoleurs, the bricoleur group presents as puzzling (at least) and somewhat impenetrable (at most). Accordingly, the informal and voluntary social cooperation that I am about to explain takes place within this framework in which the largest group of gardeners present has only recently been expected to trust people who do not share their characteristics and experiences at the allotment.

I don't feel like it's a pressure: informal voluntary social cooperation

Walking the baby

Two weeks before Amelia gave birth for the first time, husband Hugh returned home from allotment gardening and announced he had gotten a free greenhouse for their allotment, from a woman who was leaving. There was a slight problem, however, the entire greenhouse needed dismantling, the components moved to their allotment garden, (re)assembled, and fitted to a course of bricks that they didn't yet have.¹⁴⁴ Amelia recalls “...I was like '*that's nice* [laughs] *you can sort it out yourself! It's not even entering my brain*'...” before adding that she felt “...I obviously couldn't dig in the later [laughs] stages of pregnancy.” But, with both in full-time employment, their new greenhouse would have to wait until they could make more time and only when Amelia was happy to recommence gardening; with a baby about to arrive in the household, when would that be? Months, perhaps a year ahead? And what would happen to their neat and tidy normative-allotment-garden-aesthetic during this time? Weeds do grow, hence, would Amelia and Hugh be able to plant and grow as many of the vegetables that they love “The Taste!” of with the demands of a baby at their side? But actually, Amelia and Hugh need not have worried; allotment gardeners informally and voluntarily cooperated (Burawoy, 1979) to help solve their personal trouble of how to continue allotment gardening when starting a family.

¹⁴⁴ Dismantling and reassembling a greenhouse takes time and skill.

When allotment gardeners cooperate on an informal and voluntary basis (Burawoy, 1979), there is a critical intersection between processes of skill, valuation, and cooperation, in decisions about who (and who not) to cooperate with. In order to benefit from cooperation, a gardener has to be legitimated as valuable enough to be a recipient. As highlighted earlier, there are a variety of ways by which gardeners can be legitimated as valuable. For instance, being able to physically practice gardening and with skill; practicing bricolage without spending money; producing “The Taste!”; making time to do gardening; and (key to all of these) is doing so within the social distinction of the normative-allotment-gardening-aesthetic. Later in this chapter, further forms of value in allotment gardening practice become apparent, such as being a socially skilled actor (Fligstein, 2001), or being able to grow giant-leeks. And, longevity of practice, or enskilling one’s children in allotment gardening, or doing any form of organised competitive gardening, or inheriting one’s allotment garden from a relative, all accord forms of value in this social world.

Of course, not every allotment gardener will present each and every one of these forms of value, and some (such as bricolage and giant-leek growing) are located only within certain groups, however, these are the forms of symbolic capital in allotment gardening practice that are paramount when gardeners consider who to cooperate with. These decisions are also tinged with intersections of shared social characteristics such as age, social class, gender, along with the formation of friendship groups; thus, identification of gardeners who share social characteristics also influences decisions to informally collaborate. Accordingly, whilst decisions about social cooperation are firmly situated within processes of valuation unique to allotment gardening, these social processes are also influenced by social characteristics and identity as much as any other part of social life. However, key to this discussion about informal voluntary social cooperation (Burawoy, 1979) is that, when presenting these forms of value becomes troubled (for instance when a gardener is unable to make time or practice) personal trouble emerges not only for the gardener concerned but also for the collective, as it represents the potential loss of a worthy gardener from the allotment.

Amelia and Hugh find that there are willing hands to enable their retention in the collective, when they both have less time and Amelia cannot fully practice allotment gardening. Their newly acquired greenhouse, for instance, is dismantled, moved, and (re)assembled, by Gregg

(a working class man age estimated to be age late-sixties). Meanwhile, after the baby is born, Amelia spends some time at the allotment (during weekdays whilst Hugh is at work) and practices some allotment gardening (such as sowing seeds) whilst she regains the physical ability she feels she needs to dig and produce “The Taste!” again via the normative-allotment-garden-aesthetic. However, Amelia’s allotment gardening practice is often interrupted by the baby, at which times she recalls “...a few of the old ladies even walked [the baby] for me if they saw I was in the middle of something and [the baby] started crying, they'd push- the pram around for me...”.

And, during summer, I notice that even though Amelia and Hugh cannot be present regularly their tomato plants are not dying from lack of water and attention, because gardeners are informally monitoring the plants and watering them as and when needed; the plants then thrive and produce “The Taste!”.¹⁴⁵ In Chapter 4, Amelia explained how much her life and Hugh’s changed when they had a baby, here she explains how she feels after receiving cooperation to keep their allotment going:

“[voice drops] And I don't feel like it's a pressure because now we... ...people will look out and if we haven't been down people will water our stuff, the greenhouse and stuff for us. And they- they know that and they're happy to do that. So actually, I think we felt a little bit of pressure before we had [the baby] but people are very helpful and, er, you know, if the tomatoes are rotting they'll pop in and water them so that's- that's great.”

Clearly, these informal and voluntary interventions enable Amelia and Hugh to continue to practice whilst they time budget (Sullivan, 2000) after having a baby. But why are they deemed valuable to be recipients of social cooperation? As I mentioned earlier, Amelia and Hugh’s allotment is “neat and tidy”, meaning they meet the expectations of the normative-allotment-garden-aesthetic which requires an ability to make time and skill to practice. As Hugh mentioned in Chapter 4, his father had an allotment garden and Amelia explains to me her parents had a standardized home garden when she was a child, hence, both were able to navigate the allotment upon arrival. Thus, the couple produce “The Taste!” and therefore have commonality with the collective and its expectations. Both are keen to reduce social

¹⁴⁵ Tomato plants need daily attention in these localities, such as daily opening and closing of greenhouse doors/windows. Without this attention, in a matter of days it is immediately obvious to a skilled allotment gardener passing by that this has not been occurring.

distance and have gotten to know most gardeners present, including bricoleurs; as Amelia said in Chapter 4, she admires their skill.

However, the very reason for Amelia and Hugh requiring social cooperation in the first instance – the birth of a baby – courses very firmly through decisions to cooperate in allotment gardening practice. Allotment gardeners at the field sites often comment upon how important it is for all children to become enskilled in the practice of allotment gardening as a means of reproducing this social world.¹⁴⁶ Thus, gardeners with babies and very young children are deemed valuable, frequently given dispensation for not presenting the aesthetic, and wholeheartedly praised by gardeners for “teaching” their children about food provenance. Accordingly, Amelia and Hugh’s skilled practice in producing “The Taste”, their respect for skill and willingness to forge friendships across different groups at the allotment, and their production of a new member of the collective, deem the couple as valuable members of the community of gardeners at the allotment.¹⁴⁷

What is more, this cooperation is undertaken voluntarily and without incentives in place. Hence, the threat of losing valuable Amelia and Hugh from the social world rouses people into the “informal zone” and away from formal organization (Sennett, 2012: 154; Burawoy, 1979). Indeed, social cooperation is tested to its limits when something goes awry (Sennett, 2012: 154). Thus, gardeners at the field sites – although forever bound up within the rationalization of people, land, and its incumbent bureaucracy and monitoring – informally cooperate to solve problems during moments of personal trouble at the allotment; through this means, personal troubles are prevented from becoming wider issues for the collective. Although, as I will explain, gardeners do at times seek recourse via the formal rules and bureaucracy of public officials and allotment committees to solve personal trouble, it is actually informal voluntary cooperation that is the first (and enduring) port of call at times of personal trouble. Accordingly, although it is only one outcome of valuation processes (that have losers as well as winners) social cooperation is the engine house of the allotment.

¹⁴⁶ It was also regularly stipulated that *all* children in society should learn “where food comes from”. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, food provenance is a politicised discourse.

¹⁴⁷ But, not everyone is on the receiving end of cooperation, I give examples later.

He will do anything for anyone

In seeking to understand, and to glean who wins and loses in, this process of voluntary informal cooperation (and how and why), there are three questions to consider. Firstly, as I say, what is the scope of reciprocity? Secondly, what rewards are there for allotment gardeners who undertake cooperation (“prosocial” people) and what does that do at the allotment (Simpson and Willer, 2015)? Finally, does informal collaboration cause conflict at the allotment? In answer to the first question, reciprocity is to the point where it is apparent to those cooperating that the troubled allotment gardener can (or cannot) return to presenting the aesthetic. Thus, if and when personal trouble ceases, then so too does informal collaboration, for instance, once Amelia and Hugh can perform the aesthetic again,¹⁴⁸ I notice that informal collaboration slowly halts. But if personal trouble does *not* cease (such as health not improving or continuing inability to make time) this form of cooperation continues; becoming more complex as other means of ending personal troubles are sought by allotment gardeners cooperating.

This more complex stage involves the labour of social skill action (Fligstein, 2001); knowledge of networks of allotment gardening skill in the locality; communicating with public officials and allotment committees. As explained in Chapter 2, we all have some social skill, because we are members of social groups and to do so we must interact with members (Fligstein, *ibid.*: 109); we are able to motivate other social actors to cooperate (*ibid.*: 105). As such, socially skilled actors are able to form alliances and create collective activities (Vail and Hollands, 2012: 544). An instance of social skill action in allotment gardening occurs during early summer, when it becomes apparent to Gilbert’s allotment neighbours that he can no longer present the aesthetic, because he has acquired care-giving commitments and he has become troubled by ill-health in later life. Initially, as with Amelia and Hugh, allotment neighbours informally cooperate to keep Gilbert’s allotment going; watering his tomatoes, opening and closing his greenhouse twice daily. But, Gilbert’s troubles do not cease; he is not getting younger and his care-giving responsibilities show no sign of abating; and his allotment garden becomes weedy. Barnie (a working class man age estimated to be age early-seventies) is the first to take action; motivating others to cooperate further to solve Gilbert’s problem. He talks with allotment neighbours, suggesting that they find a way

¹⁴⁸ Meaning, when Amelia feels she has regained ability to practice allotment gardening and both she and Hugh can make time to do so.

together to further help Gilbert. And, at some point during these interactions, someone remembers Shona; she is a *trusted* and skilled connection in their social network and it is recalled she wants to restart allotment gardening. Enquiries are made to Shona, who agrees she will try sharing with Gilbert, if he will agree.¹⁴⁹ Meanwhile, Barnie sets about persuading Gilbert to share, which he agrees on the basis of trust; Gilbert trusts the recommendation of a skilled allotment neighbour that Shona is skilled and can in turn be trusted.

Thus, as a result of social skill action (Fligstein, 2001), intersecting with knowledge of allotment gardening skill in the locality and the ever-present role of trust at the allotment, Gilbert's problem is eventually solved by social cooperation; Shona begins allotment gardening and the aesthetic soon returns. Once Gilbert's personal trouble has been solved, however, (like with Amelia and Hugh) cooperation ceases; it is only at this stage that public officials and allotment committees are approached and informed that action has been taken to informally resolve personal trouble; that a new person (Shona) has entered the collective and should accordingly be noted as being present at the allotment.¹⁵⁰

Although not in this instance, at times some conflict (Wagner-Pacifici and Hall: 182) arises at this final stage; public officials and allotment committees are at present under pressure to clear long waiting lists for allotment gardens.¹⁵¹ And, questions might be raised at the allotment about the worthiness of a gardener during deliberation(s) over whom should receive cooperation. Such as, in an instance of informal cooperation at one of the field sites, conflict arises regarding one gardener receiving assistance, because it is felt (by some) that this gardener's ill-health in later life has been exacerbated by alcohol consumption. Thus, again the intimacy of knowledge and connectedness within extreme localness, plus the public-private setting of the allotment, result in a monitoring and valuation of a gardener's

¹⁴⁹ Gilbert is acutely aware that he has three options: Participate in the outcome of informal voluntary cooperation (by sharing with someone he trusts). Or leave the social world entirely. Or ask public officials and allotment committees to halve his garden (which would mean losing his dearly beloved apple tree, cold frames, and a greenhouse). Gilbert did not wish to see his much-loved garden split into two after his many years of gardening there, nor did he wish to leave.

¹⁵⁰ Committee members do notice informal cooperation occurring prior to being informed, because they are practicing allotment gardening as contiguously as anyone else at the field sites and may even be involved in cooperation informally.

¹⁵¹ As an outcome, further layers of bureaucracy are in operation at the field sites (and commonplace in allotment gardening in Britain) as an attempt to balance intake to the allotment as "fair" and "based on merit", however, such measures are themselves the result of the "accumulated historic inequalities" of rationalization (Lamont *et al*, 2014: 591).

worthiness to remain in the collective. Counterweighing this valuation is, however, (as Margaret said in Chapter 4) valuation of longevity of presence in the collective; not expecting a gardener to leave simply because their garden is not meeting expectations (at present) after 50 years of meeting expectations at the allotment.

Meanwhile, the allotment gardeners I have previously described as encountering personal trouble, also benefit from informal voluntary social cooperation. Bruce, highly regarded in the locality for his allotment gardening skill, is asked to re-enter the allotment and collaborate with Ronnie, who is troubled by ill-health in later life; this is mutually beneficial to both bricoleurs because Bruce feels he too is not in good enough health to garden alone and so – again via social networks and trust – a problem is solved. Billy, however, does not need someone to share with, because bricoleurs in his friendship group cooperate to return his garden to the aesthetic he so desires; thus, Billy remains at the allotment too. Finally, Betty's problems with her feet and impending operation are eased when an allotment neighbour "sends" his son (who he has enskilled in allotment gardening) from his family's allotment garden to help her regularly, and so too Betty remains. Thus, the allotment is a site of informal voluntary social cooperation (Burawoy, 1979), via which the allotment gardening skill of those allotment gardeners who are considered valuable are retained in the collective.

I asked earlier about allotment gardeners who are prosocial; why do they enact social cooperation; do they receive rewards; what does this process do at the allotment? Gregg, who cooperated to re(assemble) Amelia and Hugh's greenhouse, has developed a reputation as a prosocial person at the allotment. By reputation, I mean a "set of judgments a community makes about the personal qualities of one of its members" (Emler, 1990: 171, *in* Simpson and Willer, 2015: 49). For instance, Gregg is frequently rewarded by being described by gardeners as "...he will do *anything* for *anyone*..." and there are a range of "reputational rewards" for prosocial actors in that they are likely to be trusted more and, thus, cooperated with even more, and actually become more influential (Simpson and Willer, 2015: 49). Thus, as an outcome of cooperating at the allotment, Gregg's reputation is enhanced, which increases his social connections in allotment gardening practice as a reliable and trusted gardener; he is often defined as "Gregg *obviously* is mates with everybody".

As an outcome of Gregg's social skill, cooperation, and subsequent enhanced reputation, the collective gains increased connectivity between gardeners and gains the repertoire of a socially skilled person. Some people are, however, more socially skilled than others, taking strategic action to cooperate and to induce cooperation in others (Fligstein, 2001: 106). In the instance of Gregg, this is a combination of empathy (see Simpson and Willer, 2015: 44) and his pre-retirement occupation in a role giving him access to a wider range of social networks than most men with working class characteristics.¹⁵² Gregg is retired and his wife cooks his meals and irons his shirts, hence, he certainly has time to cooperate. Yet Gregg is also deeply committed not only to cultivating "The Taste!" but also to growing flowers to enter into local competitions, which takes considerable skill and time. As such, Gregg presents as being as "busy" as any allotment gardener I encounter at the field sites during the fieldwork year.

So, I ask Gregg about social cooperation one day as he tends his pride and joy, the chrysanthemum flowers he exhibits in local shows; their large, brightly coloured, flower heads gently bobbing about in the warm breeze as we chat whilst he ties a twine here or prunes a stem there. He explains to me how, although not native to these localities, he can comfortably interact across divisions of age, gender, and social class, because the highly particular requirements of his occupation encouraged his development as a socially skilled actor. Also, he explains, a protracted period of hospitalisation changed his beliefs and understandings about people around him; even though Gregg has long recovered he can deeply relate to people encountering personal trouble. Accordingly, Gregg's prosocial actions are motivated by empathy and firmly underpinned by his social skill. Thus, social cooperation not only solves problems for gardeners encountering personal trouble, but also rewards prosocial people and produces greater connectivity within the collective. However, although I could sense connectedness brought about by social cooperation at the field sites, it was noticeable that not everyone was the subject of this help and support.

Returning arrival gifts: symmetrical reciprocity

Seeing newcomers arrive at the allotment and receiving gifts during their first few weeks, from those already present, could lull one into a false sense of security: the new arrival being

¹⁵² As noted in Chapter 4, men with working class characteristics tend to have weak social networks.

warmly welcomed into a collective via the bestowing of plants, seeds, and tools. But actually (as pointed out in Chapter 5), security can be thin on the ground at the allotment and gifts are not devoid of obligations (Pyyhtinen, 2014: 6; Llewellyn, 2011; Mauss, 1990 [1925]). However, woven into arrival gifts in allotment gardening practice is a firm expectation that newcomers will have skill in allotment gardening (or, at the very least, will enskill and do so quickly) and will reciprocate by presenting the normative-allotment-garden-aesthetic. But the way in which arrival gifts are presented – without any hint of expectation from the givers – can create an impression that there is little complexity in social cooperation at the allotment. Actually, the bestowing of gifts to new arrivals at the allotment is an instance of symmetrical reciprocity, meaning there is an expectation that the gift will be returned by some means or other (Sahlins, 2004 [1972]; Mauss, 1990 [1925]); that the newcomer will play the rules of the game (Bourdieu, 1990).

An instance of symmetrical reciprocity in allotment gardening practice is highlighted when Erin first arrives at Leontonby. She is gifted plants, seeds, and tools, by allotment gardeners and she tells me (with some pride) that she has “...been given odd [numerous] plants, you know, and bits of, you know, veg and stuff from the people that just, you know, just generous, just giving stuff.” However, I notice this gifting does not continue beyond the first few weeks of her arrival; at this stage, gardeners step back and largely leave her alone whilst monitoring her performance as she seeks to enskill. Through the week, whilst Erin is at work and the field site is empty of almost everyone but bricoleurs, I often notice gardeners standing at Erin’s fence and making a detailed examination of her progress. If I join a bricoleur, or someone on a day off from work, at Erin’s fence, I hear discourse about where she is doing well, where she is going wrong, along with an expressed expectation that she needs to “get a move on” with getting her garden “done”; she must present the normative-allotment-garden-aesthetic and *soon*.

Erin believes “...they’ve all been dead nice...” when talking about the arrival gifts she has received, but (as far as I am aware) she does not know her progress is being scrutinised when she is absent. Furthermore, she does not receive any more gifts until she has begun to present the aesthetic, after almost a year. However, Erin’s chats with Bernard along with her improvisation and experimentation (Gieser, 2008), eventually pay off: by late-summer she begins presenting the aesthetic and is able to take salad ingredients she has grown to

work for lunch (see Chapter 4). At this point she is interacted with more often, and offered seeds “for next year” by several gardeners (including bricoleurs) – a sure sign that she is meeting expectations, is now considered to be part of the collective, and is not going to be “thrown off”.

These findings about symmetrical reciprocity align with those of Ellen and Platten (2011: 575), who note that gift exchange at the allotment is strict, with distinctions made between gifting to newcomers and those who have been present at the allotment for longer. Novices who have not yet been legitimated are a key instance of gardeners who are not part of processes of informal voluntary social cooperation in allotment gardening practice; instead they are subject to symmetrical reciprocity without necessarily realising the implication of the gift (Mauss, 1990 [1925]). Clearly, some gardeners at the field sites are prosocial, initiating and undertaking social cooperation to enable (who they consider to be) valued gardeners to remain in the collective. However, the form of social cooperation that I have illustrated earlier – via the enacting of informal voluntary social cooperation (Burawoy, 1979) to resolve personal troubles – does intersect with processes of valuation about who is (and is not) valuable at the allotment. In as much that informal voluntary social cooperation retains skilled practice within the collective and brings senses of belonging, it also further legitimates people who receive help, because they have been assessed as valuable enough to receive help.

“It takes a village to grow a giant-leek”

Watering for another leekman

It is June and Mack the leekman is furious, *really* furious. “It’s just not on!” he seethes, the source of Mack’s displeasure being two leekmen at the allotment. It is now Friday and they haven’t been since *Monday*. It is a “convention” of joint activities (Becker, 2008 [1982]: 41) at the field sites that leekmen garden together, enskilling one another and sharing tasks to grow their giant-leeks. Leekmen rarely grow alone, instead they visit one another at their allotment gardens and – unlike the enskilling of allotment gardening discussed in Chapter 4 – a master-apprenticeship role is performed in giant-leek growing that is initiated at the leek-club and practiced in the greenhouse and polytunnel.¹⁵³ These conventions “provide

¹⁵³ Leekmen are expected to join a local leek-club. These are affiliated to (and meet at) either a social club or pub; this is also the venue for that leek-club’s annual leek-show, in which that leek-club’s members compete

the basis" (*ibid.*: 42) for leekmen to cooperate to produce prize-winners. Indeed, such is the extent of cooperation amongst leekmen, it has taken me several perplexing months to understand exactly which leekman has which specific allotment garden at the field sites because leekmen constantly move between (and garden upon) one another's.

But, five days of not visiting your own giant-leeks is an eternity; making time daily is an absolute for this skilled practice. However, if a leekman does need to be absent, then there is always another leekman to rely upon; watering, ventilating, plus diligently checking each giant-leek for signs of trouble. No one else can be trusted, forget about skilled allotment gardeners – they simply do not have sufficient skill – only a leekman will do. This is a skilled practice which also happens to incur an economic cost of several thousand pounds per annum per leekman and which is impossible to recoup in prizes. You might be up against him at the leek-show, but you will also cooperate with another leekman to ensure his giant-leeks actually *get* to the leek-show so that you have a leek-show to be in. However, tending another man's giant-leeks adds considerable time onto a leekman's day; Mack and the leekmen at this field site have now been caring for these absent leekmens' giant-leeks for five consecutive days. Mack sighs, telling me that one of these leekmen "has bad legs", meaning he is troubled by ill-health. But, Mack goes on to tell me, the other leekman cannot be excused at all because he has no excuse, "...*in fact*- they're showing themselves up, they're letting everyone else down...".

Mack is a leekman, he cultivates leek plants to a size, shape, colour, and appearance, that is socially distinct from leek plants grown at the allotment (and in commercial cultivation) for human consumption in Britain. As mentioned in Chapter 1, in amongst the plants grown for "The Taste!" at the field sites, are organised competitive practices that are distinct to allotment gardening practice in these localities, as well as some others in Britain. In this final section of the chapter, I focus on one aspect of organised competition in allotment

against one another. This is the most commonplace form of giant-leek competition in these localities; to join a leek-club affiliated to a social club, a leekman must be(come) a member of that social club. Accordingly, it has been nigh on impossible for women to participate in giant-leek growing, because of the strong role of (historically gendered) social clubs and pubs in this practice. Accordingly, leek-clubs in this locality are closely associated with social clubs and pubs, drinking alcohol, gendered lives, and extreme localness. A man may join as many leek-clubs as he wishes and there is (some) mobility of leekmen between leek-clubs over time.

gardening; the cultivation of giant-leeks for prizes.¹⁵⁴ This skilled practice is illustrative of the vibrant, vital, and dynamic local experiences and forms of meaning that have remained constant throughout post-industrial social transformations in these locales. However, flowing through giant-leek growing is a form of social interaction that is not usually present within competition: social cooperation. Whilst informal competition also occurs at the field sites,¹⁵⁵ the notable difference here is that giant-leek growing is organised competition. As I discussed in Chapter 2, although competition can corrode social cooperation, actually, mutual cooperation and competition *are* able to combine via “joint activities” (Becker; 2008 [1982]).

It is social cooperation amongst leekmen that actually enables leek-shows and, thus, permits the practice to take place year-on-year. Furthermore, this form of social cooperation extends beyond the allotment and into the localities in which the field sites are situated; in domestic worlds, social clubs and pubs, and other parts of town including the Town Hall. As such, this form of social cooperation in allotment gardening (undertaken to produce giant-leeks) aligns with Becker’s (2008 [1982]) idea of “joint activities” which, as I discussed in Chapter 2, involves people working collectively to produce something they value. Thus, it takes more than just one leekman to grow a giant-leek, actually, via the resources and pool of people (Becker, *ibid.*: 92) that contribute to this skilled practice “it takes village to grow a giant-leek”.

Social life at the allotment, at the leek-club, and out and about in the town, is drawn upon here to illustrate the conventions, resources, and distribution networks (Becker, 2008 [1982]), in place to produce the value of giant-leeks collectively.¹⁵⁶ However, also flowing

¹⁵⁴ Leekmen at the field sites are members of leek-clubs which award cash prizes. This was not always the case, however, and it is recalled that (what were at that time very expensive) household goods, such as freezers and TVs, or shopping vouchers, were awarded as prizes in the 1970s. Dennis has fond memories of his (then young) children running around the stage at the end of a leek-show, excitedly looking for the white-goods he had won. Sean, however, does not share this glee, recalling that as a child “...how well my Dad done in the leek show would d-determine how well dressed I was [chuckles]...”, meaning that in the financially-strapped household of Sean’s childhood, his father was “...fanatical...” about giant-leeks to the extent that his children went without some everyday essentials.

¹⁵⁵ Such as who has grown the first tomato or strawberry of the year, or who has the tallest sunflower.

¹⁵⁶ I stress that I was present only at the field sites; my arguments here about joint activities external to the allotment (leek-club, domestic world, pubs and social clubs and so on) are based upon my detailed interactions with leekmen at the field sites. I am able to assert confidence in this data because of my previous work with allotment gardens (in which I *always* included leekmen) and my own relatedness to the locales in which this study was undertaken.

through these joint activities are the social processes at the allotment that have become familiar in this thesis; interconnections of processes of skill and enskillment, ability to make time and practice allotment gardening, and valuation. And, as with Mack's absent leekmen, there are conflicts and uncertainties affecting this skilled practice that affect everyone at the allotment. Thus, as well as explaining the process of social cooperation via joint activities (*ibid.*) to produce prize-winning giant-leeks, I also explore these tensions; how they work, what they do, and what the consequences are for the allotment. Although, as I mentioned in Chapter 2, some accounts of social cooperation have been criticised (see Vail and Hollands, 2012: 4) for relying on Becker's (2008 [1982]; 1974) idea of "joint activities", actually, competitive giant-leek growing in allotment gardening practice provides useful insight into certain nuances of joint activities and which are illustrated in the following sections.

I don't really want to eat that

Mack goes on to remind me that – along with careful genetic selection – it is actually a very strict watering routine that is key to the skilled practice of growing giant-leeks.¹⁵⁷ Indeed, he is anxious (as well as furious) today, because he believes his own carefully selected giant-leeks need to be watered at their usual time, otherwise their routine will be upset. Mack concludes that "...in a way..." it's not that he *minds* watering other men's giant-leeks, it's just that he won't be watering them in the same way as they do, or at the same time of day, thus, *all* the giant-leeks will be out of their routine. This is a very particular mode of routine, akin to raising a child within strict norms of intensely laboured monitoring, regularity, and routine, and highlights the way in which humans seek to forge both people and plants around them into what they want them to be (Hallam and Ingold, 2014: 3; Degnen, 2009). Thus, the type of care given to growing plants generally, but giant-leeks in particular, serves arguably to blur certainties around ontological boundaries between people and plants in the West (Degnen, 2009). Mack throws his arms in the air, as he walks away to find Neil, "they could all borst [burst]!" he exclaims, before finally yelling back to me "it's all in the

¹⁵⁷ Year-on-year, each leekman selects, grows, and maintains, his (living) stock of vegetatively-propagated giant-leeks (that is, from cuttings), the result of his skill and investment in the practice; it is this stock that he relies upon to restock with giant-leeks year after year. It is commonplace for (only) very experienced leekmen to sell cuttings and seeds from *prize-winning* giant-leeks to other leekmen, in order to fund their practice. Later I discuss why a leekman "never gets his money back", but for now I note that selling giant-leek cuttings is a tiny and rare instance of economic exchange and intrusion of the market in allotment gardening practice. Marty explains that should these cuttings grow on into prize winners, the buyers "...come back year after year after year. Some of them bring us [me] presents cos they've won things... ...normally a box of cigars, normally."

watering!”¹⁵⁸ Mack thus echoes what every other leekman has rammed home to me throughout the fieldwork year: watering, that is what giant-leeks are all about.¹⁵⁹

Yet, these very acts of (and commitments to) the finely-honed practice of growing giant-leeks create uncertainties, social distinctions, and some conflict at the allotment. For instance, Beverley is exasperated by the entire practice:

“I can’t think of anything wor- *anything* worse than having blooming leek-trenches and growing these great big things just to get something as big as you possibly can. Whaaat’s the point? [pauses] *Honestly*. [pauses] I grow things to eat, not to [pauses] expand out of all proportion...”¹⁶⁰

Still, Beverley is also good friends with neighbouring leekmen, puts labour into maintaining this relationship, and regularly seeks their advice on allotment gardening practice. Many other allotment gardeners, particularly women of all social classes and ages but likewise men too, find the practice of giant-leek growing and showing to be exasperatingly socially different and distant to producing “The Taste!”, yet maintain friendly and tolerant relations with the leekmen; once again, skill has currency in allotment gardening practice.

However, the role of social skill (Fligstein, 2001) can also be seen operating in the way in which the currency of the skill of leekmen is distributed amongst the collective. For instance, Mack’s social skill has culminated in him becoming a group leader for the leekmen at his field site, and a go-between in social interactions amongst the leekmen group and everybody else there in the process of enskillment to produce “The Taste!” and to reproduce the social world. The leekmen regard Mack as a master giant-leek grower and seek his advice on giant-leek growing and how to solve their life problems. Pretty much everyone else approaches Mack for advice on allotment gardening practice and awaits his direction (and an introduction) regarding which particular leekman might be the source of the best advice. Marjorie – a middle class committee member – is not always confident about

¹⁵⁸ “Borst” means a giant-leek enters the flowering stage of its reproductive cycle, for instance, through lack of water and/or decreasing light-levels. Competition rules stipulate giant-leeks cannot be shown in the flowering stage.

¹⁵⁹ “You’ve got to be able to give them the water the same time every day, the same amount, the lot. Rain, hail, or snow, got to keep your routine gannin’ [going] that’s what wins shows...” Marty repeatedly tells me. All of the leekmen at the field sites share this belief, adhering to rigid watering routines.

¹⁶⁰ “Blooming”, a slang word, used as an intensifier in everyday discourse.

interacting with leekmen, because they are socially different to her, and so she finds Mack resourceful in shuttling messages back and forth.¹⁶¹ Hence, Mack is not only a prize-winning leekman but, like Gregg, is an example of a prosocial (Simpson and Willer, 2015), socially skilled allotment gardener (Fligstein, 2001). The outcome is a retention of allotment gardening skill (which Barthel *et al* (2010) refer to as *social ecological memory*) and smooth social relations in the collective.

But, particularly for those who arrived at the allotment on the breeze of demographic transformations, the practice of giant-leeks courses with uncertainties. Notably, in addition to not caring for the practice, newer arrivals have heard rumours that persist (both at the allotment and in the locality) that leekmen are the holders of secret recipes. It is believed these recipes are for fertilizers, which leekmen feed to leeks to transform their size into giant-leeks. For instance, Beverley believes her leekman neighbour Chip (a leekman age mid-sixties) wins competitions “...because he has his secret recipe”.¹⁶² And it is the unknown contents of these secret recipes that cause so much concern.

An instance of concern about secret recipes for growing giant-leeks is Laura, who is gifted a giant-leek at the end of giant-leek competition season (in September) by a leekman gardening near to her. At first she was pleased, thinking “...and it was like, ‘*Oh I could make a nice leek and potato soup...*’” but her mood quickly changed when she remembered the secret recipes, telling me “...so I was like ‘*oh actually, I don’t really want to eat that*’.” Asking her why, Laura told me she believes giant-leeks are fertilized with “loads of chemicals” to encourage growth to gigantic proportions and that she did not want to consume these chemicals via eating the giant-leek. So, Laura did not cook the gift and instead she took the giant-leek home and composted it in her home garden, out of sight of the leekman.

Thus, ideas of holding secret recipes undoubtedly adds to the reproduction of leekmen’s status at the allotment (and in the locality) as the most skilled of all allotment gardeners; this does much to reproduce the iconic status of giant-leek growing in the north east of England.

¹⁶¹ I have chosen not to give Marjorie’s age as that may reveal her identity.

¹⁶² Leekmen categorically deny the existence of secret recipes. Marty, for instance, states secret recipes are a “load of rubbish it is... ..breeding beats feeding!”, whilst Smithy (a leekman age late-forties) explains some newcomers to giant-leek growing “...think there’s a magic bottle and, sorry, the magic bottle doesn’t- *doesn’t* exist.” Instead, leekmen insist (and demonstrated to me) that the skill behind a prize-winning giant-leek is careful selection of genetics and regular watering to prevent giant-leeks from bursting.

However, these ideas also cause some anxious concerns at the allotment for people not skilled in the practice and who do not care much for the practice in the first instance. But, as I discuss later, there is a tradition (amongst leekmen in these localities) of distributing giant-leeks at the end of competition season to make into broth to eat and share. By not consuming the gifted giant-leek and reporting back to the leekman on “The Taste!” of it, Laura has (unknowingly) rejected a tradition.

Resourcing the leek-club

Bruce has retired from growing and showing giant-leeks. Like many retired leekmen his pension from paid employment turned out to be insufficient to financially support the several thousand pounds per year required to grow giant-leeks, and be a member of a leek-club. Hence, like all joint activities, growing and showing giant-leeks requires resources (Becker, 2008 [1982]: 69). For instance, growing a prize-winning giant-leek requires a place to grow that is not precarious;¹⁶³ laboratory soil testing; expensive sundries such as specialized composts and fungicides;¹⁶⁴ fuel and a heating system to cultivate giant-leeks at a regulated warm temperature to encourage steady growth. Leekmen at all field sites explain that, even if he grows a winner, a leekman “never gets his money back”, meaning that the cost of growing giant-leeks is unsustainable. To be shown in a competition, however, a giant-leek not only requires money, but also resources of time, social skill (Fligstein, 2001), and intimate knowledge of local and regional social networks; a venue in which to be shown; promotional materials and access to journalists; access to local civic dignitaries; and a bureaucratic federal system that provides judges to award points that mean prizes.

Crucially, however, *money* is a key resource for showing a giant-leek and it is the leek-club that provides the organizational structure, via which all of these resources can be mobilized (Becker, 2008 [1982]: 69). Clearly, this is a very different valuation process to that of producing “The Taste!”. For instance, Morris is devalued for spending money on polytunnels and greenhouses for growing “The Taste!” (see Chapter 5), yet leekmen are legitimated for investing thousands of pounds into growing giant-leeks for competitions. So, whilst the

¹⁶³ Uprooting and moving giant-leeks encourages “borsting”; the preparation of soil for giant-leeks is detailed, complex, expensive, and can take many years to meet a leekman’s satisfaction.

¹⁶⁴ Leekmen at the field sites tend to purchase these (at times, expensive) sundries from allotment shops that have come to specialise in giant-leek sundries and, hence, these particular allotment shops are a hub for the crack amongst leekmen.

allotment provides a place to grow giant-leeks cooperatively, it is to the leek-club that leekmen go to socialise, enskill one another, and connect with locales external to the allotment, in further processes of joint activities that ensure the reproduction of annual leek-shows. Thus, the leek-club is the hub of giant-leek-related joint activities; it is from whence the arm of giant-leek growing and showing extends beyond the allotment and deep into surrounding localities (and the social imaginary) via chains of social networks. I remind the reader that within these localities are settings of intense localness, with strong senses of shared histories, traditions, and intimate and finely-detailed knowledge of one another's life biographies (Degnen, 2013: 554). Indeed, as part of these processes, people constantly seek connections to one another, at home, at work, at the allotment, and in the leek-club. Thus, it must be understood that it is within this setting, of complex enduring and historical social networks, that leek-clubs meet and put on leek-shows.

Over a cup of tea one afternoon, after Ronnie has gone home for his dinner, Bruce patiently guides me through the process of being in a leek-club.¹⁶⁵ At the leek-club, a leekman must meet expectations, which are to get involved in organising and publicising the annual leek-club show; take turns in raising money for the annual show; recruit new members; and drink as much alcohol as is possible whilst participating in an organised meeting. Accordingly, being a member of a leek-club requires forms of cooperation and access to chains of social networks. However, as well as socialising together in this way, *always* over pints of beer, the leek-club is an opportunity to enskill one another and newcomers in the skilled practice of giant-leek growing, and to transfer precious giant-leek cuttings between leekmen.

Newcomers to leek-clubs (although now rare) are mentored by an experienced member and, thus, giant-leek growing has a formalised master-apprentice relationship at its core, in which skills and plant material are transferred between members. Markedly, unlike the allotment (which does not have a formal master-apprentice relationship, see Chapter 4), leek-clubs are "communities of practice" (Wenger, 1998; Lave and Wenger, 1991) in which there is legitimated peripheral participation (Lave and Wenger, 1991). For instance, several less-experienced leekmen at the field sites were paired with an experienced leekman gardening nearby. Those currently without an apprentice were ever-ready, should there be plentiful

¹⁶⁵ Dinner: a (broadly) British working class meal designation as a meal taken in the middle of the day; tea eaten in early evening; supper being a snack before bed (Edwards, 2000: 5).

candidates. Marty explains keenly "I'll share *everything* I know with everybody... ..I'm happy to help anybody who wants [to start] growing [giant-leeks]". But, he and the rest of the leekmen are only too aware that the practice is in decline. Marty sums-up the general feeling amongst leekmen that it is "...the same with [racing] pigeons, the whippet racing, the lot's all- there's no young ones want to do it nowadays." Thus, the numbers of members at leek-clubs are steadily decreasing and fewer pubs and social clubs have a leek-club at all. However, the practice endures.

As it is a hot afternoon, Bruce and I sit outside in the shade of the shed that Chuck barged into weeks earlier, whilst Bruce moves on to talking me through the "pool" of people in the locality who tolerate and support the activities of the leek-club; emotionally, socially, financially, and politically (Becker, 2008 [1982]: 92). Throughout the year, leek-club members are expected to attend regular leek-club meetings, in addition to the extended periods of time spent at the allotment growing giant-leeks. Thus, in the first instance, it is the wife of a leekman who is actually the greatest supporter of the practice within the pool. For instance, leekmen aim to organise some meetings of the leek-club at times that aid the avoidance of certain household tasks, such as "special" meetings on Sunday mornings to avoid participating in cooking a "Sunday dinner" at home. Bruce would inform his wife "'I've got to gan to the meetin' y'na'" [you know]...yeah that- that was your excuses anyway! Aye [laughs]."

But, by show time in late-September, the leek-club must have accumulated sufficient money to award prizes in its forthcoming annual leek-show and this costs money as well as emotional support at home. In order to raise this money, members pay "subs" (membership fees) and organise and take part in raffles and buying game (gambling) cards; accordingly, a proportion of leek-club funds are contributed as a resource from members own wallets (and, hence, from their household). However, Bruce explains, in order to raise "serious money" [large amounts], members take turns (via a rota) at going out and about in the locality to sell raffle tickets and game cards to all and sundry: family, friends, colleagues (if not yet retired) and people drinking, working, and performing, in pubs and social clubs. Thus, people with strong, weak, and nil connections, to giant-leeks actually contribute financially to keep the leek-club (and its leek-show) going.

Meanwhile, labour is undertaken by the leek-club Secretary to acquire voluntary cooperation via resources from the pool; via chains of social networks that are actually somewhat strong, considering that men with working class characteristics are usually regarded by sociologists as having weak social networks. Shops, pubs, social clubs, and community centres, for instance, agree to place publicity posters prominently in windows. Friends and neighbours at home, and bricoleurs at the allotment, make promises to come along to the leek-show. RSVPs are returned to the leek-club in response to leek-show invitations distributed to local civic dignitaries (such as the ceremonial Mayor), local journalists, and TV crews. Schools return phone calls and agree to a post-leek-show visit by leekmen and their giant-leeks to educate pupils about the practice. And the (by now) stressed-out leek-club Secretary completes and submits administrative paperwork to governing bodies, crossing his fingers that the judge sent in return will be kind and fair. And whilst this pool of socially varied people engages in these joint activities voluntarily and without incentives, leekmen are under individual pressure. For they must grow sufficient giant-leeks of quality and standard to enter into the leek-club's own show, and other types of show in the locality that catches a leekman's eye as worth entering. These include, for instance, civic "vegetable and flower" shows organised by local councils.¹⁶⁶ But also the most challenging of all, "The Open" competitions into which only the most skilled (and regular prize-winning) leekmen enter and at which World Records are challenged and broken.¹⁶⁷ However, it is the leek-club show that is the most common-place type of show in the north east of England, entered into by leekmen at the field-sites, and contributed to as a joint activity by a wide-ranging pool of people in these locales.

In September, a distinct change in mood at the field sites can be sensed, for instance (as I mentioned in Chapter 5) growers of "The Taste!" are relaxing as the growing season draws to a close. However, for leekmen (and their social connections) it is "show time", a period of intense joint activities (and some anxieties) as leeks are selected (or rejected), prepared,

¹⁶⁶ Civic shows are not merely for giant-leeks, they have categories for fruits, vegetables, and flowers, grown at the allotment and in home gardens. However, in these locales there are *always* categories for giant-leeks, which are given the most prominent position in civic shows' spatial hierarchy and publicity material. It is commonplace for local civic dignitaries to be photographed with the winning leekmen and their giant-leeks, later to appear in local media (see e.g. Shields Gazette, 2015). Thus, giant-leeks are a central and enduring component of local State organised shows.

¹⁶⁷ I have chosen not to name any leekmen who enter "The Open" competitions, nor to allude further to these shows. The leek-growing circuit is so very small that individual leekmen might easily be identified should I do so.

transported, and shown in competitions. It is also a period of celebration and reminiscence, for allotment gardeners who have been raised in these localities. Leek-shows past are recalled and, after this year's shows, comparisons are made between this year's winners and those of years previously. Billy, for instance, has a spring in his step during this period, seems less unwell, and is more cheerful in his demeanour and even whistles a brisk tune. Although he has never been a leekman, Billy looks forward to attending as many leek-shows as possible and provides a steady stream of information on winners and who he believes ought to have won, as well as his thoughts on the quality of the beer on sale and who was the most drunken. However, this year there was a clear winner at his most local of leek-shows, he tells me and Lecky as we have a cup of tea together on the final day of my fieldwork. Frank Parsons (a leekman age estimated to be age-early sixties), had entered a giant-leek that "...simply outstretched everybody else's in terms of size" and so he had won outright, fair and square. Billy tells us this with a finality that suggests any other opinion will not be accepted.

Interestingly, however, this interaction with Billy and Lecky is actually flooded less with detail of winners and losers at the leek-show and more about what happens to giant-leeks afterwards. Thus, beginning to reveal clues as to why Laura was expected to have eaten the giant-leek she was gifted *and* explaining why giant-leeks are socially distant from newer arrivals at the allotment. Billy ribs Lecky about how much broth made from giant-leeks he ate in the social club after the leek-show, "...you must be so full of The Broth you're ready to burst!" he jibes. Lecky protests loudly and jokingly, blurting out that actually he only had one small bowl of The Broth, to which Billy retorts that "...of course Lecky wouldn't have been able to enjoy himself because he was there with his wife!" In alluding to this meal made from giant-leeks, Billy and Lecky discuss a tradition in these localities called The Broth.

Bruce also gets excited about The Broth and explains to me that after the "...one continuous drinking session from the Friday afternoon to Monday..." that was the annual leek-show in the "heydays",¹⁶⁸ the women made The Broth. What Bruce is describing is that, after the leek-show, leekmen were expected to donate two giant-leeks, one to a charity auction and

¹⁶⁸ This is generally agreed to be the 1970s.

the other to The Broth.¹⁶⁹ The wives and daughters of leekmen then cooked a soup (The Broth), which was freely distributed in the locale along with buttered bread to mop it up with; this is a form of reciprocity with the pool (Becker, 2008 [1992]). Although The Broth is now (like leek-shows) a greatly reduced feature of social life in these localities, the memory of it is very strong in people who have experienced it, and its narrative cherished and reproduced as exceedingly valuable. However, leekmen do continue to give away their giant-leeks at the end of the show, along with any giant-leeks not selected to show. To be given a giant-leek is a friendly gesture, one that symbolises kindness and belonging (affiliation) in these localities and symbolises the deep and enduring senses of vibrant, vital, and dynamic, local experiences and forms of meaning that have remained constant throughout post-industrial social transformations. However, via her lack of familiarity with, and social distance from, the practice of competitive giant-leek growing and its traditions, and expectations, Laura is not able to reciprocate nor recognise its significance. Nor did any newer arrivals to the allotment attend leek-shows. All but bricoleurs attended, returning with stories of giant-leeks winning local and world records. Yet all who participate in allotment gardening practice at the field sites benefit from the skilled knowledge of the leekmen who garden around them at the allotment

A wide variety of people in the locality support and provide resources in order for the reproduction of giant-leeks to occur year-on-year. Indeed, via the inclusion of giant-leeks in civic shows (which the local tax payer subsidises) even local government approves of this skilled practice, and makes a contribution. Thus, *it takes a village to grow and show giant-leeks*. And via The Broth, auctions and gifting of giant-leeks, there is a symbolic reciprocation to the community. The vegetable that is the giant-leek has value accorded to it by the leekmen who grow them, by some allotment gardeners, and by some people external to the allotment. In doing so, the giant-leek accumulates symbolic capital, not only for the leekmen who grow them, but also for the allotment site it was grown on and that of the specific locality it was grown in. Via this process of valuation, this rare instance of entering into economic markets at the allotment is legitimated, whilst gardeners such as Morris are considered unworthy because they spend money on producing “The Taste!”. The

¹⁶⁹ Giant-leeks are symbolically returned to the community when they are auctioned at the leek-show venue when the show ends; proceeds are given to “the nearest old peoples’ home or some kind of charity...” explains Bruce.

notion of leekmen as the alchemists of the allotment, holding “secret recipes”, does much labour to form this capital and circuit of valuation. However, the allotment is becoming socially distant to giant-leek growing, its competitions, traditions and practices, as newer allotment gardeners arrive who have no experience of the practice, or its deeply embedded histories in the localities in which this study was undertaken.

Conclusion: The engine house of the allotment

It is clear, from the evidence I have provided, that social cooperation is the engine house of the allotment and is the key social process that produces (and reproduces) the social world of allotment gardens, via intersections with skill and valuation. Allotment gardeners can be prosocial towards those gardening around them and, furthermore, use social skill to induce cooperation in the collective. Indeed, it is apparent that social cooperation is actually a commonplace and everyday feature of social life in amongst the tomatoes, giant-leeks, polytunnels, and sheds. However, social cooperation and the forms it takes, along with the ways in which people trust and interact with one another (and their specific practices) are densely mingled with skill and enskillment, valuation, time and ability to practice, along with the reproduction of practices and traditions that mark out the localities in which this study was undertaken. And, yet again, newly arrived novices can be understood as losing out at the allotment, because they must first become legitimated (via performing the normative-allotment-garden-aesthetic) before they can benefit from social cooperation. This situation is in addition to their anxious struggles to enskill without a formal master-apprentice relationship whilst, at risk of being “thrown off” if they do not meet expectations.

Accordingly, social cooperation at the allotment can be blushed with some uncertainties, misunderstandings, and conflicts, which one would anticipate in a collective of people from a variety of backgrounds and understandings. Hence, those who require support in order to continue practicing allotment gardening are situated within processes of valuation. These processes not only have a lot to do with the allotment – such as making time and ability to practice – but also to do with everyday life beyond the allotment in localities in which extreme localness necessitates that characteristics of a person’s everyday comings and goings (such as drinking alcohol) are known about and included in decisions about whether someone gets a hand with watering their tomatoes and lettuces. Thus, social cooperation at the allotment is pervaded by expectations of how one should be and act as an allotment

gardener. Such findings provoke new research questions about gardening and citizenship, in contemporary Britain and, thus, allotment gardening is ripe for further sociological analysis.

I ask again who is a “proper” (authentic) allotment gardener? I do so because these instances of social cooperation add to the evidence I have presented (in earlier chapters) about who actually does the gardening on each individual allotment garden at the field sites and, thus, who is authentic. For instance, many, many, people contributed towards producing Amelia and Hugh’s tomatoes in the greenhouse that Gregg (re)assembled for the couple. And Ronnie and Gilbert – who each hold a tenancy agreement – now garden collaboratively with a second person each, though these people (Bruce and Shona) are devalued to “helpers” (see Chapter 5) rather than being identified as allotment gardeners. Whilst Billy, for instance, has three bricoleurs regularly gardening on what he always refers to as “my garden”, he rests in a chair and watches (and gives directions) and cracks on with them; but actually Billy did very little gardening at all during the fieldwork. And day in, day out, the leekmen collaboratively grow their giant-leeks together, forever wandering in and out of each others polytunnels and greenhouses. As such, when analysing social cooperation at the allotment, it is possible to see the collective at the allotment in operation as a *community of allotment gardeners*, rather than as a collective of individuals from a variety of backgrounds and understandings each cultivating their patch of soil on their own and without the cooperation of allotment neighbours. Thus, this evidence suggests that allotment gardens are a site of collective activity and should not be regarded as single autonomous plots of land gardened upon by individuals; this evidence builds upon my assertion in Chapter 5 that allotment gardens are “peculiar goods” (Fourcade, 2011).

I have explained that sociologists seldom study social cooperation, however, these findings illustrate that the oft-assumed binary between competition and social cooperation does not always hold true; following Becker (2008 [1982]; 1974) I have described the methods by which the process of organised competition is pervaded by social cooperation via joint activities. Analysis of conflict and competition are so very commonplace in sociology, yet this data illustrates that the oft-referred to binary between competition and social cooperation does have exceptions. Furthermore, that this exception is actually possible within a social world populated by people from a variety of social backgrounds and understandings. Accordingly, I suggest these findings are not only significant for sociologists

with an interest in allotment gardening or social cooperation, but also for sociologists with an interest in conflict and competition.

Chapter 7. Closing the garden gate

And the winner of the “Tidiest Plot Competition” is...

Towards the end of my fieldwork year, public officials from the Town Hall pay a visit to a field site to judge the aesthetic of the allotment gardens entered into the “tidiest plot competition”.¹⁷⁰ After inspecting the entries, winners are announced later by a communication from the local council to the allotment committee. And, one of the winners is Pete, who is delighted to learn that his normative-allotment-garden-aesthetic, with its neat and tidy rows of vegetables growing in finely sieved soil, has been judged to be one of the “tidiest” at the allotment. Betty is reflecting upon Pete’s success a few days later, as we sit in her shed and catch-up over a cuppa. She looks downwards as she over-stirs her tea, telling me firmly that Pete *deserved* to win because he had put a lot of *work* into his allotment garden. Betty and I both know that she has told me (in Chapter 5) she believes the tidiest plot competition is unfairly skewed in favour of allotment gardeners like Pete – who not only have skill (which Betty has too) but also time and ability to practice (which Betty does not) – but she will not be drawn on this topic now, only repeating that she is pleased for Pete. Her legitimation today of Pete and allotment gardeners like him, their labour, and their allotment garden aesthetic, does much to reproduce the social world of allotment gardens. Meanwhile across the field sites, allotment gardeners begin their final harvesting and plan what to cultivate next year to produce “The Taste!”, whilst leekmen recover from the ardours of competition season and begin the process of selecting plant material for growing next year’s winners. Accordingly, the social world of allotment gardens is reproduced, seasonally and year upon calendar year at the field sites, through the intersection of the social processes of skill, valuation, and social cooperation.

Through the avenue of participant observation with allotment gardeners, such as Betty and Pete, I have explained the means by which the social processes of skill, valuation, and social cooperation, interweave to reproduce this distinct social world. In this, the final chapter of the thesis, these findings are drawn to a close through a discussion of four areas that I particularly wish to draw the reader’s attention to. Firstly, I take stock of the three social processes in allotment gardening practice that are the conceptual concern of the thesis.

¹⁷⁰ I am not present when this visit occurs; this is not a conscious decision, I happen to be at another field site that day.

Secondly, I explain why and how the adoption of a relational and processual sociological approach has been important to the thesis. Thirdly, I consider what next for allotment gardening practice and its reproduction. Finally, I ask if the allotment (and its supporters) are ready to hear about these research findings, considering the incidence of negative feedback to some social science researchers who have analysed gardens and gardening.

Taking stock of skill, valuation, and social cooperation

Clearly, the social processes of skill, valuation, and social cooperation, are present in and central to the allotment. And, although findings from ethnographic research cannot necessarily be generalised, the findings from the field sites in this thesis do reveal social processes that can shed light upon other settings (Jerolmack, 2013: 19). So, whilst we cannot know exactly how these social processes connect on other allotment garden sites in different locales, these social processes will most certainly be present in allotment gardening practice beyond the field sites in this thesis. Indeed, that social processes are always fluctuating in the first instance makes for difficulty in predicting how they might intersect elsewhere in allotment gardening practice and beyond (Liston, 2011: 172).

When taking stock of these social process – using skill as a point of departure – it is evident that skill is as active in informal life as in the formalised settings of the skilled practices of glassblowing (O'Connor, 2007) and professional ballet (*e.g.* Wainwright and Turner, 2006) discussed in Chapter 2. However, skill clearly operates somewhat differently when the formal (institutionalized) enskillment process of socially situated peripheral learning (Wenger, 1998) is not present. For instance, Erin's enskillment became inhibited without a formal master to novice (apprenticeship) relationship, whilst O'Connor's (2007) skill in glassblowing increased in a master to novice relationship. In as much, skill has an entirely different complexion when the formal is removed, with more uncertainty and anxiety flowing through the process of coming to know, and is far more dependent upon the social skill (Fligstein, 2001) of both the novice and those who are able to instruct her via social cooperation.

However, what the informal setting of the allotment really brings to the fore are the moments of intersection that make and shape cooperation. For instance, the point of intersection of skill and valuation, such as when Erin legitimises Bernard as a skilled

allotment gardener because of the presentation of his carrots. But also Marty (and other gardeners') demarcation of new arrivals to the allotment as incompetent and, thus, not valuable. It is the outcomes of such "moments of valuation" (Berthoin Antal *et al*, 2015) that culminate in allotment gardeners' decisions about whether to participate in cooperation or not. In this respect, it is in these fleeting instances that the process of valuation, which is often so ubiquitously and cloyingly intermingled with other social processes in everyday social life, can be isolated as a unique and dynamic social process. This reveals that valuation not only canonises those who have skill, but is a determinant of which new arrivals will be privileged to become enskilled. Hence, if social cooperation is the engine of the allotment, then valuation is the social process that can light (or extinguish) the spark that fires up the starter motor.

Yet much of the process of valuation at the allotment comes about as a result of valuations made externally to the social world – such as regulation by local government within the expectations of the aesthetic – and do affect allotment gardening practice as much as the internal valuations by allotment gardeners; as I said in Chapter 2, social worlds overlap and are permeable (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012). Hence, although sociological accounts do discuss the dispositions and attributes considered valuable within a distinct social world (*e.g.* Allen-Collinson and Hockey, 2007: 388), actually, valuation in allotment gardening practice falls foul of what Centemeri (2015: 299) notes as the "unequal power of conflicting 'languages of valuation'". In this sense, however, there is also an opportunity for allotment gardening to become more pliable and ready for new modes of valuation based on the multiple performances it takes.

All of the intersections outlined above illuminate the dependency that skill (and particularly enskillment) has upon cooperation and social skill (Fligstein, 2001). This can be viewed in Erin and Bernard being able to get cooperation off the ground to begin her process of enskillment, but also in Gregg being able to recognise (and, henceforth, legitimate) Amelia and Hugh's skill (via their presentation of the normative-allotment-garden-aesthetic) and his ability as a socially skilled actor (*ibid.*) to begin cooperating with the couple. More usually, however, sociologists attend to skill and enskillment and valuation, via reference to inability to practice (*e.g.* Wainwright and Turner, 2006) or via embodied knowledge (O'Connor 2007). And while this is a useful and approach, in that it unveils valuation processes, a further

development in the conceptualisation of these ideas would be to study these processes in outermost instances of socially situated learning, where the safety net of formality is not present.

That I am able to pinpoint and isolate specific social processes and their moments of intersection, illustrates the strength of a relational, processual, approach in sociology. Adopting this framework has enabled what are constant and dynamic social phenomena to be analysed within their everyday setting, which a solely social interactionist approach for instance might not have gleaned. Social life is so very much more than the enactment of social interactions, it is also about the connections, networks, relations, and non-economic transactions, that people make through the avenue of social relations and interactions that inform sociologists about how life is made and shaped (Emirbayer, 2013; 1997). By framing this thesis within a relational and processual approach, I have taken advantage of being able to show, for instance, that social networks in allotment gardening practice have chains which branch like lightning bolts into surrounding locales, forming intricate patterns of social cooperation (Scott, 2002); such as, the social life of “The Taste!”; the acquisition of objects for bricolage; and that it takes a village to grow a giant-leek. The result of this approach is that I am able to share with the reader the impact of existing social relations and connections in formations of social cooperation, via intersections of skill and valuation. It is within the context of these research results that I suggest relational and processual approaches in sociology ought to be employed by sociologists in future accounts.

Proper allotment gardeners: future valuations

I have explained that, via valuation processes, tenant allotment gardeners are legitimated over allotment gardeners who have not signed a tenancy agreement, even though all of these people contribute to keep the social world going (*see* Chapter 5). It is clear to me now, having been privileged twice over to be deeply immersed in allotment gardening (via my previous role and this thesis), that there is something not quite balanced about this; it creates hierarchies of valuation in which tenants can be legitimated over allotment gardeners who garden collectively with them. This narrative has drifted (perhaps unintentionally) into some social science accounts of allotment gardening, where the focus is upon tenants only without mentioning who else might be present; family, friends, sharers, and their steady stream of visitors (*see* Chapter 3). This creates an impression to me that

seldom is any research undertaken into (or even acknowledgement of) who else might be present at the allotment and practicing allotment gardening there, and how much that methodological stance can affect what (and who) is actually being analysed in the first place (see e.g. Buckingham, 2005: 172, or Crouch, 2003: 19). Likewise, local councils represent allotment gardening via similar descriptions (of one tenant per allotment garden), as does the National Allotment Society and other gardening organisations, and various forms of media; only occasionally are references made to “family members” joining in allotment gardening practice.¹⁷¹ Accordingly, allotment gardening has come to be represented as individualized activity, rather than collective. But, as I have shown, more people are practicing allotment gardening at the field sites than just tenants; and I have explained allotment gardening as an intensely social practice that is quite unimaginable without social cooperation.

What is more, by reproducing this narrative of individualized practice, civil society groups seeking to promote and resource allotment gardening (to government and a raft of independent funders) risk obscuring one of allotment gardening’s assets: collective activity. I wonder if this is, at times, produced by anxieties about revealing that the various technical instruments, which (in some ways) protect allotment gardens, actually prevent this practice’s most valuable element being pushed to the fore? An outcome of this process is that other forms of collective gardening are legitimated (thus receiving scarce economic funding and land) at the expense of allotment gardening practice. This thesis suggests social scientists, studying allotment gardening, ensure their research design includes opportunity for *all* people practicing allotment gardening on allotment garden sites to be represented; otherwise there is a risk of rendering people invisible.

Cooperating to reproduce skilled practice

This thesis has illustrated some of the ways in which newly arrived novices can lose out at the allotment, because they must first become legitimated (through performing the normative-allotment-garden-aesthetic) before they can fully participate in social cooperation; and that this in itself can be a double-edged sword, because enskillment in allotment gardening is highly dependent upon social cooperation and social skill. And, whilst

¹⁷¹ Indeed, I can recognise that I too have been involved in this narrative and (prior to undertaking this thesis) have probably rendered some allotment gardeners invisible at national policy-making levels.

there are other situations in which the reproduction of the social world can be threatened (for instance, when unable to practice because of ill-health), it is actually the situation with novices that causes me most concern for the continued reproduction of this social world. If novices are unable to enskill and, instead, exit the social world shortly after arrival then two problems can be anticipated in years to come.

Firstly, a reduction in the allotment gardener population will render this social world vulnerable to reproduction into the future. Secondly, allotment gardening risks becoming a practice into which only those people who already have experience of gardening may enter and participate in. Such social closure (Parkin, 1982: 175) poses risks to the mobility of people needing (and wanting) to enskill in allotment gardening and will effectively close the allotment garden gates to everyone except those people already skilled in gardening. Erin may have finally grown her salad ingredients for her packed-lunch, but I reiterate that many newly arrived novices left during the fieldwork year because they simply did not know how to garden, did not have prior connections at the allotment, and struggled to get enskillment off the ground. This constant steady seepage creates vulnerabilities for this social world (and those beyond it who enjoy “The Taste!” and leek-shows), raising questions about how new forms of cooperation can be encouraged. Of course, skill, valuation, and cooperation, might well change or combine in new ways as allotment gardening is transformed again and again as people come and go through time. But most certainly, without changes to enskillment – an outermost instance of socially situated learning in this social world – allotment gardening practice does have potential to fold in on itself and cease to reproduce. This is the most important message of this thesis as the boom in the popularity of allotment gardens begins to decline in some areas (*see e.g.* Mackie, 2016).

Whether institutions could play a more conscious role in preventing the above is debatable; for instance, the National Allotment Society and its sister-charity (National Allotment Gardens Trust) have found a niche with matters relating to the rationalization and bureaucratisation of allotment gardening, and few gardening organisations have sufficient resources to provide sustained allotment gardening enskillment at local levels. Meanwhile, government has no requirement in law to provide anything other than land for allotment gardening and, furthermore, is withdrawing from “the sphere of social reproduction” to knit

more tightly into economies that place such responsibilities with individuals and communities (Dowling and Harvie, 2014: 870).

However, in recent years, a burgeoning number of allotment gardeners (both skilled and novices) have entered various forms of visual and social media, and enskilling one another is now becoming a component of these virtual social interactions. This is a very different format to terrestrial TV gardening programmes presented by “horticultural professionals”, or the formality of the gardening press in Britain. Sean Cameron (2017), for instance, hosts the “Horticultural Channel” via broadcasts on YouTube™ from his allotment shed along with women and men allotment gardener co-hosts.¹⁷² This indicates that some long established hierarchies of knowledge production in gardening are beginning to fold and reshape. Meanwhile on Twitter™, for instance, some allotment gardeners have developed friendship groups to the extent that face-to-face local connections, social interactions and relationships, have been initiated through visits to one another’s allotment gardens.¹⁷³

Whilst these two examples are very different to the forms of cooperation in allotment gardening I have explained in this thesis (and, of course, are not without incumbent issues around use of various forms of media) they do provide sustained social interaction (of a very particular form) and, perhaps, show indications of future imaginings of allotment gardening. However, will this virtual cooperation force a cleave into social relations at the allotment? Or, enable allotment gardeners from different allotment garden sites to be drawn together for social interaction? As illustrated here, allotment gardening is produced by a variety of layers of locally distinct practices, hence, social cooperation via social media could be a new layer merging and blending with existing practices at the allotment. Or, it might inadvertently homogenise the distinctiveness of these local practices. Thus, when this new layer is interwoven with the other new layers I have suggested in this thesis – for instance, the fading out of bricoleurs leading to emptier sites on weekdays (see Chapter 4) – how will allotment gardening practice actually operate in the future?

¹⁷² The Horticultural Channel (Cameron, 2017) is aimed towards (so-called) “amateur” gardeners practicing all forms of gardening and contains a strong allotment gardening element in its broadcasts; the channel has 20,954 subscribers and has had 3,679,828 views on YouTube™ (2015); there are a variety of similar YouTube™ Channels producing similar allotment gardening (and home gardening) programmes.

¹⁷³ From 2011-2015 I produced a Twitter news feed presenting news from around Britain about allotment gardening and am intrigued with the ways in which allotment gardeners interact via this this form of social media.

Is the allotment ready for social science research findings?

There are risks in research, to both research participants and researchers (*c.f.* Scheper-Hughes, 2001), and I have provided details about how I sought to protect allotment gardener research participants and myself during the undertaking of this thesis (*see* Chapter 3). However, researchers cannot predict how their findings will be considered by research participants, or more widely in the social imaginary. Even before I considered undertaking a postgraduate study of allotment gardening, I was aware that some social scientists have been highly criticised (to the point of ostracisation) by some circles within the “allotment movement” for their findings about allotment gardening practice. And, during my fieldwork year, the sociologist Ben Pitcher was subjected to high profile negative tabloid press attention (*see e.g.* Glennie, 2014), following his participation in a radio discussion about race and consumption which included discourse about gardening (Pitcher, 2014). That Ben Pitcher (*ibid.*) was able to explain, on national radio, that plant names in Britain – as represented on seed packets and in gardening catalogues for instance – are actually examples of racialized and historicised vocabulary and consumption practices, was too much to bear for the right-wing press in Britain. I share these examples with the reader to raise my concern that there appears to be a highly particular affective sentiment for gardening in Britain, that at times verges upon protecting gardening and gardeners from critical social science analysis and discourse.

Accordingly, from the very earliest conceptualisations of this thesis, throughout the fieldwork, and into the final stages of producing textual representations, I have regularly thought about whether the allotment and those who value it are ready for sociological analysis. As noted in Chapter 3, some allotment gardeners initially understood my research not as critical analysis but as about producing a story of the history of gardening, which is telling of how great the distance is from the academy to the garden gate. This in itself implies that, whilst allotment gardeners at the field sites were ready for (and the majority welcomed) the presence of a researcher, it is not necessarily the case that these people will welcome research findings from critical social science analysis, for instance about processes that devalue some of their allotment neighbours. I do plan to visit the field sites again, to share my research findings with allotment gardeners verbally and textually. It is actually only the responses to scholarly work (such as this thesis) from allotment gardeners at the field sites, that ideas can be garnered about the readiness of the allotment, and those who

have affective sentiment for it, to welcome and further involve sociologists in their social world; and whether the field can actually be kept open for future research.

Approaching a new growing season

I have met many sociologists who are gardeners but who seldom go into the garden as researchers, I hope this thesis encourages sociologists to consider providing accounts of (all forms of) gardening. That I have imparted some of the less-comfortable facets of a form of gardening, such as allotment gardeners being subject to devaluation and inhibited enskillment, might suggest that this thesis does not provide incentive to anyone thinking about becoming an allotment gardener. However, I have also shed light on some of the delights of allotment gardening, such as allotment gardeners operating as a community of gardeners and the ways in which cooperation is enacted; highlighting that allotment gardening is a focus of affective sentiment for people, not least via the ecstasy of “The Taste!”.

I know that I certainly recognised the normative-allotment-garden-aesthetic presented at the four field sites, from my field visits to allotment gardens around Britain. This led to a challenging reflexive exercise for me, to work through my assumptions about what makes and shapes the process of this aesthetic. Hence, I am sure that allotment gardeners in other locales might well recognise elements of this thesis too. And, I have evidenced that despite the oft noted hardships of post-industrial social transformations, there remain in the north east of England some vibrant and meaningful practices such as allotment gardening, with its layers of highly distinct practices such as giant-leek growing. Thus, whilst explaining the social world of allotment gardens sociologically and ethnographically, I have also illustrated the vibrant ways in which allotment gardening reaches out to and connects with people beyond the allotment gates.

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Appendix A: People mentioned in the thesis

For the reader's ease of reference, the following is an alphabetical list of every person mentioned in the thesis; all are allotment gardeners unless otherwise noted.

Adam: a working class man, age early-forties.

Alfie: a bricoleur age mid-seventies.

Amelia: a middle class woman age mid-thirties, married to Hugh.

Anne: a working class woman, age late-seventies.

Audrey: a working class woman age estimated to be early-seventies.

Aunty Freda: Margaret's late aunt who enskilled her in home gardening practice.

Barnie: a working class man age estimated to be age early-seventies.

Belle: a working class woman age mid-seventies.

Bernard: a middle class man, age estimated to be late-seventies.

Beryl: Married to Alfie, Beryl never comes to the allotment.

Betty: a working class woman age mid-seventies.

Beverley: a middle class woman age late-fifties

Billy: a bricoleur age late-sixties.

Bob: a bricoleur age early-eighties.

Brian: a bricoleur mid-sixties.

Bruce: a bricoleur age late-sixties.

Charles: a middle class man age early-forties.

Chip: a leekman age mid-sixties.

Christine: a middle class woman age mid-sixties.

Chuck: a bricoleur estimated to be age early-sixties.

Danny: a working class man age late-forties.

Dennis: a bricoleur, age late-seventies.

Erin: a working class woman age early-thirties.

Frank Parsons: a leekman age estimated to be age early-sixties.

Gary: a bricoleur age mid-fifties.

George: a bricoleur age late-fifties.

Gilbert: a working class man age early-eighties.

Gordon: a middle class man age late-thirties.

Gregg: a working class man age estimated to be late-sixties.

Holly: a middle class woman aged mid-forties.

Hugh: a middle class man age mid-thirties, married to Amelia.

Jill: a working class woman age late-fifties.

Jimmy: a pigeonman age late-sixties.

Josh: partner of Erin, Josh rarely comes to the allotment.

Lance: a middle class man age late-sixties.

Laura: a middle class woman age early-forties.

Lecky: a bricoleur age estimated to be age early-sixties.

Lee: a working class man age mid-thirties.

Mack: a leekman age late-sixties.

Margaret: a working class woman age late-seventies.

Marjorie: a middle class committee member (age withheld to preserve anonymity).

Marty: a leekman age mid-fifties.

Michelle: a working class woman age late-thirties.

Morris: a bricoleur age late-sixties.

Neil: a leekman age late-sixties.

Norma: a working class woman age estimated early-seventies.

Paul: a middle class man, age mid-fifties.

Peggy: a working class woman age late-sixties.

Pete: a bricoleur age late-fifties.

Phyllis: a working class woman age early-seventies.

Rhoda: a middle class woman age late-seventies.

Richard: a working class man age early-eighties, married to Sally.

Ronnie: a bricoleur age late-sixties.

Russell: a working class man age mid-forties.

Sally: a working class woman age late-seventies, married to Richard.

Sara: a middle class woman age early-forties.

Sean: a working class man age mid-forties.

Shona: a middle class woman age early seventies.

Smithy: a leekman age late-forties.

Stan: a working class man age estimated late-sixties.

Steph: Belle's daughter-in-law, Steph never visits the allotment.

Susan: Married to Pete, Susan rarely visits the allotment.

Suzanne: a working class woman age late-thirties.

Terry: a working class man age mid-sixties.

Uncle Albert: Margaret's late Uncle.

Vincent: a working class man age late-fifties.

Wilf: a middle class man age late-sixties.

Appendix B: Copy of publicity poster (reduced size)

“Your allotment stories”



Deborah Burn is a mature PhD student and an allotment plotholder, from the north east.

“I would like to hear your stories about allotment gardening, as part of an independent research project called ‘The social world of allotment gardens in north east England’ being undertaken at Newcastle University.”

What is the research about?

The study is about gaining understanding about everyday social life on allotments. This could be plotholders having a chat, sharing tools or seeds, and helping each other out. “I am keen to hear about the way in which plotholders socialise on allotment sites, who they do (and don’t) chat with, what allotment gardening means to them and if it is changing.”

Who can take part?

Any plotholder on this allotment site can volunteer to take part in the study. It does not matter how long you have had an allotment or what kind of gardening you do. Male and female gardeners can take part. All ages and backgrounds are welcome to take part.

What is involved if I take part?

Simply tell Deborah your allotment stories. As a plotholder herself, Deborah understands allotment-talk and would love to hear your stories about gardening on an allotment site.

Your participation is confidential and no-one will be able to recognise you or your allotment site in any research reports or publications. The study takes the form of face to face interviews, focus groups, and observation, with Deborah. This can take place at a time and place convenient to you, including evenings and weekends. The study starts autumn 2013 and runs until 2014.

Is the council involved?

No. The study is independent. The council has given its permission for Deborah to do the study but the council will play no further part. The council will not know who (if anyone) from your allotment site took part in the study.

Interested? Want further information?

Contact: Deborah Burn. PhD Student. School of Geography, Politics, and Sociology.
Newcastle University. Newcastle upon Tyne. NE1 7RU.

Tel or Text xxxxxxxxxxxxxx (Deborah will call you back, to save your £££s)

Email xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

If you would like to ask Deborah’s supervisors any questions about the research please contact, in the first instance: xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx at the same address above, or Tel xxxxxxxxxxxxxx. Email xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

Appendix C: Copy of participant consent form

Consent to Participate in Interview-Based Research.

I consent to take part in a research project by Deborah Burn, Department of Geography, Politics, and Sociology, Newcastle University. I have received a Participant Information document about the research and I understand the following:

The research:

The research project is called "The social world of allotment gardens in north east England"

The research project is about the stories told on allotment sites in the north east of England, in order to gain understanding of the social world of allotment gardens.

The study takes the form of face to face interviews, focus groups, and observation.

The research has been approved by the School Ethics Panel in the School of Geography, Politics, and Sociology, Newcastle University.

The project is independent and carried out by Deborah Burn of Newcastle University.

The project is not connected to local or central government, but my local council has given permission for the research to go ahead.

My participation:

My participation is voluntary.

There is no financial reward for taking part in the research.

I may withdraw from the research at any time, up to and including the completion of the project, without giving a reason to anyone.

During my interactions I may decline to do anything I am asked to do without giving a reason, e.g. answering questions or taking part in tasks.

Interviews and focus groups will be recorded, and written notes taken of observations, by Deborah Burn.

Deborah Burn will arrange and manage, the confidential transcription of interviews and focus groups, by a professional transcription provider approved by Newcastle University.

I understand I may obtain a copy of my transcription(s) from Deborah Burn.

I will not be identifiable in the final report, or any other publications, associated with the project.

All of my personal details (e.g. my name, address, allotment site) will be treated confidentially by Deborah Burn.

Deborah Burn will arrange for the secure archiving of data from my interview.

Deborah Burn may use data from my interview for additional research and publication purposes.

I can receive a summary of findings, when the project is completed.

I have read the above information and understand the explanation of the research project given to me by Deborah Burn. I agree to participate voluntarily in the research project. I have been given a copy of this form to take away with me.

Signature.....Name.....

Date.....

Appendix D: Copy of participant debrief form

Participant Debriefing Sheet

Thank you for taking part in the research project “The social world of allotment gardens in north east England”.

As a participant in the study, you took part in interactions with Deborah Burn to help gain understanding of everyday social life on allotments, such as gardeners having a chat, sharing tools or seeds, and helping each other out.

I would like to reassure you that, as promised, your participation is confidential and you and your allotment site will not be identifiable in any publications, or reports, about the research.

Without your cooperation the research would not have been possible, so I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for taking part and wish you the very best with your allotment. If you have any questions in the future, or if you wish to obtain a copy of your interview transcript or a summary of the research outcomes, please do not hesitate to contact me on the details below. I have included details of allotments organisations and your local council on the back of this sheet, so that you may contact them in the future if you wish to.

Kind regards,

Deborah Burn
Ph.D. Student
School of Geography, Politics and Sociology
Newcastle University
Newcastle upon Tyne
NE1 7RU.
Tel or Text: XXXXXXXXXX
Email XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

Appendix E: Transcription conventions

Transcription conventions are illustrated below, via fictional quotations.

All quotations are represented *verbatim*:

Deborah “Mmm, that’s interesting, could you tell me more?”

Participant “Er, well, I sow them like that to get less slug damage.”

A quote within a participant’s quote:

“I was told ‘*harvest parsnips after frost*’ so that’s er what I do now.”

Seeking to preserve anonymity:

“Before I got made redundant I was a [administrative role] and I loved it.”

Emphasis placed upon a word:

“And you should have tasted how *fresh* they were.”

Part of a sentence:

“...you should have seen the size of his giant-leeks...”.

Short pause:

“Well- I’ve sown cabbages directly in the soil before.”

Long pause:

“Oh I do so love strawberries [pauses] they’re so sweet.”

Spliced sections of data, spoken moments apart:

“I love fresh carrots... ...I’m not good at growing them.”

Enabling representation of dialect:

“Well, you diven’t [do not] want to grow them like that.” (See Chapter 3, for discussion).

Spliced sections of data, of more than a few seconds apart, are not used in the thesis, so as to avoid misrepresenting participants.

Appendix F: Copy of interview schedule

How's the allotment?

Looking back, how did you get your allotment?

Can you remember, when you first got your allotment, was what it like for you?

What are your childhood memories of gardens and gardening?

When do you come to your allotment? (How often; what time of day; how long do you stay; who else is here?)

Can you tell me what a typical day is like here?

Who calls in to see you at your allotment? (How did that come about?)

Who do you go to see at their allotment? (How did that come about?)

Do you *potter*? What is *pottering*? Can you define and describe *pottering*?

Who has given you gardening advice at the allotment? (And do you take that advice? How come? / Why not?)

Who has come to you for gardening advice? (And do you give them advice? How come? / Why not?)

Thinking back, what's the best thing you've ever grown on your allotment? (Why was that? Where did you get the seeds from? How did you learn to grow it? Did anyone help out?).

What does a "good" allotment look like? What does a "bad" allotment look like? Is there anyone here you would describe as a "good gardener"?

What kind of gardener would you describe yourself as?

So, what's it like here?

Seed Packets

I've brought some seeds along, I wonder if we could look at them together and chat about them? There are no right or wrong answers, I'm only using the seeds to stimulate chat...

DEBORAH'S REFLECTIONS AND MISC NOTES FROM INTERVIEW (completed privately ASAP post-interview):