RETIREMENT AND THE EVERYDAY POLITICS OF COMMONING IN URBAN GARDENS

Presented for the degree of PhD

2021

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SUMMARY

Although the commons has emerged as a central aspect of an energetic and nascent post-capitalist imaginary, there are a number of ambiguities and contradictions in theory and practice which require further exploration, especially of the more dynamic aspect of *commoning*, which itself invites empirical engagement. Urban gardens have been tagged with the politically heavy burden of being examples of actually-existing commons, and while they provide the context for empirical exploration of commoning, their political dynamics are even more contested. This thesis starts from the premise that there is a tendency to over-emphasise the *explicitly* political aspects of both commoning and urban gardening, while overlooking some of their quiet, ordinary, and prosaic everyday actions and practices. This research involved in-depth ethnographic work across three urban garden sites in Cardiff, where I explored the everyday *living* and *practicing* of the commons (commoning) through the lens of retired gardeners. A focus on retirement introduces commoning as a dynamic that emerges as people's position within capitalist society changes, and a search for alternative meanings, values, and practices in this vacuum becomes realised.

To do so, I draw on a range of literature and political traditions which share an appreciation of the everyday dynamics of human interaction that point towards possibilities *despite* and *beyond* capitalism and the state, and thus disrupt a capitalocentric narrative. However, through a focus on the everyday dynamics within these urban gardens, it becomes clear how practices of commoning relate with and become entangled with capital and the state in various ways, and I highlight the broader implications of this. I explore this through three inter-related empirical chapters. The first starts from a micro perspective that prioritises the perspectives, practices, and sensibilities of the gardeners themselves by understanding the forms of quiet self-valorisation that emerge in these spaces during retirement. In the second empirical chapter, I highlight the more dynamic and *living* aspects of these sites through the forms of everyday communism and mutual aid that produce and reproduce the gardens and their social relations in the everyday sense. In the final empirical chapter, I engage more explicitly with the possibilities of self-management, through exploring the relationship between the vernacular and the official (the institutions that own the land). This thesis, therefore, contributes to a relative lack of empirical work on commoning and the commons through in-depth ethnographic work, highlighting the everyday and mundane possibilities and challenges of it.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 From the Personal to the Political

I have always worked physically with my hands, in various types of manual labour jobs. It feels quite distinct from the past 4 years of my life, which have mostly been sat behind the computer. But, it is becoming increasingly apparent how much of this manual work is embedded in my thoughts and ideas. I grew up on a small poultry farm where I learnt a huge range of manual skills, where we all chipped in working on the farm from a young age—in the school holidays, in the evenings, sometimes in the mornings before school. Though I don't want to romanticise this hard work, it also instilled an instinct for working outside and with my hands—the physicality of it, and the innate sense of pleasure that you get from that work, from when you fix things, build things, or see things grow. The vast majority of work I did on the farm was about the physical maintenance and reproduction of the space—painting sheds, fixing things, cutting hedges etc. Unlike in a lot of office work, if somebody asked you what you'd done that day, the answer was *never "not much...mostly meetings"* or *"just the usual".* At the end of every day, you knew what work you'd done and what you'd achieved. You could see it and you could also feel it in your body. But, I was always frustrated by how this manual work was relegated, dismissed, and misunderstood amongst people, especially compared to the supposedly "professional" or "skilled" brain work.

It was also through my experiences in village life that I learnt about communal work, as well as the fundamental importance of non-commodified work. My dad's farm, and all the farms in the area, even though mostly privately owned, depended to some extent on the collective work of other farmers and villagers—to build sheds and houses, etc. They informally shared machinery and skills—for example, because of the small scale of our farm, we did not require large machinery such as tractors, but we would borrow a bigger tractor a couple of times a year for clearing the manure out of the sheds. In return, the farmer who lent this tractor would use the manure as a fertiliser on their fields. Likewise, the local mechanic would fix machinery, and my dad would regularly give him some eggs, chickens, or turkeys as a thank you. The mechanic was always dismissive if my dad tried to pay him for it. These things are the lifeblood of a rural

community, they create and maintain the social relations between people. I imagine this was even more apparent when my grandfather owned the farm (the small farmers did organise a buyers co-operative at that point), and though I did witness the more informal cooperative work throughout my childhood, it is rapidly disappearing today. In what was once a distinctly rural lower middle/working class small village defined by predominantly small-scale farmers and other rural workers, as well as post-war council house tenants, is now a mostly upper-middle class commuting village (to Cardiff). Many of the post-war council houses were bought by their tenants during the Right to Buy era (including my grandmother), and are now occupied by Doctors, Lawyers, and other high-paid professionals. The type of communal work has ultimately disappeared as a result, since of course the Doctors or Lawyers do not possess the same rural practical skills as the average farmer or other rural worker that once lived in these houses.

Despite all the skills I'd learnt on the farm, my parents were keen for me to do anything except be a farmer, because it was increasingly difficult to make a reasonable living from such a small farm in the context of industrialised agriculture. But, I graduated with my degree amid the 2008 financial crisis, and ended up working for a few years in a call centre before moving to Vancouver, where I worked as a gardener (a job where I could put to use all those skills that I'd learnt on the farm). A few years later, when I moved back to Wales, I set up a community garden with a friend on a bit of council wasteland in Cardiff. We borrowed my dad's van, filled it with several loads of free horse manure, and dropped it all off at the site. No turning back—the smell we'd left on that site was our binding commitment, and we had to act fast because some of the neighbours weren't too happy with the smell. My friend had contacted the council for permission to start the community garden on their land, but we didn't hear anything back and they proved to be entirely disinterested. So, we carried on anyway and it ended up being a guerrilla garden until they later approved it once it was established. We changed that little space forever—it was no longer a piece of unused wasteland, but ordinary people in that area now use it, walk there, sit there, take their children there. There is free food available to pick, there is no fence, and never any vandalism or antisocial behaviour (a very common concern for many community gardeners).

I eventually went back to university, where I wrote a master's thesis on community gardening, which has now led to a PhD on a similar topic. It was a great chance to combine my academic and practical interests, something which I felt had always divided me. But the division between this hand/manual work and intellectual interest (Dewey 2012) was also apparent in many of my everyday interactions. There was a palpable difference between how people treated me when I was their gardener, compared to when they knew I was a master's or PhD student, something that I eventually understood through the theories of Bourdieu (1984). Though engaging with the academic side of this world was fascinating and shone new light on what I was already doing, I also found something jolting about the academic understanding of community gardening. I was on the one hand quite interested to see a more political reading of this (Tornaghi 2014; Classens 2015; Purcell and Tyman 2015), but on the other I had never necessarily understood the community garden to be *that* political. There seemed to be something very ordinary and prosaic that was being missed out in this literature, since it never felt like we were trying to make any grand claims through it. This problem became even more apparent during my master's, when my then-supervisor encouraged me to re-orient the focus of community gardening around food. I hadn't even thought of it this way, but fortunately we published a paper about food poverty and community growing. Although I was proud of this, I knew that the "food" element of these sites was in fact relatively insignificant, but it just seemed that the most "powerful" interests in these gardens (including academics, politicians, and funders) were for some reason determined to see them through this lens. This was, I realised, largely a consequence of the increasing academic and political interest in "food" more generally—especially around the obesity epidemic, food miles, veganism, etc (Lang 2010; Guthman 2011; Carolan 2012). This frustrated me but also drove me to explore and highlight the ways that this was about much more than food. However, this didn't mean that it was apolitical, by any means. In fact, there was something much more political about this that was not being clearly articulated, and while the rationale behind urban gardening remains uncertain (Turner et al. 2011; Veen et al. 2016), I felt that this *ordinariness* of everyday politics offered further insight into their ambiguity (McClintock 2014). In my master's thesis (Sonnino and Hanmer 2016), it was about the way that this contrasted with charitable food donations, it was people taking control of their lives, of doing things for themselves and together, and of not being victims of condescension (in the charitable model). I think to some extent this is still an under-articulated aspect of them, particularly important during a time of intersecting crises which has revealed people's sense of alienation from the world around them. This is where my interest in anarchism, Pragmatism, and Marxist Autonomism emerged, which I think provided

a much more grounded perspective on these observations and feelings. These are three distinct theoretical traditions that I draw quite heavily on in this thesis, and they all emerged quite spontaneously to help me understand and transcend particular roadblocks in my thesis.

Anarchism has seen somewhat of a revival recently, especially within the field of human geography (Springer et al. 2012; Springer 2013; Ferretti 2017). Since anarchism is endlessly complex and contested (Springer et al. 2012; Raekstad 2016), to provide any sort of neat definition of it is problematic. While classical anarchism tended to focus principally on working-class organisation (Raekstad 2016), contemporary anarchism tends to emphasise organising on several fronts of oppression and domination (patriarchy, racism, hierarchy, monarchy, oligarchy) (Kinna 2005; Springer 2012). Anarchism remains anti-state, rejecting vanguardist tactics and instead prioritising self-organisation (Raekstad 2016), direct action (Graeber 2009) and prefiguration (Kinna 2017) that are premised upon co-operative and egalitarian forms of organisation (Springer 2012). Autonomism is a particular strand of Marxism which emphasises the agency and self-activity of the working classes that isn't determined by capital and is autonomous from official organisations or representations of class (Marks 2012), and though it has a distinct history and trajectory from anarchism (which I also draw upon throughout) it shares certain similarities. They are differentiated in particular by their geographic and historical contexts (Autonomism emerged in a distinctly Italian and German context in the 1960s and 70s, for example, as a splinter from orthodox Marxist organisation), as well as various organisational distinctions (Autonomism explicitly places class struggle as a central point whereas there are distinctions *within* anarchism regarding this), while they share an appreciation of people's agency and capacities to self-organise beyond capital, and a general principle of non-authoritarian and horizontal organisation, prefiguration, and mutual aid (see Cleaver (1992b); Gautney (2009); Clough and Blumberg (2012); Høgsbjerg (2012) for a detailed discussion on this relationship). Finally, Pragmatism has been a relatively neglected sphere within leftist studies, although there has also been some energising around this recently (Bartenberger 2014; Bridge 2014; Lake 2017b; Purcell 2017). In general, Pragmatism emphasises a rejection of blueprints, a deep scepticism towards large and absolutising philosophical and metaphysical systems, and an emphasis on the interconnection between means-ends that is realised through everyday democratic practices (Dewey 1954 [1927]; Manicas 2008; Fiala 2013; Lake 2017b). In this sense, it may also share a number of under-recognised principles with anarchism (Manicas 1982), with Pragmatist philosopher William

James claiming in 1906 that a radical pragmatist was a *"happy-go-lucky anarchist sort of creature"* (Fiala 2013, p.90).

Therefore, each of the theoretical currents within this thesis share the baseline concern over the matter of action and practice, tending to look for possibility in the everyday, through an emphasis on agency and "lay-person" vernacular knowledge (Dewey 1954 [1927]; Cleaver 1992a; 2000; Graeber 2004; Ince 2012; Scott 2012; Sennett 2012; Springer 2014; Van Meter 2017). These traditions were the opposite of what I'd come to associate with the left—nihilism and a lack of imagination (to see possibilities) (Brown 1999), but also the related and overwhelming focus on the structural conditions that dominate us (Cleaver 1992b; Graeber 2004). Of course, we shouldn't abandon understanding these structures of oppression, but in general I feel that the left's ongoing problem of engaging beyond the already-politicised is partly rooted in this prioritisation. When I was working in the call centre or as a gardener—in distinctly working class environments—I genuinely don't think that anybody wanted to feel like victims of structural conditions, even if it was true. People want to feel powerful, useful, and productive, and overwhelmingly have a hopeful energy in negotiating their lives and the world around them. People mostly understand themselves as agents, not as passive victims of structures, even if what they were doing was structurally limited to some extent (for example, not everyone in the call centre would have been fortunate enough, like me, to go back to university). Starting from the point of oppression or victimhood can reproduce the sense that it is impossible to change anything. This is a core theme throughout this thesis, and one that is clearly articulated through various perspectives (Gibson-Graham 1996; Graeber 2004; Cleaver 2017).

Anarchists such as Kropotkin and Colin Ward were possibly my first intellectual "lightbulb" moment—it entirely changed the way I understood the world. In particular, the ideas of mutual aid, self-organisation and cooperation amongst people was so apparent in everyday life (Graeber 2004; Ward 2011; Scott 2012), but also seemed to contrast with my relatively shallow understanding of socialism as something that the state did, where the Political was detached from the politics of ordinary people and everyday life. Even the odd protest I'd been to seemed to confirm this—we were there to demand something, and it always felt a bit pointless because you were fundamentally dependent on somebody actually listening (which, deep down, I felt

they usually weren't). During the COVID-19 crises, this was also apparent, as the veil was once again lifted on the state's priorities (of ensuring the smooth running of capital), and in contrast we also witnessed the development of an organised grassroots response of helping the most vulnerable during a time of crisis—introducing many to the concept of 'mutual aid' for the first time (although there have unsurprisingly been efforts to distance this from its anarchist roots through state co-optation). This is why I increasingly felt that anarchism is fundamental to understanding contemporary politics, not just practically, but also theoretically (which has always been considered its weakness, in comparison to Marxist theory) (Prichard et al. 2012). I'd never heard anyone suggest that the left had invested too much of its energy into the state, as Ward (1996b) did—to me, this was something I associated with right wing Americans who were ardent anti-socialists. But, Ward's (1996b; 1996a [1973]; 2011) work increasingly started to make sense, even more so once witnessing the failures of Corbynism in the past few years (see Bassett and Gilbert 2021; Meadway 2021). It was evident that socialism had to be embedded in people's everyday lives, to happen from below, where people feel it, control it, and manage it themselves. But, this is not the case, an issue that I think has contributed to a general disenfranchisement amongst many working class communities. Although complex, I largely understood Brexit as a sign of this broader disenfranchisement that was to some extent a direct result of austerity and neoliberal-capitalism over the preceding years. My own take, shared by many others on the left, was that this was a dynamic which was largely exploited by the far right—with a 'leave' campaign dominated by racism, xenophobia, nationalism, and anti-migrant rhetoric. The message of 'take back control' appeared to capture many people's lack of sense of actual control or power in an increasingly alienating political, economic, and social environment.

There are however hopeful socialist experiments around the world—notably in Rojava (Syria) and Chiapas (Mexico), but also El Alto (Bolivia) and Jackson Mississippi (USA), as well as several smaller experiments. Even when the socialist movement was at its height in the industrial areas of South Wales, it was embedded in communities through the types of mutual aid institutions that Ward (1996b) highlighted. Although we're often told otherwise in Wales, this movement was not built by the Labour party, but by ordinary working class people. Not only did they build the institutions which preceded the NHS, but were also adept at building infrastructure of leisure outside of work—institutes, educational spaces, choirs, pubs, dance halls and community centres, even the lidos dotted around South Wales, and, of course, allotments

and gardens. Ward's (1996b) work in particular helped me realise that the types of things I was researching were absolutely political, although it also appeared that it was often read as a process of a neoliberal state becoming stripped back and offloading responsibility (Tickell and Peck 2002), in the process creating a neoliberal subject (Pudup 2008) in a dynamic that was often reflective of the so-called 'Big Society' (Scott 2011; Mohan 2012). This was a conflation that Ward (1996b) was all too wary of, which has since become the product of a more nuanced debate (Featherstone et al. 2012; Levitas 2012; Williams et al. 2014).

At the same time, I started to engage with some of the philosophy of Pragmatism, which I felt didn't necessarily have the same political bite or commitment as anarchism, but also shared some interesting but mostly unrecognised crossovers. I particularly became interested in Dewey's work, who I consider to be an under-valued radical (the dismissal of his thought I sense comes from his criticism of Marxism and State Communism at the time) (Manicas 2008). Dewey's (1954 [1927]; 1960 [1929]; 1999 [1930]; 2012) work on the interconnection of means-ends, his emphasis on grounded knowledge (in contrast to the spectator theory of knowledge), and his belief in the possibilities and struggles of everyday democracy and cooperation was crucial for developing my thinking in this thesis, and has also energised some debate in attempts to rescue a more radical Dewey recently (Bridge 2014; Lake 2017a; Purcell 2017). Finally, Marxist Autonomism became increasingly important as my thesis progressed in order to develop a more critical understanding of the dynamics of commoning, work, and social reproduction more clearly (Cleaver 2000 [1979]; 2017; De Angelis 2017; Federici 2018). Importantly, unlike the more orthodox Marxist work I'd read, it also tended to appreciate the more positive aspects of struggle and the possibilities inherent in everyday life, rather than seeing everyday life as subsumed and dominated by economic structures.

Many of these experiences solidified my interest in understanding how "ordinary" people carried out their politics through urban gardening, even if they didn't understand what they were doing as explicitly political. These theoretical currents provided the tools to be able to do that, academically, which is the essence of this research. Many of these interests collide around the notion of the commons, and provide the backbone for the threads throughout this thesis.

1.2 Actually-existing Commons?

The commons can occupy quite a sentimental place for many on the left—they are often considered historical factors in the development of capitalism, where the enclosure of common land was considered a significant factor in the creation of the working class proletariat for the newly developing industries (Moselle 1995; Marx 2004 [1867]; Linebaugh 2014). The commons, from this perspective, was a historical matter, and if one would take a more orthodox approach, it was simply a stage in the inevitable development towards Communism (Marx and Engels 2012 [1848]). Instead, it is now often understood that the commons is not a product of history, but still exists not only through the ongoing process of enclosures but through the ongoing practices of commoning (Carlsson 2008; De Angelis 2017; Federici 2018).

While the commons tends to form part of a broader academic interest in exploring post-capitalist possibilities (Caffentzis and Federici 2014; Chatterton 2016; Gibson-Graham et al. 2016; De Angelis 2017), its politics remains at times ambiguous and under-explored. Indeed, historically, the commons tends to rest on two key thinkers—Hardin (1968) as its critic, and Ostrom (2015 [1990]) as its defender. Ostrom (2000; 2008; 2015 [1990]) emphasised the commons as a resource to be managed over time, with a set of rules and methods for doing so. However, there have been critiques of Ostrom's work from the emerging anti-capitalist reading of the commons (Caffentzis 2004; Caffentzis and Federici 2014), which suggests that Ostrom ultimately overlooks the exogenous factors that limit the commons (especially the structures of global capitalism) and instead focuses on the endogenous dynamics for its reproduction. This emerging anti-capitalist perspective, which has been quite prominent and influential amongst the Marxist Autonomists (Caffentzis and Federici 2014; De Angelis 2017), has most explicitly articulated its potential for broader social and political transformation (De Angelis 2014a), and post-capitalist potentialities (Chatterton 2016). This debate has developed further nuance recently, not only through a more careful and sympathetic reading of Ostrom's work on the left (Carson 2014a; Wall 2017; Bollier and Helfrich 2019), but also the possibility for seeing beyond a simple endogenous-exogenous binary (De Angelis 2017).

Researching the commons is not an easy task, partly because examples of existing "commons" are relatively difficult to pinpoint and study in-situ, and as a result it remains largely a theoretical pursuit (Noterman 2016; Pickerill 2016). However, increasing interest in the processual nature

of *commoning* (as distinct from the commons) opens up a range of empirical possibilities (Chatterton 2016; Dawney et al. 2016). Community gardens have been recognised as potential signs of actually-existing commons (Foster 2011; Eizenberg 2012; Colding et al. 2013; 2016; De Angelis 2017; Engel-Di Mauro 2018; Federici 2018), while allotments have a long history with the commons and the enclosures (Moselle 1995). However, rarely are community gardens and allotments studied together, since they are often considered to be distinct phenomena (Bendt et al. 2013; Bigell 2015; Follmann and Viehoff 2015). This division exists even though the largest concentration of academic work on community gardens exists in North America, where community gardens can often reflect allotments in the UK. In this research, I am not hoping to make a direct comparison of community gardens and allotments as specific "projects" or as empirical entities themselves, but my emphasis is to explore the dynamics of commoning that exist within them, which by necessity requires understanding their broader context (politically, spatially, socially, historically). Therefore, I refer to them as urban gardens, or as practices of urban gardening.

However, it is also recognised that urban gardens are politically ambiguous and contradictory spaces (McClintock 2014). Some scholars have been keen to emphasise their possibilities in food-terms (Tornaghi 2014; Furness and Gallaher 2018; Porter 2018), others suggesting that they are processes of citizens reclaiming their Right to the City (Passidomo 2014a; Purcell and Tyman 2015), or the more quiet and ordinary forms of community-building (Firth et al. 2011; Veen et al. 2016), democratic engagement and active citizen participation (Glover et al. 2005; Bendt et al. 2013). Others have highlighted their neoliberalising tendencies (Pudup 2008; Rosol 2012). In this sense, there is also a binary understanding within the urban gardening literature that reflects the debate on the endogenous-exogenous in relation to the commons (McClintock 2014; Tornaghi 2014; Classens 2015).

This binary is ultimately the "opening" for this thesis, and I do so through engaging with a wide range of literature, traditions, and ideas, from understanding the relationship between the commons, the state, and capital (Cumbers 2015; Thompson 2015; De Angelis 2017; Milburn and Russell 2019; Arbell et al. 2020), and through an everyday exploration of post-capitalist (or non-capitalist) possibilities (Graeber 2004; 2011; White and Williams 2014; Tsing 2017). Though the relationship between commoning, the state, and capital remains contested (Arbell

et al. 2020), there is an increasing tendency to explore the ways that the micro-scale everyday dynamics of commoning relate with, challenge, or negotiate capitalism in various ways (Bresnihan and Byrne 2015; Chatterton and Pusey 2019). This introduces questions as to the possibility of an "outside" to capitalism, a central debate within the literature more generally (Holloway 2010a; Bhattacharya 2017). In particular, the commons are understood to be potential sites of non-alienated and self-determined labour (Shantz 2013a; Chatterton and Pusey 2019), focused around a type of doing that contrasts with capitalist value. Further questions are raised as to the extent that such "non-capitalist" or "post-capitalist" practices and actions are subsumed and determined by capitalist structures and needs (Cleaver 2011; Bhattacharya 2017), or whether they might be better understood as peri-capitalist practices (Tsing 2017).

Such debates are tied to the social, political, and economic dynamics of capitalism and people's relation with them, but also the temporal nature of these. Thus, the ambiguous and under-explored political-economic category of retirement (Oran 2017) reveals the possibility for further exploring these questions, which is ultimately the "final" piece of this thesis puzzle. This was a bit of an experimental leap on my behalf, since I had no experience or knowledge of gerontology, academically speaking, but knew from personal experiences that allotments and community gardens were often widely attended by retired people. The retired gardener occupies a unique point to intervene in the above debate. No longer tied to the rigid logic of capitalist work demands, it offers a point at which to study the everyday and ordinary dynamics of commoning, as people search for different value and meaning that emerge beneath and beyond the logic of capital.

1.3 Researching Everyday Commoning

This thesis is an exploration of the everyday dynamics of commoning in urban gardens with a focus on retired gardeners. I carried out an ethnographic study across three sites in Cardiff—two community gardens and one allotment site. Although it is not a comparative "case study" approach, these sites provide the context for in-depth ethnographic fieldwork. The fieldwork was conducted over a period of approximately 6 months between Spring and Autumn 2019, thus I could become deeply embedded and familiar with these spaces.

This thesis unfolds through three intersecting spheres of movement that is reflected in the questions: the first being the subjective and micro dynamics of people's engagement with the spaces through the forms of self-valorisation; the second, the more interactive and interdependent actions *between* people through dynamics of everyday communism; and finally, the third being the relationship between the vernacular and the official. Related to this, the thesis will address three broad research questions, each mirroring the three empirical chapters:

1. What types of needs and values are articulated through the processes of commoning in urban gardens? How does this relate to retirement and capitalism more broadly?

This first question will explore how the process of retirement relates with the practices of gardening and commoning, through the lens of self-valorisation. Why is it important and how does this relate to people's detachment from work, and how might this relate to the broader dynamics of capital?

2. How do the dynamics of everyday communism and mutual aid relate with the spatiality of commoning?

The ordinary and everyday dynamics of mutual aid are sometimes recognised as part of urban gardening (Crossan et al. 2016) and commoning (De Angelis 2017). However, Graeber's (2011) theory of 'everyday communism' invites an ethnographic approach to the Marxist phrase 'from each according to their ability, to each according to their need'. This question will explore this as it relates to space, but also how it relates to various skills, abilities and needs of retired gardeners.

3. What is the relationship between the vernacular and the official, and how does this relationship materialise in the everyday governance of these sites?

Vernacular governance (sometimes called self-management) is a crucial and embedded concept within the understanding and practice of the commons/commoning (Bollier 2019). It is reflective of the type of on-the-ground felt and experienced knowledge that is a core principle of commoning (Carson 2013). Given that the governance of community gardens and allotments

remains extremely diverse, this provides a useful nexus-point at which to study the forms of "self-management" within these sites. It also offers the opportunity to explore the ways that these forms of self-management relate to the "formal" institutional governance arrangements that are regularly attached to such sites.

The thesis contributes to the emerging literature on the commons/commoning with much-needed empirical work. In doing so, I have provided further analysis regarding the possibilities and limitations of the commons in contemporary society, in the process producing some new and unique insights. In particular, by introducing the novel aspect of studying commoning through the lens of retirement, I have highlighted the possibilities of commoning becoming more-or-less apparent as people travel through the life course (and their position within capitalist society and its structures change). The thesis also develops an understanding of commoning as a search for meaning and value in the ordinary spheres of everyday life that can extend beyond the logic of capitalism. The transition to retirement offers the possibility for exploring these ordinary dynamics of commoning, whereby people develop forms of practice that can contrast with their experiences of work. This is an important political intervention, given that everyday life is often reduced as a function for the ongoing reproduction of broader capitalist structures. I highlight throughout the interaction between the endogenous forms of commoning and the exogenous structures of state-capitalist society, with rich empirical observations that prioritises the perspectives and actions of the gardeners themselves. Thus, it becomes apparent that although the everyday is a site of possibility, it is also one whereby challenges and limitations become realised—from the forms of everyday communism and mutual aid to vernacular governance, which I argue are best understood as processual struggles rather than final ends to be met.

1.4 Thesis Structure

Beyond this introductory chapter, the thesis is organised into 6 subsequent chapters. In chapter 2, I introduce the various intersecting literature that underpins this research. I do so by bringing together a set of related topics that draw-out the political dynamics of this research—including the literature on the commons and commoning and its intersection with urban gardening, before extending the second half of the literature review into the core concerns of this

interrelationship, regarding its relationship with the state and capital, and the possibilities of an "outside" to capital in the everyday sense.

Chapter 3 is the methodology chapter. In this chapter, I initially explore the foundations of my methodology, philosophically and practically speaking, especially concerning the division between theory and practice and what this means for engaging with a 'practical' site such as a community garden or allotment. I also question the baseline in relation to notions and ideas of social transformation, before suggesting that an engaged and embedded ethnographic approach is a useful methodological tool for this thesis. I demonstrate the ways that all methodologies are embedded with political problems, and introduce the possibilities of researching from a positive and agency-oriented perspective through an ethnography. I highlight the ways that an ethnography can engage with an everyday level to understand broader dynamics, and the various practical tools and methods that I used through my fieldwork.

Chapter 4 is the first empirical chapter, where I explore the quiet self-valorising activities of retired gardeners. I do this through explaining the fundamental importance of the social foundations and experiences of these spaces, as well as the forms of self-determination that are embedded within them. I suggest that these are two intersecting processes for self-valorisation, and ultimately help define their importance for retired gardeners.

In Chapter 5 I explore the dynamics of everyday communism within these sites, highlighting their variety and diversity, that I argue must be read as a spatial phenomenon. I explore the way that people co-operate through *doing* in a way that is a process of complementarity, in particular paying attention to the ways that people's diverse skills and capacities are used for forms of cooperation. I focus on the ways that this relates to retirement, since these are accumulated skills that are re-directed towards non-commodified practices. Throughout this chapter, I also highlight the difficulties of everyday communism, and touch upon its significance, theoretically, in relation to the individual and social realms.

In chapter 6, the final empirical chapter, I focus on the struggles around vernacular governance and self-management within each of these sites. I suggest that a vernacular understanding is a

baseline of these sites and their functioning, but that there remains both endogenous difficulties of self-management as well as exogenous. In doing so, I explore the ways that the vernacular (endogenous) relates to the institutions who own the land (exogenous).

To conclude, in chapter 7 I summarise these findings and untangle the political significance of the core themes.

2   LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

There has been increasing academic interest in the commons recently, though it is an arena that remains overwhelmingly divided between two spheres, which I initially highlight in this chapter. The first, guided by the work of Elinor Ostrom, sees the commons as co-existing with the state and capital, and is primarily concerned with the internal (endogenous) design principles for its maintenance. The latter tends to see the commons as existing in conflict with the state and capital, and thus is concerned with its relationship with these exogenous factors (such as how they limit, co-opt, or exploit the commons). However, this debate is becoming increasingly nuanced, firstly through the work of Massimo De Angelis (2017), who considers these spheres together rather than separately, but also through the shift to the social process of commoning, which moves the debate away from the commons as a static "thing".

Though Ostrom's work was deeply empirical in nature, the anti-capitalist commons tends to be overwhelmingly theoretical. While commoning opens-up empirical possibilities, there remains a general lack of empirical work that connects with the complexity of these commoning and commons debates in-depth. Various forms of urban gardens—including allotments and community gardens—have recently been highlighted as actually-existing commons (Eizenberg 2012). However, in this chapter, I also highlight their ambiguity, politically, which makes them an interesting case for studying the complexities of commoning and the commons.

In the second half of this chapter, having set the tone of conversation between the commons and urban gardens, I explore in detail two aspects which define this research. The first is the relationship between the commons, capital, and the state, which includes understanding how they interrelate and use each other for their own reproduction, and also how this introduces a number of contradictions to be explored. I then explore how everyday life relates *with* capital. In the final section of this literature review, I demonstrate how the dynamics of social reproduction (often considered an aspect of the commons (De Angelis 2017)) complicates this

dynamic, and suggest the possibility of further exploring this through a reading of the politics of retirement.

2.2 Introducing the Commons

The commons could be understood to exist through various lenses—as a type of collective property that rejects private ownership in favour of collective ownership, as a process of social relations that emphasises human interaction and non-monetary exchange, or as an experimental space for alternative social forms (Arbell et al. 2020). Broadly-speaking, a commons is *"a resource that is both collectively owned and/or managed by its members or users; and is valued by its members for its everyday use, rather than for its potential monetary exchange on the market"* (Huron 2015, p.1), seen historically in the way that the commons were associated with geographical entities governed by those who depended upon them (Chatterton 2016). However, the commons is also much more than a territorially bounded resource, and can refer to water, soil, and plants, and socially produced goods such as knowledge, information, and languages (Chatterton 2016). The commons today are therefore considered much more than a method of managing physical resources (land, water, food), including free software and digital commons (Birkinbine 2018), housing (Huron 2015; Bunce 2016; Arbell et al. 2020), independent spaces (Bresnihan and Byrne 2015), education (Korsgaard 2019; Pechtelidis and Kioupkiolis 2020), sustainable mobility (Nikolaeva et al. 2019), and urban space (Stavrides 2016), that all share the emphasis of possessing an alternative value system beyond capitalist values (De Angelis 2007), and always refer to something being collectively managed and shared (Chatterton 2016). Practically-speaking, academic interest in the commons explores the range of efforts by commoners to develop creative ways of tackling problems through distributed intelligence, community collaboration, ecological stewardship, and an ethos of sharing (Grear and Bollier 2020). For Gibson-Graham et al. (2016), the commons is distinguished by variety, from biophysical (e.g. soil, water, air), cultural commons (e.g. language, music), social commons (e.g. education, health, political systems) and knowledge commons (e.g. Indigenous knowledge, scientific knowledge).

Despite the recent revival of the commons as a point of interest, Huron (2015) rightly notes that the idea and practice of the commons goes back centuries and spans continents—it is not a

new idea nor a new practice, since humans have always survived and depended on the commons (Caffentzis and Federici 2014; Linebaugh 2014). While the commons were often seen by Marxists and other socialists as historical phenomena (Marx 2004 [1867]), there has been a resurgent interest in the commons from an explicitly anti-capitalist perspective (Caffentzis and Federici 2014; Chatterton 2016; De Angelis 2017). However, as I note in the next section, this only tells a small part of the story of the commons, since arguably its most famous advocate, Elinor Ostrom—the first woman to win the Nobel Prize in Economics for her committed empirical work on the commons—has tended to be dismissed by this emerging politicised perspective. This neglect partly comes from the apparent apolitical nature of Ostrom's work (Caffentzis 2004), though there are ongoing debates about the relationship between Ostrom's work and the more recent body of literature which forefronts an explicitly anti- or post-capitalist reading of the commons (De Angelis 2017; Wall 2017). In the next section, I frame some of the initial divides within the commons literature, and suggest that De Angelis' (2017) work in particular offers a glimpse beyond these divisions.

2.2.1 The Political Context of the Commons

The resurgence of interest in the commons and commoning has largely been driven by broader experiments and interest in the possibilities of post-capitalism (Chatterton 2016; Gibson-Graham et al. 2016; De Angelis 2017). Despite this enthusiasm, the political potential of the commons can often be romanticised, and moreover there appears to be divisions, separations, and fragmentations within the literature itself as to the *meaning* of the commons, politically-speaking. As Caffentzis and Federici (2014) note, it is a term used across the political spectrum to advocate for various political interventions, thus it is necessary to address this initially. Discussion on the commons tends to rest on Hardin's (1968) famous critique of the 'tragedy of the commons', which stems from a claim that the supposed self-interested and competitive nature of individuals in managing the commons would result in its degradation, depletion, and self-destruction over time in the absence of a higher authority (Bollier 2014; Wall 2017). Hardin's (1968) critique was, however, famously flawed for several reasons, two of which I will highlight here. Firstly, it was based on a hypothetical scenario, not empirical or historical work, to prove a point about overpopulation and resource depletion (Huron 2015). Secondly, Hardin's understanding of the commons was based on a misunderstanding that they were open-access and rule-less (Caffentzis 2004; Huron 2015; Gibson-Graham et al. 2016), which is arguably a closer reflection of unfettered markets than common property regimes (Bollier

2015), seen in the destruction of the planet's resources based on such an open-access and unmanaged system (Gibson-Graham et al. 2016).

Huron (2015) argues that there have been two crucial strands that challenge Hardin's critique: the first being the Ostromian one that hopes to understand how the commons was/is maintained over time (and is very empirical); and the second being how to reclaim the commons within a hostile capitalist environment (predominantly a theoretical project). The first understands the commons as a property regime and Common Pool Resources (CPR), often focusing on natural resources and their level of subtractability, or resources that can be depleted over time and need explicit forms of collective management to avoid doing so (Huron 2015). From this perspective, the commons is about people's interaction and management of a particular resource (Linebaugh 2008), with the community of users establishing the rules and forms of governance necessary to manage that resource according to their needs (Arvidsson 2019; Sievers-Glotzbach and Christinck 2021). The second is associated with an explicit critique of capitalism, and is often associated with the alter-globalisation movement (Huron 2015) and is inspired by international movements such as the Zapatistas (De Angelis 2014b). However, this introduces a crucial discussion in the contemporary literature on the commons, in particular in relation to the ambiguous political nature of Ostrom's work, which is difficult to situate (Caffentzis 2004; Wall 2017; De Angelis 2019).

The first element—of commons as a property regime—is most closely associated with Ostrom's work. Ostrom (2015 [1990], p.2) was the foremost critic of Hardin, noting that these observations weren't particularly new, since even Aristotle had noted that *"what is common to the greatest number has the least care bestowed upon it. Everyone thinks chiefly of his own, hardly at all of the common interest"*. As already noted, since neoliberalism tends to rest on similar discourse and practice of the self-interested and competitive nature of human relations, it remains a crucial point for countering neoliberal discourse and practice and disrupting the capitalocentrism narrative (Gibson-Graham et al. 2016; White and Williams 2018). The importance of Ostrom's (2015) work, in a similar manner to Kropotkin's (2014), I argue, remains a crucial political battleground.

Ostrom's (2015 [1990], p.29) practical approach to the commons hoped to overcome the problem of collective-action through an institutional approach that will *"(1) increase the initial likelihood of self-organization, (2) enhance the capabilities of individuals to continue self-organized efforts over time, and (3) exceed the capacity of self-organization to solve CPR problems without external assistance of some form."* From here, Ostrom (2015 [1990]) developed a set of 8 basic principles for the management of the commons—ones which shouldn't be understood as blueprints but guidelines (Bollier 2014). Ostrom's (2015 [1990]) principles were, generally-speaking (since it is the political aspects, rather than the detail, that concerns this section): (1) the commons have clearly defined boundaries; (2) the rules governing the common goods should match local needs and context; (3) commoners can participate and modify these rules through participatory decision making; (4) the commons must be monitored; (5) graduated sanctions for those who broke these collectively agreed rules; (6) accessible conflict resolution mechanisms; (7) external authorities must recognise the right for commons to self-organise; and (8) commons should be nested and federated into a larger governance system. Thus, for Ostrom (2015 [1990]), the success of the maintenance of the commons are primarily endogenous design principles, from the collectively agreed upon rules, boundaries, and mechanisms for dealing with issues (such as sanctions and conflict resolution). As Huron (2015) notes, these internal dynamics can sometimes be more challenging than the reclamation of the commons in the first place. Importantly, it should also be noted that Ostrom was a committed empirical researcher, and did not develop these from an abstract position but from close observations of the lived reality of commoners around the world. Thus, it was a focus on small-scale natural resource management, rather than large-scale, global, or digital commons that concerned Ostrom (Bollier 2014), since Ostrom (2015 [1990]) believed that these small-scale examples were easier to observe and study than the others. Thus, Ostrom explored examples of communal ownership in high mountain meadows in Switzerland, Japanese village commons, and community irrigation systems in Spain and the Philippines (Wall 2017).

The distinction between Ostrom's work on the commons, and the emerging anti-capitalist one, is perhaps most evident in a conference speech that Caffentzis delivered in 2004, in reference to two conferences on the commons occurring in relative proximity in Mexico. The one addressed by Caffentzis was held on the theme of alter-globalisation and the commons, and the other was on Common Property Regimes co-sponsored by the Ford Foundation (Caffentzis

2004). Though Caffentzis (2004, p.5) describes Hardin's 'tragedy of the commons' as the *"ideal launching pad of neoliberalism",* he is likewise critical of Hardin's main protagonist, Ostrom, who he described as a neo-Hardinist. For Caffentzis (2004), the commons must be understood as a process of class struggle, recognising how the establishment and expansion of the commons is constantly under threat from capitalist and state enclosures, and therefore must contend with these systemic external factors and relations. Euler (2018) claims that the commons can therefore only be a seed form and not depict its full potential (since it is still to some extent structured by capitalist society). Caffentzis (2004) highlights Ostrom's work as capitalist-friendly, or at the very least doesn't distinguish between versions of the commons which might challenge capitalism, and those which co-exist peacefully with it, if not at times assist and reproduce it. Indeed, the commons can be used to facilitate neoliberalism and the status quo, where it is advocated by the IMF and the World Bank for example (Gonzalez 2019). Caffentzis (2004) therefore claims that there is a problematic "middle" between his anti-capitalist commons and the capitalist anti-commons, which he sees in the work of Ostrom and others, which can ultimately be a project utilised during times of economic and social crisis for repairing and maintaining the status quo, or as neoliberalism plan-B (Caffentzis 2010). Indeed, Ostrom largely understood the state, capital, and the commons as co-existing without conflict (De Angelis 2019), and neglected the understanding of the external pressures of capital (and the possibility to reclaim the commons) while focusing on the internal design principles for their long-term maintenance (Huron 2015). Caffentzis explains this in a critique of Ostrom:

> *"There is no logical reason why the village commune…that has been managing a common-pool resource (be it land, forest, water or fishery) for generations suddenly breaks down even though the logic of the coordination problem had been more or less solved. The neo-Hardinites look to changes in the characteristics of the resource (e.g., whether its value on the Market or the cost of excluding non-commoners has increased) or in the characteristics of the commoners (e.g., the number of commoners has increased) for an explanation of the breakdown." (Caffentzis 2004, p.14)*

Ostrom has therefore been dismissed from these explicitly political perspectives (Dawney et al. 2016), and although Ostrom's political ambiguity is clear, there has been some engagement

with her work on the left. De Angelis (2017), for example, has drawn closely on Ostrom's work alongside Marx for exploring the commons, while Carson (2013; 2014a; 2014b) has suggested that Ostrom is Kropotkin's natural heir and has anarchistic principles, and Wall (2017) has likewise documented Ostrom's lessons for the left. Moreover, it is possible that Ostrom's work would have sat more neatly within a Gibson-Graham (1996; 2006) framework that recognised economic diversity, instead of the monolithic understanding that is seen in Caffentzis' (2004) work.

However, there is a related and broader issue as to *how* to distinguish capitalist commons from anti-capitalist commons (Gonzalez 2019). De Angelis' (2017) work is particularly instructive in this regard. De Angelis (2017) suggests that the endogenous understanding of the commons—as primarily a managerial and design approach in the Ostromian sense—and the exogenous understanding—seen in the anti-capitalist critique—were not necessarily in conflict but should be articulated productively together. Instead, as De Angelis (2017) explains, the commons is as much a problem of organisational and communication skills as it is about liberating time from capitalist work structures. Therefore, Ostrom's arguments should not be neglected, since commons are not always destroyed by external market and state forces, but can be due to internal deficits of coordination skills, decline in trust, burn-outs, etc (De Angelis 2019). Moreover, the endogenous systems of learning how to practice participatory methods of managing the commons is a challenge in relation to the decades of individualisation that is inscribed on the individual through capitalist processes of subjectification (De Angelis 2017). Therefore, understanding the commons beyond the endogenous-exogenous binary offers the possibility for further empirical work, in particular through exploring in detail the possibilities that exist in the everyday acts of commoning.

2.2.2   *From the Commons to Commoning*

The other important aspect to recognise here is a general shift in understanding the commons over recent years—from one that primarily saw the commons as a static resource to be managed (Bresnihan and Byrne 2015), to that of 'commoning', where the commons becomes an active process (Gibson-Graham et al. 2016; Euler 2018; Arbell et al. 2020) that creates and sustains the commons (Sievers-Glotzbach and Christinck 2021). In relation to the above discussion, this is crucial, since as Huron (2015) argues, the alter-globalisation theorists tend to be preoccupied

with the reclamation of the commons with little understanding of how it is maintained over time (once reclaimed), with Ostrom's work the opposite. Euler (2018) describes commoning as practices that are produced and reproduced by specific actions. Thus, if the *"commons don't simply exist—they are created"* (Helfrich 2012a, p.61), then *commoning* can potentially also bridge this division between the two binaries I explored earlier (Huron 2015). If Caffentzis' (2004) theorisations tends to reproduce the idea of the commons as a thing (Huron 2015), a critique usually levelled at Ostrom's work (Bresnihan and Byrne 2015), then the shift to commoning represents and recognises the dynamism of the commons as an active, fluid, and processual set of practices and actions. For Gibson-Graham et al. (2016), commoning might be considered as the central focus of politics of our times.

Though 'commoning' itself remains vague and under-theorised (Euler 2018), and it is not only difficult but arguably ill-advised to develop a generic definition of the commons and commoning (Noterman 2016), there remains some general principles emerging within this literature. For Bollier (2014), the general understanding of the commons is no longer simply as a shared physical and tangible resource, but as paradigms that combine a distinct community with a set of social practices, values, and norms that are used to manage a resource. Thus, the commons also of course require some amount of production, reproduction, and maintenance over time, which suggests that they depend on a complex web of connections, social relations, and forms of governance to do so (Chatterton 2016). Commoning is therefore relational, defined by establishing rules for access and use, taking care of a resource, and distributing benefits in a way that recognises people's interdependent wellbeing (Gibson-Graham et al. 2016).

> *"Commons are not given, they are produced. Although we say that commons are all around us – the air we breathe and the languages we use being key examples of shared wealth – it is only through cooperation in the production of our life that we can create them. This is because commons are not essentially material things but are social relations, constitutive social practices [...] Exclusive reliance on "immaterial" commons, like the internet, will not do. Water systems, lands, forests, beaches, as well as various forms of urban space, are indispensable to our survival. Here too what counts is the collective nature of*

> *the reproductive work and the means of reproduction involved." (Caffentzis and Federici 2014, p.101)*

Notably, as seen in this passage, the commons is increasingly being understood as an active social relationship and a process of creating the commons through commoning (Linebaugh 2014; Huron 2015). Commoning can generate collectivised forms of production, reproduction, and decision making that contrasts with the state and capital (Bresnihan and Byrne 2015), an issue I explore in more detail below. Instead of a static reading of the commons, it becomes one of expressing relationships between humans, and between humans and the world around (Gibson-Graham et al. 2016).

> *"Commons thus are not the place for imaginary communities (Anderson 2006), for those who feel they belong to the same nation, race, or football club without even leaving their private living rooms. Commons are instead made of real communities, in the sense that their practices reproduce not only a networks of relations, but also a web of recognisable faces, names and characters and dispositions; the accidents of life also shape the web of affects, the mutual aid and the networks of reciprocity that constitute the web of solidarities and friendship" (De Angelis 2017, p.125)*

Thus, rather than communities being a pre-given, they are constituted *through* the act of commoning (Gibson-Graham et al. 2016). However, again, commoning doesn't rest on the notion of the commons as a static thing, and thus it opens up the possibility for understanding how the commons can be reclaimed, created, reproduced, in everyday life (Huron 2015). For Nayak (2021), there is a necessity to understand the processes of 'recommonisation' and 'decommonisation'—the process of something *becoming* a commons, or the process of an existing commons losing those characteristics. Moreover, given that something may be more-or-less a commons to the degree that it consists of social practices that are forms of commoning (Euler 2018), these developments provide the context for a lot of empirical possibility, and as such is an exciting point of intervention (Dawney et al. 2016). Despite these developments, the ways that the commons are made and re-made is neglected within the literature (Pickerill

2016), an issue that is central to this research. In the next section, I explore these possibilities through the empirical lens of urban gardens.

2.3 Finding the Commons: Urban Gardens

While both allotments (Bigell 2015; Page 2017) and community gardens (Carlsson 2008; Eizenberg 2012; Engel-Di Mauro 2018) have been understood as examples of the commons and commoning, theorists of the commons have likewise tentatively shown some interest in urban gardens (Carlsson 2008; De Angelis 2017; Federici 2018), though this relationship lacks close examination (Rogge and Theesfeld 2018). In this section, I explore the intersections between urban gardening and commoning, a debate that I extend through exploring the broader political debate within the urban gardening literature.

2.3.1   *Urban Gardens as Actually Existing Commons*

There has been some exploration of the ways that various forms of gardens (including community gardens, allotment gardens, and other Urban Agriculture projects) can be understood as commons or commoning—in particular in relation to the nature of land ownership, usage, access, and the management and everyday relations within them (Bigell 2015; Ginn and Ascensão 2018). In this sense, while many gardens around the world are established, managed, and organised collectively as commons (Rogge and Theesfeld 2018), both allotments (Colding et al. 2013; Bigell 2015; Page 2017) and community gardens (Eizenberg 2012; Müller 2012; Rogge and Theesfeld 2018) have been considered as contemporary examples of the commons. Thus both forms of gardens are considered as representing an interesting point of intervention for understanding the diversity of the commons and commoning (Bigell 2015; Ginn and Ascensão 2018). Indeed, while some have highlighted the historic relationship of the allotment to the enclosures and as persistent contemporary examples of the commons (Moselle 1995; Page 2017), Eizenberg (2012) claims that community gardens today are examples of "actually existing commons". Thus, these are spaces which relate to the commons and commoning in various ways, both historically and in contemporary society, but also in terms of *what* defines these spaces as commons—from the governance arrangements, the creative vernacular practices, to the social dynamics of commoning.

These are forms of sociality that exist and thrive under the radar of the market/money economy (Federici 2011), and which can challenge aesthetic norms, create alternative social experience that challenges a general alienation from the neoliberal city, and produce an enhanced sense of belonging in community (Eizenberg 2012). Referring specifically to the forms of urban gardening that have emerged in cities (in a process Federici calls "rurbanisation"), Federici (2011; 2018) notes their importance as sites of sociality, knowledge production and cultural and intergenerational knowledge exchange. Therefore, urban gardens are noted to be defined by the practical knowledge which enables the production of the commons, while providing the space for alternative social practices that confront the alienation of people from each other and their environments, and a psychological environment that provides an increased sense of control and belonging (Eizenberg 2012).

The spaces themselves are shared, the work within them is often collaborative, and produce is often shared and gifted amongst each other (Corcoran et al. 2017). In this sense, such gardens are endlessly malleable to a changing urban environment, whereby it can use and mobilise its informality for its own ends (Pikner et al. 2020). While social life and solidarity are actively constructed amongst the gardeners through such everyday forms of sharing and gifting (Rogge and Theesfeld 2018), such examples of commoning might seem small in the context of various crises. However, Federici (2018) claims that such examples of cooperation are encouraging in the context of growing impoverishment of everyday life, of paralysis and withdrawal and distrust of neighbours. While warning of their potential in reproducing capitalist social relations (as Pudup (2008) does), Eizenberg (2012) also suggests that at their most basic level, urban gardens therefore offer a glimpse into the kind of social relations and spatial practices and values that can introduce the commons into everyday urban life. In particular, it is important in the way that they *"facilitate a cooperating and participating community, gathered around noncommodified activities, collectively producing space according to their needs and visions."* (Eizenberg 2012, p.779).

In this sense, urban gardening is often a response to over-urbanisation (Cangelosi 2014) where, as Thompson (2015) exemplifies, they can emerge as a way of reclaiming the streets in the face of anti-demolition residents campaigns. This dynamic of reclaiming land from privatised urban landscapes is itself an important aspect of commoning (Huron 2015; Bunce 2016; Williams

2018). Urban commons therefore offer a promising imaginary that is capable of counterposing the enclosure of the neoliberal city (Chan and Zhang 2019). They are also often related to forms of austerity urbanism, where new opportunities emerge in the cracks that challenge neoliberal development models (Tonkiss 2013; Thompson 2015). Urban gardening as commoning is often defined by inhabitants producing urban spaces themselves, where empty and neglected spaces become an opportunity (Mattei and Quarta 2015), through the reappropriation of space to meet people's own needs (Follmann and Viehoff 2015). Though urban gardeners rarely define what they do as "commoning" or as part of the commons (De Angelis 2017), in reality what they are doing is fundamentally part of the commons and commoning (Cangelosi 2014). This can be understood as a quiet and everyday act of commoning (Thompson 2015), seen through the often invisible, highly creative activities by commoning communities, such as through community gardening in abandoned plots (Carlsson 2008). It points towards the improvisational, ongoing, and persistent acts of commoning through gardening (Ginn and Ascensão 2018), where people can actively work together in a constructive way to shape and reshape their environment (Trendov 2018).

Thus, the gardens reflect a co-operative community based around people's needs in an increasingly hostile and uneven urban environment (Eizenberg 2012). In doing so, they can create physical communities that are a counter-force to privatisation and neoliberal logic (Barron 2017), and can be socially transformative in the ways that reimagine priorities, values, and politics (Corcoran et al. 2017) where forms of use value can trump exchange value (Eizenberg 2012). While this is often seen in the use of meanwhile space, urban gardens can be under threat of being co-opted by the neoliberal agenda or destroyed for development by the state itself (Follmann and Viehoff 2015; Ginn and Ascensão 2018), demonstrating that land itself remains a key point of attention.

In this regard, urban gardening is not simply about producing food, but are claims of a lack of democratic and engaged use of public space (Rogge and Theesfeld 2018). They are therefore examples of citizens becoming empowered to take control of their lives and to gain experience in self-management and democratic governance (Rogge and Theesfeld 2018)—a point I made above (Glover et al. 2005). While there are elements of participation and self-management in this narrative (Cangelosi 2014), there are also questions of governance and relations with

institutions. For some, this fosters civic participation in urban land management (Colding et al. 2013), where a constructive relationship between ordinary citizens and administrative authority (Mattei and Quarta 2015; Pikner et al. 2020) is developed in a type of public-commons partnership (Milburn and Russell 2019), while for others interacting with local governments is a necessity rather than an explicitly articulated strategy (e.g. Eizenberg 2012). In this case, as Mattei and Quarta (2015) note, 'commons sharing regulations' in dozens of Italian cities emerge through citizens taking care of flower beds, urban gardens, or empty buildings, through entering into shared agreement with the municipality. In this sense, then, it is seen as a movement of bottom-up citizenship, demonstrating people's desire for engagement and participation in city planning in a more active way (Mattei and Quarta 2015). Likewise, Pikner et al. (2020) suggest that urban gardens as commons is the essence of a co-produced urbanity, where informal practices clash with institutionalised city planning, in the process producing an informal-formal meshwork. In this particular case (in Finland), it was suggested that this process resulted in the partial informalisation of local state and city planning institutions who were porous to this process, where the gardens were able to develop a more affective and networked movement as a result (Pikner et al. 2020). Moreover, rather than being a cog in the neoliberal machine, this idea of active citizenship is contrary to the neoliberal ideal, which is defined by excluding and disempowering ordinary citizens from city planning in favour of private investors (Mattei and Quarta 2015).

Importantly, these are processes rather than finished products, thus they likewise contain a number of contradictions (Eizenberg 2012). Eizenberg (2012) studies the urban gardens commons through an explicit Lefebvrian approach, while Engel-Di Mauro (2018) claims that there needs to be closer examination in how the commons relates to care and social reproduction, and further how this relates to the urban garden spaces, reflecting the work of Federici (2018) on the commons and social reproduction. While Federici (2018) is hopeful for the expansion of emerging forms of collective reproductive work seen in community gardens, and they offer potential to rethink political strategies of communalising, their role in collectivising social reproduction can be overestimated, since this form of gardening is often women's work that adds another layer of responsibility on to women (Engel-Di Mauro 2018). These are considerations I explore later in relation to post-capitalist possibilities and social reproduction.

However, urban gardens as commons shouldn't be understood as a romanticisation of the past, or a return to a noble and possibly archaic ideal, but as a springboard for critique of contemporary social relations and the production of new spatiality, which can be transformative to elements of everyday life, social practices, and thinking (Eizenberg 2012). Despite this, the conversation between the urban gardening literature and the proliferating work on the commons/commoning remains relatively under-developed and lacks close examination (Rogge and Theesfeld 2018). Before extending this debate through an exploration of the urban gardening literature, I explore some definitional issues regarding urban gardening.

2.3.2   Defining Urban Gardens

Urban Agriculture is a term used to refer to a range of food growing spaces and a broad swathe of activities, including city farms, community gardens, guerrilla gardening, allotments, school gardens, rooftop gardens and beehives, etc (Tornaghi 2014; Follmann and Viehoff 2015). However, there is a certain ambiguity, especially surrounding the term 'community garden' in particular, which has tended to be the focus of recent academic interest. This ambiguity is predominantly seen in the diverging contextual and geographical meaning of this term and its associated activities. For example, a brief exploration of how 'community gardens' are defined by US-based organisations demonstrates this issue. The 'Community Gardening Toolkit' developed by the University of Missouri (2015, n.p.) states:

> *"Community gardens also take many shapes and forms. From a 50-by-50-foot church garden that supplies a local food pantry with fresh produce to a vacant city lot divided into plots and gardened by neighbors, community gardens reflect the needs and the desires of people directly involved in their management and upkeep. As such, there are many, many ways to organize and manage a community garden."*

Moreover, this document states that the typical community garden in the USA is *"located on land that is divided into different plots for individual and family use"* and may be borrowed, rented, or owned by the gardeners themselves (University of Missouri 2015, n.p.). The US Department of Agriculture (2020) also define community gardens in a similar way, emphasising

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that they are plots of land often rented by individuals of groups, while the Soil Science Society of America (2020) suggest that community gardens are themselves defined by a diversity in terms of what is grown (flowers, vegetables, and community), where it is grown (school, hospital, neighbourhood), and importantly that they are defined by residents of a community to maintain spaces in their own community. Glover et al. (2005, p.79) define community gardens as:

"Organized initiative(s) whereby sections of land are used to produce food or flowers in an urban environment for the personal or collective benefit of their members who, by virtue of their participation, share certain recourses such as space, tools and water."

Although this is a vague description that closely reflects a description of an allotment, and while it is noted that UK allotments closely resemble "community gardens" as they are understood in other countries (Miller 2015), UK-based literature tends to suggest that allotments and community gardens are entirely distinct spaces and phenomena, with the general academic trends favouring studies of the latter rather than the former, today. However, McVey et al. (2018) suggest that it would be a misunderstanding to equate them since allotments are distinguished by the way they are divided pieces of land that are privately owned and rented by individuals or families for growing food, whereas *"a community garden can be seen as a collective space to which members of the community can contribute for social, cultural and environmental reasons".* The collective nature of community gardens in comparison to allotments is therefore considered a crucial difference (van den Berg et al. 2010; Follmann and Viehoff 2015; McVey et al. 2018; Kingsley et al. 2019), as well as the more formalised allotment arrangement between the Local Authority (who often own the land) and the gardeners who rent and cultivate this land (Gilbert 2013; Trendov 2018), which Bendt et al. (2013) suggest provides more stable property rights compared to community gardens. Follmann and Viehoff (2015) suggest that the new and emerging forms of urban community gardening should in fact be understood against the backdrop of the more regulated forms of gardening (i.e. allotments). Community gardens are not predefined or over-regulated in this way (Müller 2012; Follmann and Viehoff 2015), but instead provide an environment of untidiness and openness defined by participants (Follmann and Viehoff 2015).

However, these distinctions complicate and problematise the nature of academic work in the area, which is inherently international and where such clear distinctions are far less apparent, such as in the Netherlands (van den Berg et al. 2010) and New Zealand (Egli et al. 2016). Perhaps worse is that it provides an extremely simplified understanding of both community gardens and allotments. The individualised nature of allotments can be over-emphasised (or perhaps their collective tendencies overlooked), noted by those who have specifically traced the allotment and its history who highlight its specific social, collective, and cooperative functions (Crouch and Ward 1997; Acton 2015). Likewise, despite the narrow range of activities often associated with allotments (growing food) in comparison to the diversity of social, cultural, and environmental elements of community gardens, it is questionable as to whether it is as clear and universal as is often claimed. Acton (2015), for example, closely documents the environmental and social factors that drive contemporary allotment gardeners, including their relations with the local community (rather than simply individual), their collective practices, and their physical and mental health benefits.

Therefore, given these problems, then it is necessary to consider a broader term that can encompass the dynamics that interest this specific research. Firstly, both have been understood as existing forms of the commons (Colding et al. 2013; Colding and Barthel 2013; Bigell 2015), which is how I will understand them through this thesis (without neglecting the ambiguities of this, too). But, in referring to the gardens, I will use the term 'urban gardening' or 'urban gardens', and only 'allotments' or 'community gardens' when referring to specific cases. However, without becoming overly preoccupied with such definitions, since allotments and community gardens may be non-urban, and there are other forms of urban gardens such as private gardens and public parks, it is a term which I consider is situated in the geographical context of this particular study as well as the political intentions of it. Urban gardens, or urban gardening, provide the basis for bringing together separated phenomenon in what I understand to be examples of existing forms of commons and commoning.

2.3.3 Understanding the Contested Politics of Urban Gardening

Although urban gardens are celebrated from a wide variety of perspectives (McVey et al. 2018; Kingsley et al. 2019), their rationale does remain extremely ambiguous, and research to date is inconclusive in this regard (Turner et al. 2011; Veen et al. 2016). The diversity of research

demonstrates how the same spaces can be read from a broad range of perspectives and disciplines, but also suggests that the practices and actions of the gardeners themselves remain multi-faceted, diverse, and thus potentially ambiguous. Indeed, broadly speaking, they are spaces that can be seen through various lenses, including environmental and ecological political (Reynolds 2008; Purcell and Tyman 2015), racial justice (Alkon and Agyeman 2011; Kato et al. 2013; Passidomo 2014b), gender and social reproduction (Engel-Di Mauro 2018), social and cultural (Milbourne 2012), educational (Hale et al. 2011), health-based (Okvat and Zautra 2011), or food-related (Poulsen et al. 2014; Furness and Gallaher 2018). Of course, categorising the gardens in this way is partly reductionist, since often the meaning given to these spaces by the gardeners' practices and intentions can cross-over several of these dynamics. However, in general, the crux of this particular debate has tended to become increasingly focused around their ambiguous and contested political dynamics—which is the focus of this section. McClintock's (2014) paper is largely considered the "nexus" of this debate, highlighting their often ambiguous and contradictory nature, with the literature in general divided between those who see them as resistant to neoliberalism or criticised and dismissed for underwriting and enabling it (Certomà and Tornaghi 2015; Miller 2015; Barron 2017). Miller (2015) suggests that there are two broad trends emerging—one that explores their potential in terms of food security, food justice, cohesive neighbourhoods and community development, and sustainability, while the other focuses on the exclusionary aspects of the projects as neoliberalising agents.

Though neoliberalism is a contested term (Peck and Theodore 2019), it is often understood in two broad ways: first, as a neat and monolithic political economic dynamic (through the imposition of the free market); and second, a more 'messy' view, largely deriving from a Foucauldian governmentality perspective (as an act which structures and organises not only the governing but also the governed through the shaping of the population and the self) (Barnett 2010; Wacquant 2012). The former sees the extension of free market governance and policy, which advocates small government transformation in favour of the market, through methods of selective deregulation and targeted re-regulation (Peck et al. 2018). The latter suggests that neoliberalism is an act of governing human beings that produces particular effects from their behaviours (Lorenzini 2018), which produces economic values and practices into every sphere of human life (Moisander et al. 2017). Though both of these perspectives have provided crucial insights, for Wacquant (2012, p.68), both miss what is "neo" about neoliberalism, which is *"the*

remaking and redeployment of the state as the core agency that actively fabricates the subjectivities, social relations and collective representations suited to making the fiction of markets real and consequential". For Wacquant (2012), these two perspectives are inherently limited without considering their interrelation—the former rests on narrow economic orthodoxy, and the latter provides an account of neoliberalism that is devoid of specificity and over-relies on process. Instead, neoliberalism here is understood as *"an articulation of state, market, and citizenship that harnesses the first to impose the stamp of the second onto the third"* (Wacquant 2012, p.71). However, Barnett's (2010) work is particularly instructive, which claims that it is the re-articulation of the state rather than it becoming "small" or stripped back that is important (which tends to suggest that the state is passive rather than active). Secondly, Barnett's (2010) intervention is crucial for highlighting the structuralist tendencies in both perspectives, since both the political economic and governmentality understandings tend to see social life as simply a function of broader macro forces (and is entirely manipulable), with the former understanding it as being shaped by class interests, and the latter understanding the way that governmentality shapes practices as rational and serving economic efficiency. Instead, Barnett (2010) questions and challenges the assumption that both processes have resulted in the decline of public life. This is a crucial point for understanding the everyday possibilities of commoning, as is questioned and reflected upon throughout this thesis.

In the gardening literature, this binary tends to rest on either seeing garden spaces and their practices as reproducing a macro political-economic dynamic (neoliberalism) or a supposedly less critical approach which sees these macro processes as benign or unimportant at the micro level (Classens 2015). The contested nature of these spaces has therefore resulted in an equally contested set of literature, and though scholars have attempted to transcend this binary through a more nuanced discourse (Barron 2017), it remains to some extent at an impasse (Miller 2015). This section will explore this binary in more detail—suggesting that on the one hand it is impossible to divorce urban gardening from broader political-economic dynamics (including neoliberalism and austerity), while on the other it is important to explore their transformative or counter-neoliberal potential while also being realistic about the progressive potential of urban gardening (Cumbers et al. 2017).

Critics of urban gardening have claimed that it contributes to neoliberal formation and rationalities of individualism, consumer choice, austerity localism, entrepreneurialism, and self-improvement (Guthman 2008; Pudup 2008; Classens 2015). Broadly, this position emphasises an understanding of neoliberalism that goes beyond the simple idea of privatisation and de-regulation of the market, to the "soft" strategies of involving civil society in governance (Rosol 2012), or as governance beyond the state (Swyngedouw 2005). Therefore, the gardens appear as symbols and practices of the state devolving responsibility onto civil society (Rosol 2012). Pudup (2008), for example, has suggested that urban gardens have largely internalised this neoliberal logic, where discourses of self-help provide the rationality to obscure the broader political context of state retrenchment (Classens 2015). Barron (2017), for example, raises concerns as to how urban gardens represent the devolution of responsibility for social welfare onto communities and individuals, which is not only apparent in community gardens but also in allotments and other urban gardening projects (Nam and Dempsey 2018). Therefore, these gardens can inadvertently alleviate the state from service provision (Ghose and Pettygrove 2014), by unreflectively filling in the gaps left in the wake of the state, without challenging the structural conditions of this dynamic (Classens 2015).

McClintock (2014) suggests that urban gardens can be both radical and neoliberal at once—thus it is a conflictual and contradictory process rather than a binary one. It therefore remains equally important to explore their transformative elements that contradict these neoliberal tendencies, which requires an understanding of the ways that it challenges or reinforces conventional configurations (Classens 2015). Tornaghi (2014) suggests that researchers could engage in deep empirical and case-study oriented work to explore ways that these projects can undermine neoliberalisation—such as through social reproduction, food sovereignty, emancipatory place-making, or re-scaling the local food supply chain—which is partly the intention of this thesis. Part of the issue with the neoliberal narrative within its conventional political-economic understanding is that it remains unclear what service provision urban gardens actually replace (unlike, for example, the direct privatisation of healthcare or waste collection). On the one hand, it is unclear how these projects actually relate to the existing welfare state—or indeed, more generally, tends to rest on a common logic of seeing the public (state) and private (market) as existing in conflict. In this sense, they are not necessarily directly "removing" any previous state provision—since, aside from allotment gardens, such spaces have very rarely been an area of interest for the state. Moreover, their relationship with land deserves

further attention, since these gardens are often the victims of neoliberal land development (Spilková and Vágner 2016), rather than beneficiaries of it. In terms of the debate on neoliberal subjectivity (within the Foucauldian lens) that Pudup (2008) highlights, this also deserves further critical examination. Indeed, forms of mutual help and aid, reciprocity, and cooperation are often understood to be fundamental to the functioning of the spaces (Veen et al. 2016). As Ward (1996a [1973]) documented, mutual aid and self-help are socialist principles that have been co-opted and associated with a right wing logic—an associational trap that Pudup (2008) has fallen into here. This is crucial, because otherwise this "critical" scholarship (Classens 2015) assigns authorship of terms such as mutual aid and self-help, and even community, to neoliberal protagonists (Crossan et al. 2016)—a warning that reflects Ward's (1996a [1973]) concerns regarding left-wing scepticism towards these ideals and practices. Perhaps the most significant problem of emphasising the neoliberal character of urban gardening is that it reduces gardeners to passive subjects being duped by powerful state and corporate actors (Crossan et al. 2016), instead of attempting to understand how gardeners themselves understand their on-the-ground experiences and practices. As Page (2017) notes, this has been a historical problem in how people understood urban gardens (especially allotments), where gardeners tended to be treated as passive figures.

However, as Rosol (2012) notes in the case of Berlin, there is a distinct difference between the nature and logic of neoliberalisation from above and how it is understood on the ground in daily life, thus urban gardening should be considered as more than a stop-gap in the demands of austerity (Corcoran et al. 2017). The neoliberal strategy of outsourcing maintenance of parks to citizens is rarely realised—largely because citizen engagement is a limited resource, citizens rarely want to carry out community work for free (without the time or energy), nor do they accept their position as a stop gap (Rosol 2012). Therefore, Rosol (2012) suggests that while there is undoubtedly a form of roll-out neoliberalism within urban gardening in practice, they also possess several contradictions, including turning private lots into public spaces, inventing new uses and designs, users becoming decision makers, and the creation of public green space—which are contrary to the logics of the market (and neoliberalism).

Perhaps the best way of understanding this problem is through a historic lens, exemplified especially by Ginn's (2012) exploration of the Dig for Victory campaign during the Second

World War. Ginn (2012) demonstrates how the UK government at the time had promoted forms of home growing (including in allotments and other public gardens) as a deliberate strategy of boosting patriotism for the war effort. In this sense, it was a top-down attempt of directly manipulating people's subjective experiences of gardening for political ends (in a similar way to the Big Society neoliberal dynamic exemplified by critics of urban gardening). However, Ginn (2012) notes that this was quite distinct when understood from below, where these efforts to boost patriotic feelings and sentiments through gardening was far less apparent, but it was a more pragmatic effort to help themselves and those around them during a crisis— ultimately, to feel constructive and powerful during a time of powerlessness.

This sort of analysis may be extended to this thesis in the contemporary context, where cynical strategies of austerity (and decentralising and devolving services onto communities) are contrasted with the felt and lived realities of the gardeners. In this sense, there is a danger of over-determining the influence of neoliberalism on individual human and non-human actors (Classens 2015)—thus downgrading the role of agency (Bakker 2010). The critique of neoliberal subjectivity can be contrasted in the way that urban gardening can promote a form of citizenship that is at odds with the neoliberal construction of citizenship, offering a glimpse of a radical urban citizenry beyond the neoliberal one of an atomised citizen subject independent of any broader social responsibility (Crossan et al. 2016). In this regard, urban gardens can provide an outward and relational sense of community rather than a parochial and individually oriented one, which is particularly important for marginalised and disadvantaged groups (Cumbers et al. 2017). They are often thought of as spaces of sociality, as a micro fix to some of the problems of urban isolation and fragmentation, while acting as "third spaces" beyond work and home (Veen et al. 2016). In this regard, it is understood that gardens produce much more than food and can be crucial tools for community organisers and practitioners (Draper and Freedman 2010). Reflecting on Putnam's (2000) emphasis on active membership in such associations, Glover et al. (2005) notes that leisure activities such as gardening can contribute to a sense of empathy towards community members and a broader political engagement in their community. Social factors are often the main motivators of gardeners, through interaction with neighbours, creating social networks, and reciprocal learning (Cangelosi 2014). In this regard, urban gardens can enhance social capital, where social bonds in the community are developed and nourished (Firth et al. 2011; Veen et al. 2016). These forms of social capital allow for the development and identification of shared values and common aims, social support, and social

connections (Kingsley and Townsend 2006). However, these forms of social capital don't always, at least immediately, transfer into the wider community and beyond the garden itself (Kingsley and Townsend 2006).

While the gardens can be crucial areas for civic engagement and participation (Ohmer et al. 2009), this isn't a process that is necessarily at odds with neoliberalism—though as noted it does contrast with the individualised and atomised emphasis of the neoliberal citizen. For example, although Glover et al. (2005) suggest that such voluntary associations can be crucial forms of developing democratic citizens, such associations have been central to the Big Society agenda (Scott 2011; Balazard et al. 2017). In this sense, urban gardens can often be defined by a combination of social and civic activity, based on participation and cooperative tasks and the realisation of democratic values (Glover et al. 2005). Bendt et al. (2013) suggests that they reflect a dynamic of active participation and experimentation by citizens themselves in shaping cities. Such forms of local creativity and experience is often overlooked in formal planning procedures (Bendt et al. 2013). Related to this, Classens (2015) suggests that others have attempted to link their transformative potential in terms of their ability to reshape the urban form. Thus, they are potentially a way of intervening in urban politics (Follmann and Viehoff 2015) during the "post-political" world (Swyngedouw 2005; 2011). Some academics have likewise used them as a critical discussion of the politics of urban space and neoliberal transformation (Tornaghi 2014), including the Right to the City (Passidomo 2014b; Mattei and Quarta 2015; Purcell and Tyman 2015) and the way that they challenge the place-making of cities in the Global North through appropriation of neglected land, bilateral agreement of sharing of private land, and community stewardship of public parks (Certomà and Tornaghi 2015). In this sense, urban gardens highlight the tensions that characterise how land and property are valued today and therefore are sometimes thought to be sites of contestation (Barron 2017). As Crossan et al. (2016) notes, Rosol's (2012) critique (of the state devolving responsibility for land management on to civil society) emerges through a context-specific understanding of urban gardening that is occurring on public park land, whereas in Glasgow, Crossan et al. (2016) argue that it is more common for urban gardens to emerge in abandoned and enclosed derelict land. Cumbers et al. (2017) suggest that we therefore shouldn't ignore their role in reclaiming abandoned and derelict space for social and public use. In this sense, then, they should be understood as a struggle for the urban commons around self-valorisation and social need over the dominant neoliberal urbanism (Cumbers et al. 2017).

However, there is a broader and important question as to the extent that these spaces are explicitly political. For some, it is a form of "DIY citizenship" that reflects a bottom-up response that can protect individuals and vulnerable groups from powerful forces that regularly exploit and oppress them (Crossan et al. 2016, p.943). This form of DIY citizenship is an interdependent set of relations between people, organisational processes, and institutions that help rework the notions of citizenship (Crossan et al. 2016). Spilková and Vágner (2016) likewise demonstrate their explicitly political potential, where allotments in Stockholm have organised against their privatisation through a network of civic organisations and collaboration between gardeners and lawyers, architects, city planners who learn laws, regulations, and ways to intervene in threats to allotment gardens. Taking a more anarchistic approach, Izlar (2019) suggests that these are potentially prefigurative forms of welfare embedded in solidarity and mutual aid that subverts both statist and capitalist institutions. However, Glover et al. (2005) suggest that participants often do not see their activities as political, but that the behaviour and practices of the gardeners can implicitly challenge the notion that social issues must be addressed through existing administrative and representative institutions. Guerlain and Campbell (2016) similarly suggest that rather than urban gardens being based on a common political intention of prefiguring a new society, it is instead based on the simple shared practice of gardening. This contests the usual idea of prefiguration that is predicated on strategic intention, where the very mundane and everyday actions and practices force the questioning of what is and isn't a political act (Guerlain and Campbell 2016). More work is needed to understand how the gardeners themselves view what they are doing and their own goals and intentions, rather than externally imposed notions of prefiguration (Guerlain and Campbell 2016). In this sense, it becomes crucial to recognise the less explicit forms of agency and action, otherwise there is a risk that it could provide a narrow lens on social action that results in side-lining these actions (Guerlain and Campbell 2016).

For some, the focus is placed on the quiet politics of everyday life, as emphasised by Hankins (2017). Kneafsey et al. (2017) suggest that it is a "quiet" process rather than one of overtly radical transformation—one which encompasses learning skills and capacities, or the "quiet sustainability" of sharing, gifting, repairing and bartering identified by Smith and Jehlička (2013). Crucially, a significant amount of this quiet everyday activity of the gardens requires little market or state involvement (Smith and Jehlička 2013). Therefore, as noted from the experience of gardeners in Poland and Czechia, people who grow, consume and share their

own food, don't do so out of environmental obligations or to achieve resilience, but is a daily quiet practice of satisfying life—and thus is associated with joy, exuberance, generosity, skill, and care (Smith and Jehlička 2013). Thus, the quiet activities are not simply ones of coping, but conviviality and non-alienated labour (Gibson-Graham 2006; Schor and Thompson 2014; Slocum 2018).

This relates with other studies which specifically explore the type of labour being carried out—since they are usually based on volunteering principles (Trendov 2018). While urban gardens can extract scarce material, labour, and time from already resource-poor citizens (Ghose and Pettygrove 2014), volunteering in urban gardens can in fact reconstitute a relationship between people and their environment and the products of that relationship that is actively severed in capitalist relations (Crossan et al. 2016). They offer the potential for the creation of autonomous and self-valorising work practices (Crossan et al. 2016), where they become spaces for less alienating and more collective and solidaristic forms of work (Cumbers et al. 2017). Moreover, conflating various dynamics of urban gardens with more severe forms of neoliberalisation is problematic—for example, between the volunteerism required of urban gardens and that of "enforced" volunteerism as part of neoliberal workfare regimes (Crossan et al. 2016). Instead, gardeners can take part in political participation, where a process of learning, doing, and being in the presence of difference (ideas, cultures, social classes) is important (Crossan et al. 2016).

In conclusion, urban gardens are largely defined today by their ambiguous and contradictory political nature—and McClintock's (2014) intervention here remains crucial. As McClintock (2014) also highlights, it is absolutely crucial to move beyond the dualism of radical or neoliberal—on the one hand, a critique of it can be counterproductive, and on the other, a romantic view will prove disappointing. Therefore, it is important to engage with the plural, contradictory, uncertain, and ambiguous nature of their existence and practice, rather than attempting to rescue and package them within a neat political imaginary. Based on this, it is not difficult to see why there has been some interest in exploring these spaces of urban gardens as sites of commoning, or as actually existing commons (Eizenberg 2012). While the contradictions developed within this literature mirror those that I highlighted in relation to the commons, it suggests that the two sets of literature may be brought together in a productive and

mutualistic way. The next sections will suggest that a more robust engagement with some of the complexities of the commons and commoning might provide the foundation for a more in-depth engagement between these two sets of literature.

2.4 The Commons, Capitalism, and the State

While reading urban gardens through a commoning lens may be possible, it remains unclear as to how it can elaborate on some of the ambiguities that I've highlighted in both the commons and gardening literature. Here, it is therefore necessary to develop and elaborate on the relationship with the state and capital as both a central and key point for understanding the commons (Cumbers 2015; Dawney et al. 2016).

2.4.1 Beyond False Polarities: Appreciating the Vernacular

One of the foremost contemporary thinkers on the commons, Massimo De Angelis, provides some explanation as to the difficulties in transcending such an impasse in the urban gardening literature. De Angelis (2007) identifies three common false polarities: self-interest and competition vs. cooperation; Laissez-faire vs. state intervention; and free trade vs. protectionism. De Angelis (2007, pp.11–12) suggests that these are not things that exist in conflict but are deeply interrelated processes:

> "In reality, economic liberalism and the market system have been actualised through their opposites: self-interest and competition through cooperation of labour in production; creation of markets through the state; free trade through protectionism. To the extent that the critics do not question the systemic bond between the two poles (that is, the fact that the two poles take the form they take because of the dynamic relations between the two), and instead embrace one of the poles without problematising the nature of its relationship with the other, they perform a service for their opponents, by opening a space for the reproduction of this dynamic relation."

It is possible that this understanding explains the impasse and confusion relating to the gardening literature. Indeed, within the reading of neoliberalism presented by critiques of urban gardening, there is a tendency to view the state as existing in a separate sphere from the market, as an almost benign actor, instead of seeing how neoliberalisation is a dynamic that happens *through* the state, not in spite of it (Barnett 2010; Wacquant 2012; Bruff 2014; Bruff and Tansel 2019). Hardin revisited his own critique to suggest that there are two options of avoiding the tragedy of the commons—the private ownership of land or state ownership (Carson 2013), reflecting the common market/state dichotomy that is largely the foundation of the neoliberal discourse (in terms of both its advocates and opponents). Thus, the notion of the tragedy of the commons has been used for the justification of government control or privatisation (Turner 2017). Renewed interest in the commons and commoning has increasingly viewed this dichotomy as problematic, and in this sense it offers some potential clarity on the previously discussed impasse in the urban gardening literature, as noted by Hardt and Negri (2009, p.ix):

> *"The seemingly exclusive alternative between the private and the public corresponds to an equally pernicious political alternative between capitalism and socialism. It is often assumed that the only cure for the ills of a capitalist society is public regulation and Keynesian and/or socialist economic management; and, conversely, socialist maladies are presumed to be treatable only by private property and capitalist control. Socialism and capitalism, however, even though they have at times been mingled together and at others occasioned bitter conflicts, are both regimes of property that excluded the common. The political project of instituting the common...cuts diagonally across these false alternatives."*

Likewise, for Ostrom, both the state and private enterprise were unsatisfactory solutions to the management of the commons (Carson 2013). As Carson (2013) points out, both *"result in the same knowledge and incentive problems that always result from externalizing costs and benefits, when ownership and control are divorced from direct knowledge of the situation"*. The commons is therefore often understood as existing beyond this public/private dichotomy (Cangelosi 2014). In this sense, then, one of the foundational pillars of the commons is in

terms of self-management (Stavrides 2015), where people themselves determine the rules, traditions, and values of the spaces and resources (Bollier 2020b). The commons therefore introduces the possibility for self-organisation outside of capitalist logic (Huron 2015). On the one hand, this emphasis on the localised and specific knowledge of the on-the-ground users reflects the critique by Hayek (1999 [1944]) of centralised state planning of the economy (a dynamic which Cumbers (2015) also notes in relation to state critiques on the left), but also requires extension through the work of James C. Scott and Colin Ward. In Seeing like a State, Scott (1999) documents the various ways that modernist planning methods have failed—partly because they overdetermine and ignore the vernacular and everyday practices of ordinary people. While Hayek (1999 [1944]) used a similar point to advocate for free market economics (since he felt that centralised planning was unable to capture this complexity), Scott uses this logic also as a critique of the free market itself. As Scott (2010, n.p.) notes:

> *"Large-scale capitalism is just as much an agency of homogenization, uniformity, grids, and heroic simplification as the state, with the difference that, for capitalists, simplification must pay. The profit motive compels a level of simplification and tunnel vision that, if anything, is more heroic than the early scientific forest of Germany. In this respect, the conclusions I draw from the failures of modern social engineering are as applicable to market-driven standardization as they are to bureaucratic homogeneity."*

In a similar manner to Jacobs (2016 [1961]) influential work, Sennett and Sendra (2020) have recently suggested that developers, planners and architects designing the neoliberal city from above (which includes both private organisations as well as public institutions) are unable to understand the on-the-ground complexity and experience of daily life of ordinary citizens. Likewise, Colin Ward (1996b; 1996a [1973]; 2011), an anarchist critic of both capitalist and statist responses to practical issues (e.g. housing), highlighted the vast networks of mutual aid institutions that the working classes built during the 19th century, including friendly societies, building societies, sick clubs, coffin clubs, clothing clubs, cooperatives, and trade unions. One of Ward's significant contributions was also his assertion that the state was incapable of understanding the complex and messy dynamics of everyday life—that architects and planners had not built mass council housing as though they themselves would live in them (Ward 1996c;

2011). Ward suggested that tenants often found council housing to be alienating and paternalistic because of this, and often unsuitable to people's own needs (Hodkinson 2012; Thompson 2015). Ward (1996c) therefore celebrates vernacular architecture—seen in his emphasis on DIY and self-builds, which emphasises the centrality of dweller control. In this regard, Ward (1996a, p.72) suggests that this is because people need to be able to *"attack their environment"* to make it their own—to have a direct responsibility for it.

As Honeywell (2011) notes, a major driver for Ward was to in fact re-claim this libertarian terminology for the anti-capitalist left that had been stolen by the free-market right libertarians.

> *"The most depressing thing about the ideological mess we have made for ourselves in the field of housing is that whenever someone on a public platform eulogizes self-help and mutual aid, half the audience stop listening since they regard these words not merely as Conservative platitudes but as a smokescreen to conceal the abdication of governmental responsibilities. I cannot imagine how these phrases came to be dirty words for socialists since they refer to human attributes without which any conceivable socialist society would flounder"*
> *(Ward 2011, p.109).*

In many ways, this helps explain the issues raised by the critics of urban gardens, such as Pudup (2008). As Ward (1996a [1973]) notes, the issue was that the left had abandoned these grassroots forms of organisation and invested all of its energy into the state itself. Therefore, it is perhaps unsurprising that people arrive at 'neoliberalism' so readily when something is not taking the usual shape of state management or control, in this case. In fact, though they don't explicitly recognise Ward's contributions in this field, Caffentzis and Federici (2014) suggest that these 19th century mutual aid societies in the USA are examples of the commons, referencing the work of Beito (2003). In this sense, Ward (1996b) and Kropotkin's (2014 [1902]) emphasis on the mutual aid societies and institutions might also be understood as examples of commons.

2.4.2   Negotiating Contradictions in the Commons

The relationship with the state and capital is therefore a central point to understand and explore the commons and commoning. This is true whether a more sceptical approach to the state is taken (such as with Ward and Scott) or whether the state is seen as a facilitator and partner to the commons. Arbell et al. (2020) note the various ways that the commons are understood to relate with the state and capital—either existing against and beyond them (Caffentzis and Federici 2014), as an escape from them (Bresnihan and Byrne 2015), or entangled with them (De Angelis 2017). However, rather than neglecting the presence of the state and capital, there is a necessity to recognise their presence in everyday life and therefore how they relate to the commons. For De Angelis (2017), the spheres of autonomy and autopoiesis of the commons offer the potential of emancipation from the current state and capital and the problems they create (e.g. war, global warming, poverty in the midst of plenty, expropriation, exploitation etc). However, *"we cannot emancipate ourselves from the vertical state and exploitative capital tomorrow or in a year's time; rather, we must see emancipation as a process of growing commons powers vis-à-vis capital and the state"* (De Angelis 2017, p.358). In this regard, De Angelis (2017) recognises that the commons is deeply interrelated with the state and capital rather than separated. This closely reflects empirical work which has shown that the commons is rarely in fact detached from the state and capital but is deeply entangled with them (Chatterton 2016). But, the extent that it offers an alternative to state and capitalist solutions, or whether it is simply an entangled meshwork in a diverse and fragmented system—in a more Gibson-Graham (2006) sense—remains relatively uncertain.

As De Angelis (2013; 2017) and Hardt (2010) have noted, capitalism depends on forms of the common itself, therefore there is a need to appreciate its complex interaction, and how capitalism itself functions as a result of commoning capacities and practices. This reflects Tsing's (2017) emphasis on 'salvage accumulation'—where capitalism depends upon and exploits non-capitalist practices (e.g. how garment workers in Mexico need to know how to sew before even beginning their jobs—in other words, a skill learnt *outside* of capital). As De Angelis (2010) notes, even in the moment of production itself, workers do not participate in monetary transactions—if a worker needs a tool, another worker passes it to them. For De Angelis (2010), although this is a type of cooperation that is embedded within and driven by the capitalist mode of production (producing a commodity), these commodities are produced by a set of ordinary actions and practices that are not themselves commodities (passing someone a

tool, for example), but a type of labour which is a form of quiet commoning. This reflects Graeber's (2011) notion of everyday communism, which suggests that everyday life is permeated by forms of communistic behaviours, yet are so widely accepted that they go unnoticed. For Graeber (2011), these forms of everyday communism exist even in the most capitalistic spaces—that ultimately capitalism is built upon a bedrock of everyday communism, or is an undemocratic and authoritarian way of organising these communistic tendencies and capacities. This, of course, contrasts with Gibson-Graham's (1996; 2006) important intervention of understanding the diversity of the economy that already exists, since it overlooks these quiet and ordinary possibilities that lie latent in the heart of capital. Of course, although Marx didn't take an anthropological approach to his work, it is arguably central to Marx (2004 [1867]) own understanding, where the development of the working class and their cooperative capacities was crucial for transforming capitalism.

De Angelis (2017) exemplifies the complexity of the relationship between the commons, the state, and capital—both in terms of how capitalism and the state depend on the commons, but also how the commons depend on elements of the state or capitalism:

Table 1: Using the other system's complex products

Source: De Angelis (2017, p.333)

Commons...	... using the products of capital complexity
Wikipedia	depends on a distributed infrastructure including mainframes, cables, privately produced electricity etc.
Community-supported agriculture networks	trucks, fuels, electricity, road networks
Cochabamba water associations	trucks, fuels, some equipment, pipes
Massimo's local community garden	tools, irrigation equipment, some borrowed tractors
Reclaimed factory (Rimaflow)	capitalist detritus, fuel, trucks

Capital/state ...	... using the products of commons complexity
Large event (Milan, Expo)	volunteers and their support households
Any skilled occupation	'good will': nurtured in the commons
Public parks	increasingly tended on 'ecological days' by volunteers mobilised in the community
Police	use information from neighbourhood watches, 'civic' behaviour ....
Labour power	Reproduced in households

Thus, the commons are always partial and coexist alongside forms of public and private ownership and management (Chatterton 2016), and although they may exist in opposition and conflict, the commons, state, and capital necessarily co-exist and depend on each other for their own reproduction (Ruiz Cayuela 2021). The commons can rely on public funding, the state can utilise charities to run public services during austerity cuts, and capital depends on the commons through forms of social reproductive work by women and communities (Ruiz Cayuela 2021). Thus, De Angelis (2013) cautions against analysis which suggests that the commons using capitalist markets (for its own ends) demonstrates the co-optation of the commons, instead thinking through this interaction as a contingent strategy of survival and precondition for their reproduction. As De Angelis (2017) notes, the immediate environment of the capitalist circuit is the commons circuit, and vice versa. While capital depends on the commons to manage its crisis, the commons must be aware of capital's enclosure of the commons as well as its potential co-optation (Jeong 2018), as noted by the World Bank's interest in the commons (De Angelis 2013; Caffentzis and Federici 2014; Jeong 2018), whose approach to development rely on commoning principles to tie communities to global market circuits (De Angelis 2013). However, strategically-speaking, such a perspective can also reproduce an understanding that it's only possible to replace capitalism through sweeping ruptural change (e.g. orthodox revolutionary change), in a closed-systems approach, which tends to forefront the power of capital and its gravitational pull (Gibson-Graham et al. 2016). However, at the micro level, how these commons might function without access to vehicles, the fuel to run the vehicles, irrigation equipment, or methods of communication (social media etc), without in fact depending on and interacting with capitalism itself is unclear. For De Angelis

(2017), it is the process of "boundary commoning" which is important, whereby a commons might interact with other commons to construct a broader system of interdependency. This is not an ideological defence of capitalism, but it is simply to suggest that it is an important strategic and organisational consideration when referring to post-capitalist transitions. Moreover, with this in mind, there are questions as to the extent that the state and capital can be "infected" with the commons (Carlone 2013; Gibson-Graham et al. 2016).

Some of these dynamics are best understood in relation to periods of economic crises, with recent UK-based literature exploring the ways that an austerity-driven agenda was accompanied by increasing emphasis on community empowerment through the 'Big Society' (Featherstone et al. 2012; Levitas 2012; Williams et al. 2014). De Angelis (2017) suggests that the notion of the 'Big Society' is a dynamic in which neoliberalisation depends on ordinary capacities of commoning, an interesting perspective given the aforementioned debate on urban gardening. Unlike Thatcher who suggested that there was 'no such thing as society', Cameron opened up services to new providers like charities and social enterprises, etc (Scott 2011; De Angelis 2013; Balazard et al. 2017). For De Angelis (2013), the Big Society is an example of the dormant resources in communities which need to be activated through some form of commoning. Indeed, given that forms of commoning and the commons are often understood to provide services that were previously provided by the state, there is the risk that the commons can be seen to facilitate the roll-back of the welfare state and therefore support the neoliberal project of dismantling these welfare systems (Tickell and Peck 2002; Dawney et al. 2016). This reflects some of Caffentzis' (2004) concerns regarding the positionality of Ostrom's apolitical commons. However, although there has been a significant amount of work around the relationship between the Big Society, austerity, and scaling back the state (Featherstone et al. 2012; Levitas 2012; Williams et al. 2014), Hoedemækers et al. (2012) claim that many on the left have reminded us for decades that capital itself has always reproduced itself by depending on non-market practices in what are, ultimately, types of commons. Perhaps more problematically, such notions of scaling-back the state tend to overlook the ways that the state has played an active and constructive role in austerity and neoliberalism, where much of this critique tends to rest on the type of noted false polarity between public-private (De Angelis 2007).

However, there's a necessity to distinguish the direction and purpose in terms of these interactions. On the one hand, the Big Society utilises the commons for a purpose outside of the commons itself—not to provide an alternative to capital but to develop a particular model of capitalism—while on the other, a community garden purchasing tools and seeds from the market does so in an instrumental way for its own ends (De Angelis 2013). This demonstrates how austerity is itself a distinctly top-down process which contrasts with how it is understood and expressed on the ground, as I noted similarly in relation to the history of the Dig for Victory campaign (Ginn 2012). In this sense, it is crucial to pay attention to the type of latent commoning within communities (De Angelis 2013) without seeing this as simply being *produced* and *structured* entirely by and for capital (Gibson-Graham et al. 2016). Moreover, there are further questions to be answered as to what possibilities there are of commoning existing state resources—if this is the goal of a post-capitalist commons, then how can this occur without the possibility of it being reduced to a narrative of austerity–making? Indeed, Gibson-Graham et al. (2016, p.193) claim that the commons *"can be conceived of as a process—commoning—that is applicable to any form of property, whether private, or state-owned, or open access".* This is important, since the state resources that are being privatised are happening *through* the state, not in spite of it, as noted. In this sense, by turning them into commons, what problems and what potentials emerge as a result? One might look towards the contemporary situation of the welfare state, which was largely prefigured by a range of mutual aid societies that Ward (1996b; 1996a [1973]) documented. Indeed, these were eventually made vulnerable *through* the state, not only because of ideological changes within the state, but also related broader socio-economic changes. Thus, the alienation of people from these services is a vulnerability that perhaps can be avoided through understanding them as commons—which must fundamentally require some element of commoning.

Cumbers (2015) argues that the rejection of the state (see Holloway 2010a) leaves questions as to how to move from the micro to the macro of such commons projects. For Cumbers (2015), this requires the necessity of working with and through the state. Others have therefore seen the commons as facilitated by the state, rather than being *necessarily* coerced or used by it (Cumbers 2015; Thompson 2015; Bollier 2020a), which can involve strategic governance between government and civil society (Jeong 2018; Sievers-Glotzbach and Christinck 2021). The state, in this instance, might play a facilitative role and provide general rules, legal support, coordination, particular types of expertise, or infrastructure, to aid the development of the

commons (Thompson 2015; Bollier 2020a). This is sometimes seen in a more radical social democratic lens where recent efforts of municipalisation (e.g., the Preston model, Barcelona, Cleveland), have emphasised the importance of public-commons partnerships (PCPs). This suggests a more intentional relationship with the state. However, while calls for the nationalisation of services demonstrate desires to confront privatisation, PCPs suggest the importance of questioning when and where state ownership is the most appropriate form, while suggesting the possibilities of developing co-ownership models between state authorities and Commoners Association that is flexible and can respond to the particularities of specific assets, rather than as a monocultural institutional form (Milburn and Russell 2019). This is a perspective which draws on the engagement of formal top-down politics (within Local Councils and National Governments) with active social movements (Milburn and Russell 2019), however, the extent to which the activation and reproduction of the commons depend on the state in the long-term remains a critical point of analysis. These questions require further exploration, as noted by Bresnihan and Byrne (2015), since the impact and potential of the urban commons to impact wider political dynamics and power relations remains in question—for example, their limited ability to impact health and safety regulations or rent prices. The strategy of the commons remains an ambiguous and contentious one, since they largely remain invisible from the perspective of the public institutions, and intentionally distance themselves from representative politics, and therefore how it can engage with and transform the state remains in doubt (Bresnihan and Byrne 2015). Thus, the extent that the state can become an ally for a more radicalised civil society remains to be seen (Chatterton and Pusey 2019). Cumbers (2015) rightly notes that Bookchin offers some solution between this either-or dynamic (traditionally seen between anti-state anarchists and the Orthodox Marxists who prioritised the state). Bookchin's political journey itself is revealing, from a Stalinist to an anarchist, who then largely abandoned this label due to frustration with the individualistic and "lifestylist" nature of anarchism (Bookchin 1995), and instead increasingly focused on the development of federations and nested forms of governance in order to scale-out bottom-up direct democracies (Bookchin 1991; 2015). It is important to note, however, that Bookchin remained deeply anti-state (the capitalist state, at least). However, Bookchin's projects rest on developing these federative structures outside of and in conflict with the capitalist state, not within it, as Cumbers seems to suggest (2015).

To extend the understanding of this dynamic, it is necessary to provide a more subjective and micro understanding of the relationship between the commons, the state and capital. To do so requires a reflection on the process that has been historically referred to as the enclosure of the commons, but also exploring how this relates to the forms of doing that are associated with the commons. This helps to ground the focus of commoning around everyday life, which is a crucial aspect of this thesis, and will be the focus of the next section.

2.5 Everyday Life and Capitalism: Is There an Outside?

Gonzalez (2019) claims that simply speaking of commons as a verb (commoning) is not enough, and instead it is important to enter into the antagonisms of everyday life and practices of commoning. In this section, I address the ambiguities and possibilities of everyday life in relation to capitalism.

2.5.1 Capitalist Enclosure of Non-waged Activity

The history, practice and narrative of the commons is deeply related to the processes of enclosures (Jeffrey et al. 2012). The dynamic of enclosure of the commons has been a crucial point for many interested in the commons (Federici 2018), but likewise for Marx (2004 [1867]) who saw this as a significant development in the transformation from feudalism to capitalism. In Capital, Marx (2004 [1867]) referred to the process of 'primitive accumulation' to detail the enclosure of common land and property as a central aspect of the ongoing development of capitalism, where it "freed" the agricultural population to work in the newly developing industries, through the creation of a rural proletariat of landless labourers (De Angelis and Harvie 2014; Linebaugh 2014; Jeong 2018). Critical work on the commons and commoning see this as an ongoing process rather than a finished one (Midnight Notes Collective 1990; De Angelis 2017; Federici 2018; Jeong 2018), a process that Harvey (2003) described as accumulation by dispossession. While Marx was concerned with primitive accumulation as an inevitable stage in historical materialism, Federici (2018), for example, provides an analysis and defense of the commons as something that struggles with and against capitalism's continuing forms of "primitive accumulation" and its attempts to discipline the proletariat through coercion into the wage labour system. Likewise, De Angelis (2004) suggests that although there has been a significant amount of work on documenting privatisation, marketisation, and welfare

cuts, neoliberalism itself (as a particular form of capitalism) has rarely been understood in terms of its processes of enclosure. De Angelis (2004, p.75) sees enclosure as the accumulation of surplus value by capital, which is based on the *"forcible separation of people from whatever access to social wealth they have which is not mediated by competitive markets and money as capital"*. In this sense, this perspective on the commons emphasises the struggle for subsistence and activity *outside* of wage labour relations, through the establishment of degrees of autonomy and independence from competitive market relations (De Angelis 2004). This is a crucial point for those interested in urban gardens, because as noted in the earlier section of this chapter, these gardens emerge largely in abandoned and unused land (usually in cities), but are likewise often threatened with forms of enclosure (Ginn and Ascensão 2018).

The commons of England that Marx (2004 [1867]) primarily referred to were ones which reflected upon people's material *use* of the land, from collecting and using wood, food, or water—a dynamic which underpinned Thompson's (1966) seminal work in this area. Marx (2004 [1867]) thus recognised that the process of enclosure wasn't simply a matter of enclosing physical land, but the associated means of subsistence in commoners everyday lives. Thus, common lands are a product of class struggle, that were communalised as a result of struggles between serfs and peasants and landlords, that made it possible for people to subsist outside of waged work (Caffentzis 2004).

> *"In order for capitalism to exist there has to be a working class to exploit; and the main condition for there to be such a working class is that workers are separated from the means of subsistence."* (Marx 1909 in Caffentzis 2004, p.4)

Though this process of enclosure was often understood as quite linear, Humphries (1990) argued that primitive accumulation was more processual than a simple transfer from non-waged peasant (utilising the commons) to waged proletarian (dependent on a capitalist wage)—and that evidence suggests that dependence on wage labour was in fact already fairly widespread in rural England by the time of the enclosures. Humphries (1990) refers to semi-proletarian existence in which much of the population were both peasants dependent on the commons (and non-waged activity) as well as proletarians dependent on some form of wage (usually the husband/father). The non-waged activities which depended on access and use of the commons

were usually carried out by women, and were not unsubstantial in comparison to the wage (Humphries 1990). Therefore, the binary division between peasant and proletarian labourer was simplistic, and instead rather than pushing people from one category to the other, it was a matter of eroding non-wage forms of subsistence amongst semi-proletarian families (who already earned wages) and an increasing of waged dependency (Humphries 1990). Crucially, Humphries (1990) suggests that women's use of the commons was an alternative to charity or the poor law.

> *"Proletarianization has been interpreted ahistorically as the transformation of self-sufficient peasants into breadwinning wage laborers. The overwhelming emphasis has been on the male experience. But in reality survival seldom depends on a single breadwinner: a family's subsistence derived from the productive contributions of all its members. Proletarianization was a gradual process whereby access to resources other than wages was slowly eliminated."* *(Humphries 1990, p.42)*

In many ways, Humphries (1990) argument is one which resonates closely with some of the commoning literature, where there is an increasing emphasis on the necessity to explore non-commodified and non-waged sources of "doing" (Chatterton and Pusey 2019). This opens up the question of the mundane and everyday practices of gardening, which can be understood as forms of commoning and as a non-commodified activity (Moselle 1995). The success of the enclosures in restricting non-waged activity was only partially successful, and Moselle (1995) suggests that allotments are one of the few post-enclosure examples of alternatives/supplements to wage labour, reflecting some of the observations of Gibson-Graham (1996; 2006). Moselle (1995) argues that allotments closely resemble the role that common rights played pre-enclosure, and the existence of allotments in particular can't be understood without an understanding of their historic relationship with enclosure. The 1843 Select Committee on Allotments, for example, wrote that:

> *"The allotment system also appears to be the natural remedy for one of the detrimental changes in the condition of the labouring classes of this country, which the lapse of years has wrought, by gradually shutting them out from all*

> *personal and direct interest in the produce of the soil, and throwing them for*
>
> *subsistence wholly and exclusively upon wages." (cited in Moselle 1995, p.483)*

One of the crucial aspects of this claim was that the allotment appeared to provide a type of non-alienated and self-determined activity *("from personal and direct interest in the produce of the soil").* Indeed, the legislation for allotment provision emerged due to a number of clashing and interacting dynamics—widespread anti-enclosure protests had been seen in the UK since at least the Levellers (and the Diggers) movement in the 1600s, culminating in large riots during the 1830s (which were concurrent with rising food prices and high levels of unemployment) (Miller 2015). Combined with the parallel process of industrialisation and rural-to-urban migration, Miller (2015) suggests that this resulted in intense parliamentary debates during the time regarding this social unrest and increasing demands for land to rent (which landowners were unwilling to make available). In fact, nationwide elections in the 1880s were dubbed the "allotment elections", leading to the legislation of allotments and providing protected status to a number of sites throughout the UK (Miller 2015). This is a dynamic which suggests that the allotment is a history that is deeply related with the enclosure of the commons—not just in terms of finding land for the emerging industrial population (the proletariat), but likewise people's own struggle for non-waged activity and subsistence.

Though writing about it in this historical style tends to naturally produce a distance and lack of subject-oriented understanding of it (rather, it appears as a sequence of objective historical events), it is also possible to witness how this was a process of the extension of capitalism into everyday life (and, crucially, also stories of resistance to this). This is a concern that is at the forefront of the contemporary discussion on commoning, though rarely has it been explored in the urban gardening literature. During the process of enclosure, human activity is channelled into forms that prioritise the accumulation of capital (De Angelis 2004). In contrast, De Angelis (2004) suggests that work in the commons (in terms of striving for self-determination and autonomy) distinguishes it from the alienation within capital's everyday rhythms. Commoning is differentiated by value practices such as mutual aid, conviviality, cooperation, solidarity, that are quite at odds with this capitalist logic (Shantz 2013a; Pickerill 2016; De Angelis 2017), a perspective that mirrors some of the earlier debates around mutual aid and cooperation in the urban gardens (Crossan et al. 2016; Cumbers et al. 2017). As Chatterton and Pusey (2019)

note, the commons is an important tool for experimenting with different modes of doing that contrast with capitalist modes of production, where forms of self-valorisation in the commons are rooted in the needs, experiences, and desires of those in the specific communities (Shantz 2013a). This is an important consideration, since as Dawney et al. (2016) note, there has been a general neglect historically of the way that the commons are made and remade through forms of doing, and the way this interacts with people's everyday relations, practices, and thinking.

Urban gardening practices are sometimes referred to as self-valorising in this regard (Cumbers et al. 2017; Valle 2020), or self-determined activities that challenge capitalist domination and alienation in people's lives (Ward 1996a [1973]; Holloway 2010a). Müller (2014) suggests that do-it-yourself and grow-it-yourself means finding one's own expression in the products of one's own labour. In this sense then, it is deeply linked to questions around non-alienated practice, though it is an aspect of the gardening literature that remains extremely under-explored. These forms of self-valorisation are tied to the production of commons outside of capitalist enclosure (De Angelis 2007). The commons offers spaces to work, play, and share in a non-commodified way, offering an escape from the enclosure of the city that opens up ways of collectivised DIY organisation to meet each other's needs, for example in terms of social reproduction and care (Bresnihan and Byrne 2015). The commons can therefore be about the way that people live together that resist the privatisation and individualisation of everyday life (Dawney et al. 2016). Related to this is an increasing interest in the nature of "doing" in relation to the commons, too, as it relates to post-work, alienation, and a sense of purposeful and meaningful doing (Chatterton and Pusey 2019). For Chatterton and Pusey (2019), the creation of commons against enclosures, forms of production that are "socially useful" (and counter commodification), and "joyful doing" that negates alienated work and useless toil, are at the forefront of a transition to postcapitalism. Chatterton and Pusey (2019) consider micro commons, such as community gardens and platform co-operatives, as crucial experiments within this realm. This concern and interest in "postcapitalism" is an important one for understanding the critical potential of the commons.

2.5.2   *Beyond Capital or in Service of Capital?*
If the enclosure of the commons also encloses and commodifies forms of livelihood and ultimately forms of "doing", this section explores how micro practices might contest and

challenge this. One of the key functions of capitalism is its attempt to replace a rich array of existing and potential meanings with a singular value (Cleaver 2017), therefore discovering the spaces that escape or transcend this singular value and meaning is an important task. Central to this has been the work of Holloway (2010a, p.21), in particular his work on 'crack capitalism':

> "*A crack is the perfectly ordinary creation of a space or moment in which we assert a different type of doing... In some cases, this is direct and un-theorised: the friends who form a choir because they like to sing, the nurse who really tries to help her patients,* **the car worker who spends as much time as possible on his allotment***...it is part of an understanding that the rule of money is the centre of a whole system of social organisation, a system of domination that we call capitalism: in that case, the refusal to let money determine our activity is part of a conscious rejection of capitalism and understood as part of the struggle against capitalism.*" [emphasis added]

Drawing on Marx, Holloway (2010b) notes that Marx's theory of alienation stems from an understanding that, under capitalism, this conscious life activity is exploited and becomes a form of alienated labour (i.e. it is not self-determined, it is not controlled by the worker). Holloway (2010b) suggests that Marx abandons this terminology latterly, though he extends these ideas in Capital using the concepts of abstract labour and concrete (or 'useful') labour. Essentially, concrete labour is the practice, skill, energy, and cooperation of producing a specific product or service (Narotzky 2018), producing specific use values (e.g. clothing, books, housing, food) and is always necessary for meeting human needs and wants (Saad-Filho 1997). Abstract labour, however, is focused on the production of a commodity (suggesting a mode of production in which those that produce products are separate from the decision of what and how to produce something, as well as the value extracted from that product) (Saad-Filho 1997).

Holloway (2010b) suggests that there are several consequences regarding the way that useful/concrete labour is appropriated in to abstract labour-form under capitalism—primarily the dissolution of enjoyment (in doing), the lack of self-determination and creativity, and the reduction in quality (of a product, for example). Holloway (2010b, p.914) therefore sees radical potential in *"useful doing in-against-and-beyond abstract labour"*, seeing the prefiguration of a

post-capitalist future revolving around a tension between abstract and concrete labour. Using an example of shipyard workers diverting their woodworking skills by appropriating scraps of lumber to make things to use at home or sell themselves, Cleaver (2017) takes a similar stance, noting that piecemeal ruptures in the social relationships of capital are always occurring through forms of concrete labour that emerge in the interstitial spaces of abstract labour. Similarly, referring to Gibson-Graham's iceberg model of the economy, De Angelis (2017) suggests that there are a range of commoning activities that are not measured in capitalist terms of economic growth (including mutual aid, gift exchange, solidarity, household self-provisioning, domestic labour and care etc). While noting the significance of unpaid labour (including huge amounts of volunteering within micro commons, such as coaching the local sports team), De Angelis (2017) does however claim that the commons can't simply be reduced to volunteering, since we do not exist as volunteers in our families or in social movements.

In this regard, the earlier perspective highlighted by Holloway is rejected by Bhattacharya (2017), who provides a comparison between gardening as concrete labour and working in Starbucks as abstract labour, refuting that gardening is a form of non-alienated labour in this case. Bhattacharya (2017, p.10) suggests that:

> *"Marx is also proposing that our performance of concrete labor, too, is saturated/overdetermined by alienated social relations within whose overall matrix such labor must exist...even my concrete labor (gardening) is not performed during and for a time of my own choosing or in forms that I can determine, but has to "fit in" with the temporal and objective necessities of other social relations".*

Bhattacharya (2017, p.10) continues by claiming that *"since under capitalism the wage-labour relation 'suffuses the spaces of nonwaged everyday life,' the time of reproduction must necessarily respond to the structuring impulses of the time of production."* A similar critique was provided by Blackledge (2012, n.p.), who suggests that Holloway was naïve in thinking that forms of concrete labour prefigure a non-alienated and post-capitalist future:

> *"It is impossible to be powerless before an alien world at work, and then magically to become autonomous self-determining agents when we read, play, socialise or have sex."*

Though an important critique, the view represented here by Bhattacharya (2017) and Blackledge (2012) is problematic, also, since it results in a nihilistic and ultra-structuralist perspective where everyone is reduced to being dominated and passive subjects of capitalism. Cleaver (1992b) suggests that such perspectives have stemmed from an intellectual emphasis on identifying and documenting every manipulative mechanism upon which capital extends its reach, a dynamic reflected in the debate of neoliberal subjectification in relation to urban gardening (Pudup 2008). As Cleaver (1992b) notes (primarily referring to the Frankfurt School), the studies which have followed capital beyond the realm of the factory to demonstrate how it colonises cultural time and everyday life have simply reproduced and expanded the orthodox vision of despotism in the factory—a perspective which has some resonance with the earlier discussion on the creation of the neoliberal subject in the garden. This is likewise a perspective taken by Graeber (2004, p.76):

> *"The moment we stop insisting on viewing all forms of action only by their function in reproducing larger, total, forms of inequality of power, we will also be able to see that anarchist social relations and non-alienated forms of action are all around us."*

Rejecting this perspective provides the potential to see that there are endless forms of activity that don't fit neatly into theories of value within capitalism. Cleaver (2017) notes that value within capitalism is reduced to ranking people in terms of their income and wealth, and in place suggests the importance of being able to imagine how we can define ourselves by our abilities, how they are utilised, and the nature of our relationships, rather than by the size of our wage. Therefore, it is crucial to explore non-commodified and non-waged activities that help transcend this (Cleaver 2017). This has also been well-explored within the anarchist tradition, which has recognised the forms of non-capitalist and non-authoritarian (horizontal) forms of self-organisation that permeate ordinary experiences of everyday life (Springer 2014; White and Williams 2014; Ince and Hall 2017). These are not reactionary processes, however, but

positive and active ones that hope to reclaim space, time, and labour from capitalist valorisation processes (Cumbers 2015), or beyond capitalocentric imagination (White and Williams 2018).

For example, musicians will often willingly play for free (self-exploitation) because it is for "more than money" (this doesn't contradict that musicians are often under-valued and exploited) or a grandparent might look after their grandchildren without necessarily thinking about its economic value or how it reproduces the functions of capital by freeing the parents to work (even though it does also function in this way). For Cleaver (1992a; 2011), the concept of self-valorisation was key for realising these possibilities, which is the active process of struggle against capital in going beyond mere resistance to the creation of new ways of being and doing (individually and collectively), through the self-determination and self-development of the working class. Borrowing this concept (from Negri's (1991) re-reading of Marx), Cleaver (2011) suggests that focusing on the inventive and positive aspects of struggle was the most important contribution by the autonomists because it rejects the relegation of agency to the post-revolutionary "transition" within orthodox Marxist thought. For Cleaver (2011), it suggests all kinds of self-activity (outside of labour as well) *"that is autonomously (from capital) constitutive of human being and human society"*.

However, the aspiration to develop non-commodified means to meet people's needs is inevitably complicated by its entanglement with the existing social and economic relations (Ferreri 2016). Tsing's (2017) work in this regard is fundamental for furthering this debate and relating it with the commons and commoning, which proposes that we look around for the commons rather than ahead to the future, and to search for possibilities in the latent commons. For Tsing (2017), these are latent in two ways—firstly, they are ubiquitous and we rarely notice them, and secondly, they are undeveloped. Tsing (2017) largely reflects some anarchist observations here—Scott (2012), Ward (2011), and Graeber (2004) have all suggested that anarchistic practices are such an embedded and fundamental part of everyday life that they are rarely recognised or articulated at all. Tsing's (2017) observations offer some clarity on the above discussion, though here they are described as 'peri-capitalist' practices that suggest that it is possible to exist simultaneously inside and outside of capitalism at the same time. Tsing (2017) refers to the process in which capitalism depends on forms of non-capitalist "doing" and activity. Tsing (2017) defines this as a process of "salvage accumulation"—where capitalism

takes advantage of value produced in non-capitalist ways, or without capitalist control (e.g. raw materials that are part of ecological processes that precede capitalism, or the production and reproduction of human life, which are often beyond commodity production). Therefore, Tsing (2017) also suggests that there's a capturing of certain forms of "doing" and practices in this regard—again, like De Angelis (2007; 2017) and Chatterton and Pusey (2019), tying together a reading of the commons with ways of doing, labouring, and practicing. However, unlike Bhattacharya (2017), Tsing (2017) doesn't see these as actions that are entirely determined by capitalism. In this sense, there appears to be a distinction in the literature between one that sees the prosaic and ordinary everyday activities as inherently related to but not necessarily structured by capitalism (which can at times point beyond it), and others which see these activities as entirely determined by capitalism's needs. Orthodox Marxists, in reducing all forms of everyday activity as being determined by an all-encompassing capitalist structure, reproduce the idea that there is no outside to capitalism, or perhaps more appropriately that there is no outside unless there is a sweeping and ruptural overturning of it.

Tsing (2017) questions whether capitalism is a single, over-arching system, or one segregated economic form among many? This is something that is also explored by others, notably Gibson-Graham (1996; 2006). However, rather than seeing this from a political-economic perspective (as diverse economies, in the Gibson-Graham form), an anthropological understanding of capitalism and non-capitalism drives Tsing's (2017) analysis in a different yet complimentary direction. Tsing (2017) claims that Gibson-Graham's suggestion of seeing diverse economies as an element of postcapitalist politics is premature, and that instead pericapitalism is a more appropriate form. Pericapitalist sites and practices should be distinguished from non-capitalist sites, since they are neither properly inside nor outside of capitalism, but their ambiguity is a central feature (Tsing 2017). For example, Tsing (2017) suggests that in the case of gift and commodity, which are often understood as distinct, it's noticeable that in reality the two interrelate. An example Tsing (2017) provides is in relation to the Matsutake mushroom, which is often a gift given in Japan, but purchased as a commodity and given as a gift, yet likewise those commodities may have relations earlier along the supply chain in relation to activities and practices that are non-capitalist, or on the unruly edge of capitalism. Tsing (2017, p.66) therefore claims that *"we might see how capitalist and noncapitalist forms interact in pericapitalist spaces"*. Thus, rather than seeing these non-capitalist forms as providing a genuine alternative to capitalism (as Gibson-Graham tends to),

Tsing (2017) suggests the necessity of understanding how capitalism itself depends on these non-capitalist dynamics, but also how the dynamic between capitalist and non-capitalist is far more fluid. This is important, since *"pericapitalist economic forms can be sites for rethinking the unquestioned authority of capitalism in our lives."* (Tsing 2017, p.65). Here, Tsing's (2017) observations also reflect the work of Graeber (2011) on 'everyday communism' (sometimes referred to as 'baseline communism'). As noted, Graeber (2011) suggests that capitalism depends on certain 'communistic' principles—where even relations within the most capitalistic organisations (despite being extremely hierarchical and undemocratic) function on the principle 'from each according to their ability, to each according to their need'.

Although these are debates that extend an understanding of everyday life in relation to capitalism, it is a debate which can be critiqued and extended through engaging in more depth with the Marxist-feminist understandings of social reproduction, which I attend to in the next section.

2.5.3   Social Reproduction and the Commons

As Federici (2019) notes, capital accumulation, exploitation, and extraction doesn't just revolve around the wage—but also extracts and exploits the unwaged and unpaid labour of housework, and the work done by women that produces and reproduces the workforce and community. Indeed, while social reproduction has been sometimes considered as part of the commons (De Angelis 2017), this is an important point to further develop the nuance of the debate. The theories of social reproduction are significant in that they disrupt the narrow Marxist understanding that identifies value-generation and exploitation with the productive sphere (Mezzadri 2019), suggesting that value also comes from those who produce the producers (Federici 2019). Dalla Costa's (1971; 2019) seminal work highlighted how social reproductive work is crucial for the ongoing accumulation of capital, and is an important point for understanding women's oppression and exploitation under capitalism. Fraser (2017) notes that this "background work" of social reproduction provides the conditions of possibility for capitalist society to function, which depends on certain zones of non-commodification (not only non-waged labour, but also ecological extraction). However, while this work is often embedded with elements of solidarity, care and mutuality, they are also inherently connected to the reproduction of capitalism and wage labour, and are also often sites of coercion, repression,

and domination (Fraser 2017; White and Williams 2018). These questions of social reproduction are a central concern for a liberating form of commoning (De Angelis 2017; Engel-Di Mauro 2018; Federici 2018; Vas and Barbagallo 2019).

How the forms of non-alienated and concrete labour identified fits in with the exploitation of non-waged social reproductive work (which can often be alienated, exploitative, coercive, etc) is unclear and introduces some issues. If, as Fraser (2017) notes, forms of social reproduction are often defined by elements of solidarity, mutuality, care, and empathy, not only is social reproduction a site of alienation and exploitation, but it is also one that is potentially underpinned by values that also transcend (if not clash with) valuation in capitalist terms. Thus, social reproductive work can simultaneously work *for* capital (producing and reproducing labour power), but also involve efforts and activities that go *beyond* capital to sustain and reproduce the types of relations that are usually subordinate to capital (Cleaver 2011). There should be no contradiction (as Bhattacharya (2017) seems to suggest) in claiming that some actions simultaneously exist in a way that potentially transcend capitalism (and how it narrowly values activity), while also being exploited by capital at the same time. Graeber (2011)—and Kropotkin (2017 [1892]) and Marx (2004 [1867]) before him—claims that capitalism depends on (and exploits) cooperative behaviours to function in the first place (e.g. the ability of the working classes to cooperate in complicated, efficient, dynamic systems), suggesting that while these may function as a way to reproduce capital, they also potentially point *beyond* it. In many ways, this reflects the dual character of social reproduction as the renewal of life as well as the production of value relations for capital (Mattick Jr. 2016). It is the dual nature of social reproduction that means that in capitalist societies people are reproduced as workers while simultaneously as people whose lives, desires and capabilities transcend the role of the worker (Federici 2012; Barbagallo 2016). As Di Mauro (2018) notes, there are stereotypical elements of women's social reproductive work—such as maternalism and women's role as "nourishers"—that, despite being currently tied to patriarchal processes, can be leveraged for non-capitalist purposes and towards building a cooperative society, which offers some possibilities in relation to this thesis.

For Federici (2011), capitalism has always depended on non-monetary relations, seen primarily in the reproductive work of women, that are technically external to the market. Likewise,

White and Williams (2018) note how non-capitalist practices can be appropriated for other ends, including by austerity-inflicting governments (and the Big Society), that compliment and reinforce rather than challenge neoliberal dynamics. The irony of this, Federici (2011) claims, is that the neoliberal attempts of extending the commodity form into all spheres of life is impossible, since capitalism could not function without the appropriation of this labour that is technically external to the market. However, it is possible that these are activities that are readily exploited by capital due to the reality that they are underpinned by values that are somewhat *unrecognisable* by capitalism—in other words, these forms of labour require certain skills and capacities that transcend monetary value and the capacities of the capitalist market (for example, love, empathy, care, pleasure, joy, etc.). Cleaver (2011, n.p.) is critical of Dalla Costa's (1971) lack of engagement with a more positive and transformative perspective in this regard, claiming that Dalla Costa suggests but doesn't elaborate on the fact that *"people are capable of things like cooking and eating together, or making love together, sharing of affection and intimacy in ways that do not serve the capitalist goal of recreating life as labor power".* The key thing for Cleaver is not to conclude by seeing activities romantically as only being acts of friendship or love, or cynically to see them as simply reproducing labour power for capitalism, but to understand the degree to which these activities involve one dimension or the other (or both).

> *"Basically, we can recognize every moment of everyday life as a terrain of struggle – not merely as a terrain to fight against the various ways that capital now tries to shape our activities for its own purposes, but as a terrain upon which we can and must seek to develop alternative ways of being in the world and relating to each other in which we thrive and capitalist Power is outflanked and therefore negated."* (Cleaver 2011, n.p.)

I suggest that a reading of a neglected area within the production/reproduction debate can offer an interesting point of intervention—that being retirement, which is an important empirical element of my research. As Bhattacharya (2017, p.8) notes; *"If under capitalism the child will always be a figuration of what could be, then the retired worker is perhaps, in capitalist terms, the termination of all possibilities."* Indeed, Bhattacharya's (2017) critique of seeing concrete labour (gardening) as simply determined by existing capitalist structures is partly premised on

seeing capitalism through a very particular timescale and rhythm—referring to the daily and weekly routines of capitalist work (i.e. where gardening occurs predominantly on a weekend or evening). Oran (2017, p.149) claims that *"within value theory, what happens to the elderly (past workers) is mostly an overlooked aspect of the social reproduction of labor power."* There is of course no doubt that the period of retirement should be subject to the same perspective that Fraser (2017) highlights, through recognising how it is related to and structured by capital in various ways. Not only is retirement temporally determined by capitalism as much as other non-work time (e.g. weekends), it is also inherently related to production and reproduction, since it is fundamentally premised on providing security and sustenance for those no longer working (Oran 2017). However, unlike weekends, which are continuously determined by the temporal structure of capitalism (of returning to work), these structures of capitalist labour exist in the past during retirement (although care and consumption in relation to capitalist markets continues)—therefore the potential autonomy from capitalism during retirement is entirely different, and Bhattacharya's (2017) critique doesn't necessarily stand.

Moreover, this makes it a particularly interesting point at which to study the intersection and ambiguities of the above debates—including non-waged practices (and the question of self-determination and alienation), but likewise the commons and gardening. This is confirmed by related literature in the area. The difficulty in placing this period of retirement within this tension of production/reproduction is highlighted by theories in gerontology—and, though this isn't a gerontological study, it is important to at least briefly recognise this particular point. While elder care is regularly considered part of reproductive work (Vogel 2013), there's a very particular period in people's lives in which people are both autonomous from work as well as from needing to be cared-for, which largely reflects Lasslett's (1989) theory of 'Third Age'. Laslett (1989) considered the emergence of a very distinct period in people's lives that has emerged in contemporary wealthy societies, defined largely by people living longer, with better health and more financial security (in general) (Wink and James 2012). Laslett (1989) considered this to be the only period of genuine autonomy in people's lifetime. Wink and James (2012) suggest that empirical evidence in gerontological studies strongly support Laslett's theory. The key elements of this 'Third Age' for people is self-fulfilment and self-realisation (often through forms of active leisure activities), due to freedom from responsibilities of raising children as well as from labouring and its potential for self-alienation (Laslett 1989; Chatzitheochari and Arber 2011; Wink and James 2012). This is a period distinguished from

first age (era of dependence, socialisation, immaturity and education); second age (independence, maturity, time spent earning and saving, as well as responsibility for children); and fourth age (dependence and death) (Wink and James 2012). As Wink and James (2012) highlight, Laslett connects this period of Third Age with the sense of alienation that most workers experience in their working life (the Second Age):

> *"Work may well be justly valued for what it creates ... but work in the Second Age is almost wholly imposed by others rather than oneself ... it is allied with the loss of personal control over time ... [and] what your efforts help to create is never wholly yours to take a proper pride in, to exhibit or dispose of." (Laslett 1989, p.149)*

Though this closely corresponds with some of the above debate around activities of commoning, there are further connections with this literature in other ways, though largely unintentional and unrecognised. Though it is widely noted within the literature that forms of urban gardens are often attended by retired people (Wright and Wadsworth 2014; Martin et al. 2016; Calvet-Mir and March 2017; Young et al. 2020), this is often simply mentioned in passing rather than explored in a way that might reflect broader political-economic dynamics. Some of this literature in fact suggests that the distinct population of such gardens are overwhelmingly retired people (Martin et al. 2016), while often exploring the leisure, social and communal importance and health benefits of such spaces, without explicitly exploring this political meaning. Others have noted that distinct periods of change, such as retirement from paid employment, mean that group membership of such gardens is crucial—as noted by Scott et al. (2020), but have tended to see this through an 'ageing' narrative rather than retirement itself (see Wang and MacMillan 2013). Therefore, there is an opportunity to explore some of the above debates through this lens—in particular as it relates to a detachment from work, an ambiguity regarding its position within production/reproduction, and further the questions of purposeful and meaningful doing through commoning.

2.6 Chapter Summary

While there has been increasing interest and hope in the political potential of the commons and commoning, there remains a number of debates, contradictions, ambiguities, and disagreements. In this chapter, I have attempted to set the context for the remainder of this thesis by highlighting many of the main intersecting elements of this literature. I highlighted the initial divide between so-called capitalist-friendly commons and the anti-capitalist commons. The former tends to understand the internal design aspect of the commons (for its long-term management), while the latter explores the commons as fundamentally opposed and in conflict with capital and the state, thus it tends to understand the external (exogenous) dynamics that relate to the commons. De Angelis' (2017) work offers the possibility for seeing beyond this binary, especially when understood alongside the shift from a static commons to an active *commoning*. I then explored how this might relate to the nascent literature on urban gardening, which is equally if not more ambiguous. Broadly-speaking, I demonstrated how the academic interest in urban gardening struggles to get beyond a particular impasse regarding the political nature of these gardens (as pointing beyond or legitimising neoliberalism). This ambiguity, however, offers the empirical potential for understanding the nuances of the debate on the commons, and vice-versa, especially since various types of urban gardens (allotments *and* community gardens) have been understood as types of commons (Eizenberg 2012; Bigell 2015; Corcoran et al. 2017; Ginn and Ascensão 2018).

However, this political ambiguity (in particular relating to debates around neoliberalism and the state) is also apparent in the commons literature, which I explored in more detail through the relationship between the commons, the state, and capital. Ultimately, following De Angelis (2007), I suggest that the knot in the urban gardening literature has emerged largely because of an understanding that the public and private sphere, or state and market, exist in conflict—as a false polarity. Instead, I explore the relationship between these spheres—how they use each other to reproduce themselves, and the political consequences of this (such as the Big Society agenda). The final section of this literature review then explores the more micro dynamics, considering the ways that everyday life is entangled with capital in various ways, and whether it also points beyond it. As has been pointed out, the work of Graeber (2011) and Tsing (2017) can be extremely useful here. I ultimately suggest that reading these dynamics through the theoretical lens of social reproduction is a challenge to many of these questions, before finally suggesting that there are possibilities for exploring this through the neglected sphere of

retirement—which is ambiguous in terms of the relationship between production and reproduction. This, therefore, connects immediately to my empirical work.

If the *"commons don't simply exist—they are created"* (Helfrich 2012a, p.61), then further detail is required in terms of how this process actually happens, since such detail on 'commoning' is often lacking (Euler 2018). Likewise, despite the vast intellectual theorisation of the commons, there remains little research in terms of the everyday spaces, conflicts, and contradictions of commons (Bresnihan and Byrne 2015), and it is important to pay attention to the mundane practices of commoning (Williams 2018) beyond the activist subject (Ferreri 2016; Noterman 2016). This requires an empirical grounding that opens-up the possibilities for seeing how everyday, mundane, and prosaic practices could help us understand these interactions. There needs to be more attention to the "what" and "how" of commoning, to understand the potentiality of commoning from the perspective of commoners themselves, rather than in abstract and theoretical terms (Bresnihan and Byrne 2015). However, it is equally important to do so without over-romanticising (Bresnihan and Byrne 2015) and without smoothing over the cracks and the contradictions of the complexity of everyday life (Noterman 2016).

Dawney et al. (2016) argue that making existing commons visible is a crucial political method for critiquing the authority of neoliberal capitalism in everyday life, an argument also made by Gibson-Graham et al. (2016). In contrast to what has become a relatively binary understanding of the commons, there is firstly a necessity to develop an anthropological understanding of commoning which avoids replicating a universalised understanding of monolithic and unchanging concepts (of capital) (Dillabough-Lefebvre 2020), but it is equally important to explore the ambiguity and contradictions of this as well, where there is the possibility for romanticising the presence of non-capitalist relations in everyday life. As De Angelis (2017) notes, homoeconomicus is everywhere—and thus capital is *in* the commons. It is crucial to become attuned to the messy everyday realities of commoning, which conflict and question some of the ideological theorisation that surrounds it (Noterman 2016). This requires an openness to the everyday possibilities in the commons.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

In the literature review, I concluded the chapter by suggesting the importance of delving more deeply into the everyday dynamics of urban garden spaces. To be able to do this requires a particular set of methodological tools and practices, which I turn to in this chapter, where I describe my ethnographic fieldwork as a way of exploring the everyday dynamics of commoning. This chapter is structured in two sections: the first being an exploration of the foundational principles of the research; and the second a description of the research design.

3.2 Foundational Principles

I initially situate my ethnographic fieldwork within broader principles and debates around research, social change, and the role of the research within that.

3.2.1 The Division Between Theory and Practice

One of the most common critiques of ethnography is that it explains people's actions and practices in conceptual terms that are at odds with the people themselves (Hammersley 2018)—thus, the researcher is often accused of having too much authority over what is represented. Whether it is explicitly articulated in this way or not, this is a problem that can be understood through the binary of theory/practice, which I will explore in this section.

As Hammersley (2013) documents, praxis (action) and theoria (research) have been treated as distinct at least since ancient Greece, where both Plato and Aristotle saw theoria as the superior way of life. This involved detached contemplation of the world, divorced from action (or praxis), a perspective that has largely been carried through ever since (Hammersley 2013). Hammersley (2013) suggests that Pragmatist John Dewey has provided the strongest account against this dualism—claiming that scientists are not an other-worldly elite but are ordinary

people who should engage with everyday life and activity. For Dewey (1920), this dualism was a consequence or reflection of the lived experience of Greek society, where there was a sharp division of labour between women and slaves on the one hand (who carried out the practical work) and free men on the other hand (who had the luxury to spend their time engaging with philosophy and intellectual activity) (Carson and Rowlands 2001; Brinkmann and Tanggaard 2010). As Dewey (1920, p.13) noted in reference to the practical work of the former, *"this type of knowledge and the method upon which it depended lacked prestige and authority."*

Dewey claimed that these experiences were reified as metaphysical realities and a philosophy that saw theory as separate from action, resulting in a parasitic relationship between those who "think" and those who "labour", where such abstract theoretical thought would both misunderstand the nature of such everyday practical activity, while also failing to contribute to it (Carson and Rowlands 2001). Sennett (2009, p.124) likewise traces the distinction between *seeing* and *doing* to ancient Greece, noting that the word 'theoria' shares a root in Greek with theatron (theatre), which literally translates as *"a place for seeing".* Sennett (2009) describes how the archaic theatre was one where performer (doer) and spectator were not separated, but people were often both (in rotation). However by the time of Aristotle this distinction had become embedded—between actors and dancers with special skills, and the audience or spectators who speculated often about what the stage characters did not understand about themselves (Sennett 2009).

These observations led to Dewey becoming preoccupied with what he termed the 'spectator theory of knowledge' in Western philosophy, which separated those who know (and who had education in formal theoretical forms of thinking) and those who supposedly do not know (with practical forms of education) (Brinkmann and Tanggaard 2010). For Dewey, the solution to this problem was through overcoming the separation of theory and practice, which is only possible when the traditional spectator theory of knowledge is disrupted by a theory which regards the knower as an active agent in the world (Putnam 2010). Indeed, he was deeply concerned with abstract knowledge:

> *"Intellectualism as a sovereign method of philosophy is so foreign to the facts of primary experience that it not only compels recourse to non-empirical method,*

> *but it ends in making knowledge, conceived as ubiquitous, itself inexplicable"*
> *(Dewey 1929, p.22).*

Therefore, practice/theory and action/thought were not separate, nor did Dewey (2012) prioritise one over the other, but recognised that they were so interdependent that considering one without the other in isolation makes no sense (Putnam 2010). Dewey (1929) shared this with other Pragmatist philosophers who considered thinking and doing as entirely inseparable actions (Simpson 2018). In this sense, epistemology—the theory of knowledge, what it is, and how we come to have it (Cartwright and Montuschi 2014; Rosenberg 2018)—is disrupted in this Deweyan (and broadly Pragmatist) perspective. The philosophical basis of Pragmatism largely placed itself in contrast to Cartesian dualisms (mind and body, thought and action), arguing instead that humans were problem solvers and that "thought" helps guide action to solve problems and overcome obstacles as they arise in the course of life (Gross 2009). Ideas and knowledge are no longer out there to be discovered, nor are they representations of how the world is, but for Dewey (2012) ideas and knowledge (his method of inquiry) are tools with which we engage with, understand, and transform the world around us (Brinkmann and Tanggaard 2010). Morgan (2014) likewise suggests that a Pragmatist approach to social science research isn't focused on a commitment to abstract philosophical beliefs, but to beliefs that are directly connected to action. The world therefore appears and "is known" by humans in relation to their activity or social practice (Brinkmann and Tanggaard 2010).

Instead, philosophy had to develop methods to avoid becoming abstractly theoretical and entirely detached from experience (Emirbayer and Maynard 2011). For Dewey (1929, p.22), knowledge is deeply related with experience—experience should guide knowledge but the process of "knowing" can serve in *"bettering and enriching the subject-matters of crude experience".* Brinkmann and Tanggaard (2010, p.244), for example, emphasise a *"epistemology of the hand" in* place of the dominant *"epistemology of the eye".* By re-orienting our knowledge through the hands in this way, it provides an attempt to re-establish a connection between theory and practice, where action is centred to contest the problems of detached theorising that concerned Dewey (1920; 1929; 2012). It is also a problem-solving and practical philosophy in this sense.

I suggest that this perspective of a *"epistemology of the hand"* (Brinkmann and Tanggaard 2010, p.244) is very relevant in a study where the practical everyday actions and practices of gardeners are emphasised. Likewise, these concerns are of fundamental importance for research on commoning—which has many related values in terms of it being action-oriented, based around principles of self-management and grounded in vernacular and local knowledge (Bollier 2019). These are also arguably the same elements that most clearly connects the theoretical strands within the research (e.g. anarchism, Marxist Autonomism, and Pragmatism), which are all action-oriented theoretical traditions that also emphasise the "lay" person's agency often in contrast to "high theory" and formal knowledge (see, for example, Cleaver 1992a; Graeber 2004; Sennett 2009). While this is embedded in much of my theoretical work in this thesis, it is also a deep methodological concern that reflected my empirical practices and philosophies. Most recently, Dewey's philosophy has been a significant influence on researchers carrying out Participatory Action Research (Hammersley 2013), though I will suggest in the next section its possibilities ethnographically.

3.2.2 Research and Social Change: Re-Thinking Baselines

The relative lack of empirical work stemming from these Pragmatist observations is surprising, since it provides the foundations for a number of interesting empirical considerations and practicalities. The result is that it remains unclear how these Pragmatist perspectives relate to practical fieldwork. However, Dewey's critique of the spectator theory of knowledge and his ensuing method of inquiry has been influential for advocates of action research in particular (Stark 2014; Kaushik et al. 2019). Notably, Participatory Action Research (PAR) has been at the forefront of this critique in methodological terms, where it is framed as *"a response to hierarchical and unjust power structures, processes, and relationships"* (Lake and Wendland 2018, p.21), with its key principles including a collaborative research environment, empowered participation, and commitment to action and social change (Kindon et al. 2007; Coghlan and Brydon-Miller 2014). One of the foundations of PAR is to create a popular science that transcends the researcher/researched and subject/object binary (Fals-Borda and Rahman 1991)—thus there is a certain Deweyan philosophy within it. It is a method inherently based on problem-solving, where *"the actors-cum-researchers in a particular social setting conduct their own research geared towards changing their own situation"* (Coghlan and Brydon-Miller 2014, p.585).

These concerns directly relate to questions of positionality in the field, which is an important consideration in all research (Herr and Anderson 2014). Feminist and post-structuralist theorists in particular have been instrumental in exploring the power dynamics in relation to fieldwork, the subjectivities embedded within it, and the accompanying methodological approaches (Mullings 1999). However, it also reflects a broader transformative perspective within the research process concerned with promoting social justice and human rights (Hammersley and Traianou 2014). This is an ethic based on *"the values of empowerment, shared governance, care, solidarity, love, community, covenant, morally involved observers, and civic transformation"* (Denzin and Giardina 2007, p.29), and bringing about change in the world rather than simply producing knowledge (Denzin and Giardina 2007; Hammersley and Traianou 2014).

The concern for justice in research is not a new one, but there are longstanding debates in the social sciences regarding this, in particular in terms of reciprocity and what each side (researcher and researched) actually gets from the research (Hammersley and Traianou 2014). This is accompanied by the reasoning that research has been, or can be, exploitative— researchers get access to data and information (usually for free), which provides benefits in terms of building a reputation (through developing their research portfolio) and promotion benefits (Hammersley and Traianou 2014). However, there are deeper problems within the transformative ethic, in particular regarding its understanding of the role of research itself in social transformation, as well as the problems of understanding the researcher and researched as necessarily existing in conflict.

In this sense, the possibilities of *direct* social transformation through social research remain unclear. As Hammersley and Traianou (2014) point out, researchers do not possess the capacity or power to promote justice in this way, and if this is one's goal, then carrying out research isn't necessarily an effective strategy. It remains an incoherent strategy compared to political movements and agencies designed to do this, such as *"revolutionary workers' parties campaigning on the streets, through guerilla armies attacking key installations, to the United Nations promoting international agreements"* (Hammersley and Traianou 2014, p.7). As already noted, if direct promotion of justice is the goal of the research, it remains unclear how this might happen through the processes of research. I suggest that this baseline can give undue

authority to the researcher, but even with more participatory methods (where there are attempts to democratise the process of research (Fals-Borda and Rahman 1991)), it gives undue authority to the *research process* itself, which doesn't necessarily overcome the issues highlighted here.

Though I entirely agree with the general principle and direction of this, since a research ethic of emancipation in a world of inequalities and injustices is important, the baseline of my research is fundamentally different. The primary reason is that such a baseline tends to start from a position of a 'deficit' to be solved or improved—which is not necessarily the case in my research. Within PAR and other participatory perspectives, the answer to this problem is for the participants to become embedded in a more empowering and democratic research process. However, even if the research process is democratised in this way (where the participants might identify the problems, conduct the research etc), there remains some underlying issues in terms of the prioritisation of the research process itself over existing non-research practices and actions (thus, there is still an element of saviourism of that researcher entering that space in the first place). In other words, this can't simply be explained through it being a "top-down" process that is remedied through participatory methods, but is a deeper issue within much of social sciences, which often places the research as central to "fixing" problems. The methods, practices, and actions that need to be carried out to "fix" such problems are unclear.

This issue was highlighted when one participant entirely misunderstood my research— *"see, we're not all as old and loopy as you think..."* and again a little while after *"did you expect us all to be with walking sticks, hobbling around?"* Ultimately, the gardener was making the point that supposedly I had come in with a particularly negative agenda focused on vulnerabilities (of apparently seeing them as *"old and loopy"*, or *"hobbling around"*). It was clear that they sensed that my research would inevitably involve identifying and ultimately exploiting (for my own gain, ultimately) problems, weaknesses, or vulnerabilities—and I think in many ways they were not wrong to presume this since this is often the foundation of social research. Of course, this was not the case, and I explained that it was not the case, and that I was interested in how people negotiated the changing structures of their lives through the transition in retirement and how it relates to the everyday actions and practices of these spaces. They reacted far more positively to this. However, it was reflective of the broader problems with how research is

framed (the baseline) and how this in fact structures the power imbalances within the field (as well as how participants themselves experience the process of research). Ultimately, these power imbalances are less of a concern if the baseline is one that begins from a starting point of seeing people as active agents in the world rather than inevitable victims of it.

Instead, this research baseline proposes simple foundational principles that recognises and prioritises the agency of participants as something that precedes and extends beyond this research, and in spite of the research. Broadly, I draw on theories which see people as agents rather than victims (Hastings and Cumbers 2019). This position is highlighted by Graeber (2004, pp.11–12), who advocates an intellectual approach that guards against "vanguardism" in the research process, and thus decentres the academic as well as the research process itself from direct social transformation:

> *"The role of intellectuals is most definitely not to form an elite that can arrive at the correct strategic analyses and then lead the masses to follow…One obvious role for a radical intellectual is…to look at those who are creating viable alternatives, try to figure out what might be the larger implications of what they are (already) doing, and then offer those ideas back, not as prescriptions, but as contributions, possibilities—as gifts."*

Graeber (2004) is largely reflecting an anarchist critique and principle of research. As DeLeon (2019) points out, anarchists are highly critical of the colonising aspects of research, where the researcher is a detached observer rather than an embedded actor, able to observe and produce knowledge from a supposedly "neutral" stance. Anarchist methods instead emphasise the importance of contingency, where the research becomes an "accompanying" element rather than determining actor, and the presence of grounded knowledge and practices is appreciated (Burdon and Martel 2017). Thus, *"rather than assume that the expert and the academic 'knows better' than the members of the community involved, anarchism assumes the opposite"* (Burdon and Martel 2017, p.319).

An obvious and immediate response to this is that such a perspective is problematic since if people are active agents in this way, then where is the room for change? Ultimately, doesn't this perspective reproduce the status quo? I would argue that this is not the case, since a critical perspective would recognise that these are only glimpses of possibilities and potentialities, not universal or generalisable activities. I therefore suggest that this is a perspective that opens up the possibilities of an ethnographic study of commoning.

3.2.3   The Value of the Everyday: A Pragmatist Ethnography?

Given the context of this research was essentially to explore the types of commoning activities that permeate the experience of retirement in these gardens, a large part of the fieldwork was to explore the ordinary everyday experiences of this—including, for example, mutual aid, gifting and sharing, alienation, self-determination, vernacular governance etc. Thus, an ethnography was the appropriate method to explore the "everydayness" of these spaces.

The relationship that such everyday actions and practices have with macro dynamics, as well as its relationship with theory, is an important consideration within an ethnography. As Burawoy (2009) notes, theory can inform how a researcher sees the everyday "physical" (empirical) world and vice versa, therefore there is a mutual relationship between the theory and the empirical. Such an approach helps reveal the connections between the micro and macro (Burawoy 2009), or what Mills (1959) described as 'the sociological imagination'. Lefebvre, one of the most influential theorists on "everyday life", claimed that everyday life is *"the screen on which our society projects its light and its shadow, its hollow and its planes, its power and its weakness"* (Lefebvre 1971 [1968], pp.64–65).

Such accounts of everyday life are an important concept for human geographers, and in this area of study, the Lefebvrian perspective has been very influential (see Purcell and Tyman 2015). Hall (2018) suggests that geographical attention to intimate relations in the everyday is crucial as a way of understanding the core of significant social relations. For Gardiner (2000, p.2), the everyday is where *"we develop our manifold capacities, both in an individual and collective sense, and become fully integrated and truly human persons".* In this sense, the everyday is where people enter into transformative praxis with nature, learn about love and

comradeship, feel a myriad of desires, emotions, and pain, acquire communicative competence, and eventually "expire" (Gardiner 2000, p.2).

While Gardiner (2004) emphasises the importance of focusing on routines in everyday life, he also suggests that these habits and routines cannot be thought of separately from wider political and economic forces. As noted in the literature review, a significant element of this commoning perspective is understanding this micro-macro dynamic, often understood as the relationship between the commons and commoning and its wider environment (or the endogenous and exogenous dynamics) (Huron 2015; De Angelis 2017). I am therefore interested in exploring this dynamic, but not necessarily in terms of how these activities are subsumed by and reproduce capital, but in understanding how they relate to it—which also necessarily includes the more positive ways that people negotiate, or even subvert, capitalist logic. As Graeber (2011) notes, this more positive aspect is in fact a deeply neglected area in the social sciences. In contrast, Graeber (2004) emphasises the importance of consciously rejecting the idea that all actions only exist by their function in reproducing larger and total forms of power (though he accompanies this with a critique and rejection of poststructuralism). Holloway (2012) and Cleaver (1992b) likewise are suspicious of the understanding in the social sciences where to be critical is to unmask forms of "unseen" modes of domination, inequality, and exploitation. Cleaver (1992b) suggests that such perspectives have stemmed from an intellectual emphasis on identifying and documenting every manipulative mechanism upon which capital extends its reach. While such perspectives privilege the role of the intellectual in identifying these forms of domination (which are hidden, diffuse and pervasive) and thus in successful social transformation (Cleaver 1992b), they also possess much broader and deeper issues. As Gardiner (2004, p.230) notes, the technique of 'problematization' itself can be an issue, since it tends to reproduce the Enlightenment's strategy of unmasking the hidden and obscured, where folk knowledges of the everyday have a *"quaint or exotic appeal, but ultimately they must be superceded by social-scientific description and analysis"*. The result is that social scientists are seen to possess a privileged epistemic status (Jay 1993; Gardiner 2004). As Gardiner (2004, p.237) notes, this is a common Postmodernist critique of Lefebvre (see Felski 2000; Colebrook 2002; Frow 2002), which suggests that the Lefebvrian account is one that fails to appreciate everyday life on its own terms, instead subordinating it to political and intellectual projects that undermines *"the integrity of everyday life and promoting the viewpoint of the critical intelligentsia at the expense of the 'folk' accounts of the ordinary people who inhabit it"*.

Gardiner (2004) ultimately defends the Lefebvrian account of the everyday as a position which should counter homogenous readings. Instead, for Gardiner (2006a), a critical account of everyday life should celebrate the hidden possibilities and potentialities of everyday life and commonsensical forms of knowledge, while also recognising the limitations of this mundane world as it currently exists. Indeed, the distinctive element of Graeber's work is that he takes a similar line to the Postmodernist critique (as wanting to rescue everyday life from simply being subordinated to macro forces), but remains deeply critical of postmodern philosophy itself (see Graeber 2004). Gardiner (2006b, p.3) emphasises that the everyday can highlight how the *"ordinary can become extraordinary...by fully appropriating and activating the possibilities that lie hidden, and typically repressed, within it".* Gardiner (2006b) also suggests that everyday life can be the locus of emancipatory and non-alienated tendencies, thus it has particular relevance for this study. However, my emphasis remains distinct from Gardiner (2006b), who emphasises that the purpose is therefore *to change* everyday life, not simply describe it. Once again, the issue (as covered above, see Hammersley and Traianou (2014)) is whether a researcher can facilitate the changing of everyday life in this way. Gardiner (2006a; 2006b) here is largely contrasting this critical Lefebvrian approach to a sociological and phenomenological one, which in this instance is considered an uncritical description and celebration of the routines and habits of everyday life.

These were not observations that escaped Dewey either. Dewey (1929, p.38) suggested that the greatest issue with non-empirical philosophies was that they had *"cast a cloud over the things of ordinary experience."* Dewey wanted to introduce a philosophy that focused on *"concrete human experience and its potentialities",* in particular its potentialities of daily experience for joy and self-regulation (which, for Dewey, had been obscured by philosophies). Dewey (1958, p.38) noted that in many circles it was *"a sign of lack of sophistication to imagine that life is or can be a foundation of cheer and happiness"* . Graeber and Grubačić (2021, n.p.) likewise suggested that *"both traditional Marxism and contemporary social theory have stubbornly dismissed pretty much anything suggestive of generosity, cooperation, or altruism as some kind of bourgeois illusion".* This is a crucial point that is reflected in many parts of this thesis—in particular the "critical" reading of community gardening as a set of neoliberalised spaces and practices in contrast to the supposedly "naïve" and "uncritical" perspectives which tend to celebrate these spaces.

This also helps explain how a researcher interested in social change might frame their research without giving undue authority to the research process itself, or without seeing everyday life as simply subsumed and dominated by wider forces. Taking Graeber's lead on this (against vanguardist intellectualism), it is possible to see how Dewey's perspective might be appropriate to such an ethnographic account that values people's agency as a fundamental baseline. However, while Dewey's influence in PAR is clear, it has been under-explored within such ethnographic contexts. In this regard, there are two distinctions here that need attending to—the first is that ethnographic research is generally less concerned with practical problem-solving, and secondly it intentionally retains an element of detached theorising. In this sense, an ethnography could be seen to be incompatible with Dewey's philosophy. However, in briefly addressing these concerns, I advocate that it is compatible with an ethnographic approach if taken from a different angle.

As Hammersley (2013) notes, one of the problems of the Deweyan perspective is that not all research is stimulated by a practical problem, nor should knowledge be reduced to its problem solving potential or its practical consequences. While Hammersley claims that such a blunt reading of Dewey can lead to an overly-instrumentalist perspective, Gross (2009) suggests that action is habitual rather than simply a utilitarian process of means and ends (of its practical reasoning and problem-solving nature), and action therefore also consists of finding meaning and purpose in existence (Gross 2009). An ethnographic account is undoubtedly suitable for pursuing this. Secondly, Tavory and Timmermans (2013) claim that a Pragmatist approach shouldn't necessarily imply a first person approach to explanation (in terms of privileging actors reasoning), but instead that an ethnography should focus on people's actions (whether verbal, physical, cognitive). Emirbayer and Maynard (2011) advocate for a return to experience and concrete practices and empirical everyday life "in situ"—suggesting it is an underdeveloped area within Pragmatism. Such explorations are of course highly relevant to the Pragmatist philosophical tradition, since Tavory and Timmermans (2013) suggest that ethnography has a unique ability to investigate and explore unfolding moments in action, arguing that ethnographers should focus on and trace the processes of meaning-making in action. Similarly, as Graeber (2009, p.222) notes, an ethnography should *"tease out the implicit logic in a way of life...to grasp the sense of a set of practices".* Thus, an ethnographer is interested in exploring implicit norms that govern behaviour (Feinberg 2015). Critical pragmatism, which aims to redirect expert knowledge and appreciate local understanding (Feinberg 2015), can be a

supportive philosophical tool in this regard. In particular, as Feinberg (2015, p.154) notes, local understanding or "common sense" can often be partial, and ethnographic methods are often a useful tool for exploring these "roadblocks".

While there are frequent calls for ethnographers to adopt a 'native point-of-view', Hammersley (2018) suggests that ethnographers should resist such a reductionist form of research by using the tools and resources at their disposal to evaluate evidence, which at times might contrast with the participants. This is important, since as Tavory and Timmermans (2013, p.710) note, macro forces *"can be accounts that actors' in the field are well aware of and act upon, explanations they only partially grasp, or even explanations to which they are completely oblivious."* Part of the job of an ethnographer is to understand how actors might negotiate these macro dynamics in everyday life (such as the relationship between capitalism and retirement). Therefore, ethnographic "causal" or explanatory claims can come from the actors themselves, from the more implicit interactions in the field, and from academic theorisation of macro forces (Tavory and Timmermans 2013). From a Pragmatist perspective, an ethnographer is part of a broader community of inquiry that engages with both the wider scientific research community, as well as those constructed and articulated by actors in the field (Tavory and Timmermans 2013). In this sense, it widens the notion of democratic inquiry beyond the immediate fieldwork.

3.3 Research Design

In the literature review, I highlighted some cross over between urban gardens and commoning literature. Since the former (especially work on community gardens) remains more empirically developed than the latter, yet commoning is understood as an active and practice-oriented dynamic, it is an area which remains very accommodating to in-depth empirical work.

Though the gardening literature does remain predominantly qualitative in orientation, the types and specifics of qualitative data is quite varied. The most common being qualitative interviews (see Kingsley and Townsend 2006; Pudup 2008; Ghose and Pettygrove 2014; Poulsen et al. 2014; Guerlain and Campbell 2016; Kingsley et al. 2019), sometimes combined with

ethnographically informed methods through participant observation (Ohmer et al. 2009; Firth et al. 2011; Martin et al. 2016; Cumbers et al. 2017), and some more embedded ethnographic work that involved interviews, participation in activities (planting, harvesting, making tea, attending meetings), and observation (Miller 2015; Eizenberg 2016; Calvet-Mir and March 2017; Pikner et al. 2020; Valle 2020). Some work emphasised a participatory methodology, though they were predominantly forms of qualitative methods (such as interviews, surveys, diaries, participation in activities) that didn't explicitly demonstrate any participation in terms of directing or disseminating the research (see Ohmer et al. 2009; Pikner et al. 2020; Valle 2020). Other work remains primarily theoretical with no *explicit* empirical engagement (Müller 2012; Classens 2015; Purcell and Tyman 2015; Engel-Di Mauro 2018). However, in general, the qualitative emphasis can and does differ quite significantly—as a result it is important to provide specificity as to the type of qualitative research I conducted, including details of the methods used.

As Classens (2015) notes, it is crucial for researchers to engage with more in-depth empirical work on these spaces in order to sharpen the theoretical tools. However, particular methodologies help inform particular theories, and much of this literature leaves a certain amount of ambiguity regarding the reasoning behind particular methods. In this section, I highlight why my ethnographic choices were a useful way to reorient the study towards the practices and actions of the gardeners themselves.

3.3.1   Multi-Sited Ethnography

I conducted the empirical fieldwork across three different sites. For purposes of anonymity, I have anonymised the three sites: Hendre Community Garden (HDCG); Aberporth Community Garden (APCG); and Derwen allotments (DA).

Hendre Community Garden

This site is located in the middle of a housing state in a traditionally working-class area in East Cardiff. It started in 2012, when a tenant of one of the local Housing Associations (Wales & West) was struggling to maintain a garden that was too large, and a collaborative effort through several of the local HAs (Wales & West, Linc, and Hafod) offered the space to any tenants

who would be interested in starting a community garden. From here, a small group of tenants formed and started the garden with support from the HAs (in particular Wales & West, who own the land).

Aberporth Community Garden

This is a new community garden that opened at the back of the community "hyb"—a council run building that functions as multi-purpose buildings for services, from the library, housing advice, and exercise classes. In Cardiff, these hybs were rebuilt and repurposed across the most deprived parts of Cardiff in the last decade, with this one being in place of the old library. In terms of socio-economics, this area would probably sit between the two other cases—it is probably the most mixed of the areas, and this is largely reflected in the gardeners. The garden started when the hub was rebuilt and was part of a council initiative called 'Well-being Wednesdays'. Out of all the case studies, this is the only one specifically targeted towards older people.

Derwen Allotment

Historically, allotments became particularly prominent in working-class industrial cities for families to grow food—and unsurprisingly, in a predominantly working class and post-industrial city such as Cardiff, there are many allotments across the city. Despite existing in a relatively wealthy area of Cardiff, the allotment itself has an interesting mix of working- and middle-class people—ranging from several ex-industrial workers (primarily from the old steel industries in Splott), to more "middle class" ex-professionals. Approximately 8 years ago, the site transferred to a self-managed system, whereby the council handed over a large part of the management of the allotment to the tenants themselves. Thus, it is now managed between both the allotment association and the council. On site, there are 105 full plots, many of which are divided into half plots, with approximately 140 tenants here in total.

Though these sites were all quite distinct—in terms of socio-economic characteristics of the area, size, space, aesthetics, ways of managing and governing, etc.—it was important that this research didn't become a comparative research of the "sites" or "projects" themselves, but one that is focused on the practices and actions of the gardens that are situated within specific

contexts (which therefore must consider variations of these sites). The focus of this research wasn't on the "projects" per se—since as noted, once significant time is spent in these spaces, it is hard to justify that the "project" should be considered as the point of analysis at all (which is relatively common within similar studies). Instead, I directed the research towards the everyday practices and actions of the gardeners, and the ways that they varied according to particular structures, contexts, histories, and spaces.

It is quite common for research on community gardens to be framed around particular cases, sites, or projects. Many of these studies are framed as case studies (Calvet-Mir and March 2017; McVey et al. 2018), sometimes through the single-case (Whatley et al. 2015) or multiple comparative cases (Pitt 2014; Aptekar and Myers). This seemed to be a relatively acceptable approach of understanding relatively bounded entities and spaces, though the ambiguity of a case study in these studies is apparent, where sometimes a case study was combined with particular methodologies (such as interviews or ethnographic work). Often, case studies can be used in such studies as a framing mechanism rather than as a methodology. Therefore, I deliberately avoid the ambiguity of the case study approach, since firstly it does tend to reproduce the centrality of the "case" rather than the actions and practices that interest me, and secondly it remains ambiguous methodologically. Instead I describe this as a multi-sited ethnography (MSE), which developed especially from the work of Marcus:

> *"Multi-sited research is designed around chains, paths, threads, conjunctions, or juxtapositions of locations in which the ethnographer establishes some form of literal, physical presence, with an explicit, posited logic of association or connection among sites that in fact defines the argument of the ethnography."*
> *(Marcus 1995, p.105)*

However, while much MSE involves the expansion of the ethnographic fieldwork and imaginary beyond what has been seen as the traditional anthropological focus on singular bounded sites, MSE has developed on the basis of collapsing the division between the local and the global to a more fluid site—which follows the people, the stories, metaphors, objects etc (Candea 2009). Without dismissing the importance of such claims, or to co-opt or dilute the meaning, Candea (2009) also points towards a more foundational and perhaps basic element of

MSE which simply involves ethnographies across several sites. For this research, I am not carrying an MSE which follows the people or their stories in this fluid way, but one which embraces the bounded nature of the ethnographic work, and is instead interested in exploring the local practices and knowledges that exist in specific sites. Carter (2018) similarly carried out MSE in this way, exploring the various networks and scales of governance and their impact and dynamic on the ground in various separated sites. The type of MSE adopted here therefore involves carrying out ethnographic fieldwork in a number of spatially separated sites (Boccagni 2020). MSE is deeply relational, interested in the nature of coproduced and interdependent social settings and spaces (Boccagni 2020). Flachs (2013) demonstrated how non-comparative ethnographic research across multiple separated garden sites can be a fruitful and important intervention—since it focuses on the diverse practices, activities, and social relations that exist across what appear to be distinct and unrelated spaces. This was an important consideration in the design of this research, since carrying out a single sited ethnography of a community garden or allotment would have given me a very different perspective to carrying out an MSE.

3.3.2   *Positionality and Embeddedness*

Though Certomà and Tornaghi (2015) claim that most researchers in this area cultivate the land and are in the gardens participating in the work, it is rarely articulated within the studies, nor is it justified as a particular methodological tool. As Certomà and Tornaghi (2015) therefore argue, the methodological reasoning of participation and embeddedness within these spaces needs to be more explicitly articulated by researchers (beyond simply a commitment to reciprocity in the field). I felt that this embedded and grounded approach helps avoid the common situation of academics developing apriori assumptions and prematurely labelling these sites (e.g. as food growing *projects*), instead providing the intimacy to help uncover the banal everyday dynamics of these spaces. This is similar to Burawoy's (2009) methodological emphasis in ethnography, where the researcher should avoid imposing their understanding on people, but extend their analysis through in-depth engagement into the lives of those they research.

Bourdieu (1977, p.1) noted that:

> *"The anthropologist's particular relation to the object of his study contains the makings of a theoretical distortion inasmuch as his situation as an observer, excluded from the real play of social activities by the fact that he has no place...inclines him to a hermeneutic representation of practices."*

Bourdieu (1977) continues to suggest that, when remaining unaware of the limits of this observer point-of-view, the anthropologist adopts a representation of action which is then forced upon participants. Bourdieu (1977) is therefore suggesting the problematic issues of representing a social situation from an outside perspective, where the researcher ("the anthropologist", for Bourdieu) compensates for a lack of *practical mastery* or knowledge of that particular situation through the creation of a semi-formalised and pre-determined repertoire of rules. As a result of this "outsider" perspective, the social life under study is misrepresented (King 2012). These observations largely mirror Dewey's, discussed earlier.

The positionality of a researcher is therefore an important consideration—in particular as an outsider from a university entering quite an informal space such as a garden, where the clothes, the language, the conversation, the culture, are all extremely different to a university environment. The question of a researcher's positionality in relation to knowledge production is often thought of in terms of an insider/outsider binary (Bilgen et al. 2021). The "insider" is usually categorised as those with natural access to—or as an active member of—a particular place, culture, or institution (Breen 2007; Bruskin 2019), or with similar racial, ethnic, language, socioeconomic or gender characteristics, and an "outsider" as those who do not share these characteristics (Bilgen et al. 2021). The insider researcher is often considered to be intimately engaged with the research domains, in comparison to the "outsider" who is often thought to parachute into people's lives and then leave, often despite the researcher's best intentions (Breen 2007). Drew (2006) referred to these researchers as seagulls—suggesting that this is an inherently extractive process. The difference is therefore that research is either carried "within" (an insider) or "on" (an outsider) (Breen 2007). There are endless debates regarding the positive or negative aspects of the positionality of the researcher, though in general the benefits of being an insider—such as a familiarity and understanding of the culture and an ability to interact more fluidly within it—is often contrasted with a so-called lack of "objectivity" due to the deep intimacy of those relations (Breen 2007). However, the insider/outsider binary has

been challenged also, as dynamic, fluid and constantly changing in situ (O'Connor and Celik 2018; Bruskin 2019), rather than a fixed category (Breen 2007; O'Connor and Celik 2018). At times, a researcher may possess a quasi-insider status (Bruskin 2019) or as neither insider or outsider but one who traverses this as a continuum (Breen 2007).

Though I was not an insider, since I was not a member of the community gardens or allotment before the research, I was also able to adopt a quasi-insider status quite easily. I had been an active member and founder of another community garden in Cardiff for years, and was also renting my own allotment plot at another site. I had worked for several years as a landscape garden labourer and grew up on a small turkey farm—therefore, I am comfortable with the environment and culture of these spaces. Physical labour is second nature to me—I look like somebody who can do physical practical work and I am somebody who can do physical and practical work. Therefore, I felt at home, but perhaps more importantly, I didn't necessarily appear to the gardeners as a detached "academic" with no practical knowledge or experience of these spaces. In fact, I often intentionally emphasised this with people, partly as my own strategy of essentially saying *"look, I'm not just a student who's never gotten my hands dirty in my life"*—because I know that this is how many people in these types of situations think. Accent was also an interesting aspect of this—people knew I was Welsh because of my name, and I do have a soft and what would likely be considered "middle class" Cardiff accent. However, the more working class people were surprised that I was from Cardiff (technically, a small village about 10 miles outside of it)—whether this was due to my name (a lot of older generations don't associate Welsh names with the city), or my accent, I don't know. However, it did certainly help that I could relate to people by being from Cardiff—whether it was talking about rugby, politics, or the city in general, I made sure that they knew I had a certain amount of commitment to the local area and a vernacular understanding of the city.

While Stoller (2005) claimed that the non-native anthropologist can never transcend difference, Wacquant (2005, p.450) suggests that one can *"provisionally suspend or significantly attenuate many differences (plural) pertinent to her inquiry in the course of building extended and intimate relations."* Wacquant (2005) famously adopted an enactive ethnographic approach through a carnal sociology of boxing in Chicago. Wacquant (2005, p.467) argues that *"a fertile means of examining these competencies is to acquire them in practice"* (2005: 467), in what he

describes as an 'apprenticeship' that helps us understand what we are studying. Wacquant (2005, p.465) thus suggests that such an apprenticeship can act as both the object *and* means of inquiry, and as an important ethnographic tool that helps capture the *"visceral quality of social life that standard modes of social inquiry typically purge from their accounts"*. This enables the researcher to delve into the practical, situated, and ordinary knowledge beneath the controls of the discursive awareness (Wacquant 2005). In a similar way, Juris (2007) suggests that a militant ethnography can help address objectivist shortcomings of ethnography, through becoming active participants and practitioners and developing an embodied and practical understanding from the inside rather than being outside observers. Thus, rather than a form of top-down research in which the researcher projects knowledge on to particular objects of study, I adopted an "anarchistic" method, where the researcher immerses themselves into the community, not to stand above it but to join it as much as possible (Burdon and Martel 2017).

Though I wouldn't describe my research as an enactive or militant ethnography, I find that this is useful as a more general observation and principle within my methodology. I increasingly felt that a large part of "knowing" these spaces was through taking part in their everyday activities—which, of course, included gardening (weeding, watering, planting, etc.) but also making tea, drinking tea, sitting around having a chat, going to events, committee meetings, AGMs, and much more. This methodology largely shaped the outcome of my analysis since it helped clarify that, firstly, gardening is not an activity in itself (it is a combination of related activities, such as weeding, watering, planting etc—which ultimately might be broken down even further), and secondly, that "gardening" is only a small part of what happens within these spaces anyway. This is also why I refrain throughout from suggesting that these are about "food growing", often despite academics, funders and governments seeing them in this way. These are spaces where a huge amount of activity happens—people sharing food, plants, receiving gifts of old furniture from the wider community, getting help from people with certain DIY skills, yet also a deep social space where people celebrate, laugh, mock each other, and share their worries, misery, and sometimes even mourn together. These were activities that I found important *through* taking part and being deeply embedded in the sites.

3.3.3 Participants

Unlike other research methodologies (especially quantitative), ethnographers spend little time concerned with or describing methods of sampling, though choices are always made regarding where to study, whom, of what and when (O'Reilly 2009). "Cases" (whether people, settings, times, events) are chosen deliberately for a range of reasons (O'Reilly 2009), which will be explored here.

Given that this research is interested in both the practices of urban gardening and commoning as they relate to retirement, the participants weren't simply those that happened to be on site, at least in the case of the allotment. Therefore, the choice of gardens themselves was initially important—there are several community gardens and allotments around Cardiff, and some may not have any retired gardeners involved in them, or be more mixed. However, based on personal experience, this is highly unlikely—both community gardens and allotments were extremely well-attended by older retired people. These sites were all chosen as a result of this. Aberporth Community Garden (APCG) met on Wednesday mornings and were specifically set-up as part of a broader 'Wellbeing Wednesdays' project by the council, with all of the gardeners being retired. Hendre Community Garden (HDCG) met on Friday mornings, and though they were not set up intentionally for older people, all of the gardeners were retired. The more complex case was Derwen allotment (DA), since there were about 150 people on site and a more mixed demographic as a result. However, it is very common for allotments to be attended by retired people, and on this site people told me that approximately three-quarters of the plot-holders were retired.

Of course, there is a general presumption regarding retirement as it relates to ageing, and thus speaking to participants about this required sensitivity. Some were offended that I was interested in them because of their age, and I was always cautious of the potential of it coming across as patronising in this regard. However, I was clear throughout that my interest was retirement as it relates to the detachment from work and how people negotiated this. Thus, every participant that I interviewed was retired, aside from the interviews with broader actors who worked in various sectors of governance around food growing, community gardening, and community land.

3.3.4 Interviews

I carried out my fieldwork between April 2019—November 2019, and carried out 39 in-depth qualitative interviews (ranging from 30 minutes to 2 hours) during this period [Appendix F]. These dates allowed me to become quickly embedded in the busiest parts of the growing and gardening season. In-field ethnographic interviews were conducted with 30 gardeners, which involved interviewing participants with whom I already had an existing and ongoing relationship, occurring in a more spontaneous manner and in a more "natural setting" (Allen 2017). Given the noted scale differences between sites (approximately 150 in the allotment, approximately 10-15 in each community garden), I naturally conducted more interviews in the allotments than the two community gardens, although embedded ethnographic work was more fluid in the community gardens.

Within the ethnographic tradition, however, interviewing has often been thought of as a secondary method to participant observation, critiqued on the basis that it provides no embodied access to life-worlds and depends upon accounts rather than direct experience, yet it is a crucial tool for the ethnographer and is in fact an ordinary feature of everyday life in the Western context (Hockey 2002). Indeed, the core of ethnography is to explore the meaning of actions and events, and while some of these meanings are expressed indirectly through word or action, they are also expressed more directly through language (Spradley 2016). As Spradley (2016) noted, observation alone is insufficient, and to grasp people's perspectives requires asking questions. Ethnographic interviews can thus comfortably function within ethnographic work to reveal social and cultural interactions in a more complex way than a simply binary of saying or doing (Rinaldo and Guhin 2019). Thus, ethnographic interviewing remains a crucial method for recognising and exploring the complexity of human experience and to hear directly from people themselves regarding their experiences, thoughts, and feelings (Heyl 2001). It is the time factor (length and frequency of contact) and the quality of the emerging relationship that distinguishes ethnographic interviewing from other forms of qualitative interviewing (Heyl 2001). The purpose of such semi-structured interviews is to explore participants perspectives on the topic (McIntosh and Morse 2015), and specifically through the thoughts and practices as articulated by the participants themselves, in their own words and (as much as possible) on their own terms (Allen 2017). However, while only the naïve interviewer believes that they are simply accessing information (Rinaldo and Guhin 2019), it should instead be thought of as an interaction between the researcher and participant of ideas, thoughts, and cultural frames

(Wuthnow 2011). Therefore, it is important to remain aware of the widely-agreed goals and ethics of ethnographic interviewing: listening well and respectfully; being aware of our role in the co-construction of meaning during the interviewing process; remaining conscious of the ways in which the ethnographic experience and ongoing relationship affect the interview process and research; recognising that partial knowledge is all that will ever be attained (Heyl 2001).

To do so required a semi-structured format, which was flexible to the context and allowed a more fluid direction in the interview. I had various set themes that simultaneously remained relevant to the focus of the research yet provided some scope for participant self-expression, e.g. *"could you tell me how you became involved in the garden?"; "what do you enjoy about it?"; "why did you feel like becoming involved?".* Such questions would easily lead on to many more significant discussions, which would require some level of prompting *("could you elaborate a little bit on ...").* In what seemed like a natural and comfortable form of communication, interviewees would regularly speak through forms of storytelling, an important part of ethnographic interviewing (van Hulst 2020). This was unsurprising, partly because some of the questions were based upon reflection of the fairly recent past (*"could you tell me how you became involved in the garden?"*) to more vague questions to do with retirement and work (*"what did you do for work?"; "I'm interested in people's experiences of retirement—could you tell me a bit about that?").* Moreover, it became increasingly clear that many of the gardeners were extremely happy to speak to me, partly to indulge their nostalgia but more importantly there was often a sense of pride in their work histories, as well as pride in what they were doing in the garden. This was extremely revealing and I was happy with this, since it reflected many of my own methodological baselines described above. Moreover, it made me realise how rare it is that academic theorising engages with this almost innate sense of pride and joy that people regularly and willingly articulate.

Usually, by the time of carrying out a recorded interview, much of these discussions had occurred in a more informal way during my fieldwork time, but an opportunity to directly speak to the participants and record the audio was beneficial. I also carried out 9 formalised interviews with several actors involved both directly and indirectly with the governance of these sites. This included workers in the Housing Associations associated with HDCG and council

workers who worked alongside APCG, but also a representative of Cardiff Council, and four members of separate organisations who were involved in aspects of food growing, community gardening, and land access at various scales (from the city, region, and nationally). These participants provided invaluable insights for the sixth chapter. I hoped to speak to the allotment Officer from Cardiff Council, but I didn't receive any response. This was unsurprising, given that the gardeners sarcastically wished me well in trying to get hold of them every time they'd come up in conversation. The interviews for this took place wherever convenient for the interviewee—with 6 also being carried out during the first COVID-19 lockdown via Zoom. Given that I had not developed a relationship with any of these interviewees, and that they were not ethnographic interviews, I had to tailor the questions to be more specific.

Aside from these individual interviews, I also had the opportunity to carry out several more informal group discussions. These happened naturally throughout the fieldwork (usually during a tea break), but there were opportunities to carry out intentional discussions too. This happened during group meetings that were independent of my research: in the allotment, during the monthly Sunday committee meetings that I attended; in one of the community gardens during the AGM; and in the other during a conference workshop. In each of these, I was asked to give feedback about my research, during which it allowed (almost organically) for the discussion to open up amongst us a group.

3.3.5   *Fieldnotes, Participant Observation, and Participant-as-observer*

Fieldnotes were taken throughout the fieldwork, often recorded on my phone (typed and/or voice notes) which I felt was less intrusive in the garden than a pen and paper, though I was also wary of the sense of appearing rude if I was typing on my phone during the session. While note-taking on a phone is an increasing trend in the field, Gorman (2016) highlights how this raises some issues in terms of consent and power dynamics, potentially reinforcing difference between the researcher and participants. However, at a practical level, I found that it was easier to switch between the "everyday" elements of gardening (weeding, digging, planting) in the field and taking periodic notes on my phone (particularly since it isn't a particularly "paper friendly" environment). Sometimes this would involve having to find a more secluded space to make more detailed notes, since standing around on your phone typing is typically inappropriate while other people are working in the garden. However, I did often inform participants that I

used my phone for taking fieldnotes and writing reminders, and that this was part of the work, since I wanted to avoid the illusion that I was disengaged (for example, that I was sending messages to friends, or on social media). Such a site certainly required a different type of note-taking than one where a pen and paper might be more "in place" in a different ethnographic site (such as a classroom or office). Notes were often taken in ways that could be reminders for making further and more detailed notes after the session, rather than providing deep and fluid accounts at that particular time (since doing so would mean I would have been taking notes during that whole session—neglecting my ability to take part in the activities, which were important).

As already noted, my positionality and how it relates to the participants was significant, from a political perspective. But, this form of embeddedness was also an important data collection method. With a desire to avoid both extractive research as well as attempting to avoid the elitism of prioritising the research over the practical activities of the sites, I attempted to develop more fluid forms of participation that meant becoming embedded in the sites as much as possible. In many ways, this was defined by dynamics of mutual aid and cooperation. Of course, this is borrowed from Kropotkin (2014 [1902]), not in the narrow sense of simply being a reciprocal relationship of exchange (to which it is often mistakenly reduced), but one in which people work together with different sets of skills to achieve certain goals. This is an important distinction, since the emphasis on reciprocity can be problematic—that actions are carried out simply in exchange for another action, thus potentially reflecting an element of the capitalist focus on exchange. Graeber's (2011) analysis of everyday communism is relevant to such a position—which is crucial in that it recognises a range of different skills and needs within a given communal or cooperative setting—which was both an aspect of the fieldwork, but likewise an empirical focus that I detail in chapter 5. In this case, the goals of each person in the garden may have differed, though the constant negotiation and renegotiation that happens in these spaces result in forms of common "ends" (or at least, appear to be "ends", but more likely are fragmented and interlinking processes).

In the early period in each site, it became clear that most of the gardeners were unsure why I was there. I explained my research interests and why I was interested in retired participants specifically. It quickly became clear that their main interest was having me involved in the

garden itself—an extra hand to help, or even somebody with some ideas. As Åberg (2019) highlights, ethnography is suitable for researching urban gardening, since the researcher can adopt a participant-as-observer strategy that suits the practical nature of the object of study. Likewise, Flachs (2013) emphasised how becoming an active volunteer in the gardens was an invaluable element of developing deep qualitative data and to understand the complex dynamics and intersections of these spaces. Moreover, it opens up further spaces for dialogue as the researcher-subject relationship becomes two-sided (Flachs 2013). What became increasingly important is what Heyl (2001) describes as a 'strong' notion of reflexivity—one which goes beyond a 'soft' reading of self-awareness, recognition of difference and influence, to one which actively tries to deconstruct the researcher's own authority in favour of a more egalitarian relationship.

However, there were distinct differences between the sites in terms of how easy it was to become a "participant". In both community gardens, this was quite straightforward, since these are smaller spaces and no single person had authority or responsibility over the space or a particular part of the garden. Working as a group in some shape or form was how both of these spaces functioned. However, in the allotment, I was much more an "outsider" since I had no plot (and therefore did quite a lot of lingering) but the space is also far more individualised, with the communal element happening more informally in the interstitial spaces and opportunities. In this sense, then, becoming involved as a participant was far more challenging, and did require some awareness of how my offering of help (as a form of embeddedness and participation) might come across to the plot holders, since a person offering to help out on their plot could easily be taken as an offense that they were not managing it themselves.

3.3.6   Analysis

Once the fieldwork was done, there was a process of typing up and organising (and re-organising) all of the fieldnotes, photos, and then transcribing the audio recordings. While the written presentation of the thesis is inherently linear, the reality of social research is that a large amount of analysis occurs during the data collection itself (through forms of reflexivity, thematising data in situ) and throughout the organising of the data and transcription. The linear "steps" of research (data collection, data analysis, writing up) are not distinct but are deeply interrelated processes that often occur simultaneously (Creswell 2013). Therefore, by the time

of sitting down to analyse in a more methodical way, I had already become very familiar with the data and had a good idea of the most important and interesting themes that I wanted to explore in more detail.

I transcribed all of my interviews manually, since the recordings were not clear enough for any automated transcription software. Though a laborious process, I found that this was extremely helpful for becoming even more familiar with the data. I then organised my fieldnotes—which were recorded in a range of formats, from audio notes on my phone, emails to myself, and written notes on paper. The fieldnotes were inherently difficult to record because of the nature of these spaces, thus the initial part of the analysis involved collating and organising these "messy" fieldnotes.

I imported all the fieldnotes and interviews into NVivo software, where I carried out more in-depth coding to identify themes, patterns, and connections within the data. This type of analysis has the advantage of providing theoretical freedom to the researcher without sacrificing the richness or complexity of the data (Nowell et al. 2017). Such forms of coding and thematising risk potentially simplifying the data, and providing a rigid account to the fluidity and endlessly complex dynamics of everyday life. I found that NVivo was too rigid, and useful mostly as an organisational or structuring tool, and therefore I carried out manual coding also. Therefore, much of the analysis was done in a much more "messy" (literally) way by hand and paper, exploring both the descriptive and theoretical (Angrosino 2007). These forms of coding acted mostly as an organisational tool for my data, which was useful during a long research project such as a PhD, where organised data can be useful when the immediate memory of the fieldwork becomes more distant and faint. Coding initially began in a relatively broad sense, and then I narrowed this down through re-coding the existing codes, and then re-visiting the raw data again several times during my analysis. This constant "checking" of the data was useful to develop a deeper understanding of the data and situate it within the broader context. Though I have noted the importance of interview data in an ethnography, I wanted to avoid putting too much weight on this data, and therefore paid close attention to my field notes, and the way that this interrelated and guided the interviews. In fact, I found that the primary themes emerged quite organically in the field itself, with the result that these themes often were discussed with the participants in the interviews. Thus, it became apparent that the more

"organic" methods of ethnography (of observation and participation) were closely linked to my interview data.

3.3.7   *Ethics*

Research ethics might be understood to exist in two ways—the "broad and fixed" Ethics (capital E) of Ethical reviews and regulations, and the "messier" and processual ethics that emerge in the everyday fieldwork (Crang and Cook 2007). The more formalised and bureaucratised element of Ethics have been critiqued as impoverished and inadequate for ethnographers in particular, since Ethics ultimately fail to capture the ethical encounters in the field (Atkinson 2009). However, since one of the ethical issues of ethnography is in terms of its level of deception and potential invasion of privacy (Schrag 2008), I suggest that at the very least these Ethical regulations (through forms etc.) serve as an official reminder that a researcher is entering that field *as a researcher*. I submitted relevant forms for approval prior to conducting fieldwork—including the School of Geography and Planning's 'Ethical Approval Form' [Appendix D] to the ethics committee and a Risk Assessment form. During the fieldwork itself, I had prepared consent forms for the sites themselves (which I presented either to the broad group or to an individual who had a formal role for the site), as well as information sheets (with information about the research) and consent forms to individuals involved in the gardens [Appendices A-C]. I found this quite stressful at times, but also tended to use them as a way of "breaking the ice" with participants I didn't know very well—often joking a bit about bureaucracy while pointing out some of the important principles of the form, such as consent and anonymity. Throughout this thesis, I have anonymised both the sites and the participants, through the use of pseudonym, as well as organisations where it would have been possible to identify the individual as a result (such as small community food-growing organisations), but not large organisations (such as Cardiff Council or Wales & West Housing Association). All of the audio recordings were transferred from my phone to my secure (password-protected) Cardiff University OneDrive account, while I also retained them on an encrypted physical external hard drive, following the ESRC (2020) guidelines on data storage, considering issues of ethics, security, confidentiality and copyright.

I was constantly aware, however, of how introducing these forms in the garden sometimes resulted in an awkward impasse—where the consent forms themselves didn't seem to produce a

sense of reassurance for participants but instead suspicion and discomfort. Introducing these forms in the field seemed to make people more cautious and concerned about my presence, as though the forms signified that there was *now* actually something for them to be concerned about (in the same way, for example, that when renting a car, the insurance form makes you feel that some form of accident is now inevitable). However, I recognised that these were functional and served a purpose, despite the awkwardness.

As Atkinson (2009) highlights, such research should ideally be underpinned by practices of mutual trust and respect. I found that through engaging with the ordinary activities of these spaces, this helped build this trust and respect—I was now no longer just a researcher, but also a gardener giving them a hand. In a situation such as a community garden or allotment, largely due to their informal and "outdoorsy" practical culture (that contrasts with research in a more formal environment such as an office), it was sometimes quite difficult to navigate this dynamic of simultaneously being researcher and participant in the activities. This was particularly difficult when you become embedded in the practices of the space—for example, digging with people or sitting around having a cup of tea might periodically suspend some of these divisions, though I was still aware of my role as a researcher, and whether the participants were as aware of this divide is unclear. However, being an embedded researcher in such a space meant I had to dress appropriately—in clothes I was happy to get dirty. This was quite a striking contrast with a university environment, and at times I went back to my university office after fieldwork sessions in my "gardening clothes", often receiving strange looks from students and staff members. This is an example of the strict institutional difference between the field (in this scenario) and the institution that I was part of, and in many ways though I found it quite easy to transcend this divide in the field (as noted in the previous section), I was constantly aware of the ethical issues of doing so, since it tended to feel like I was "acting" in order to get data and that I was therefore a fake.

Over time, this feeling tended to disappear as I became more familiar with the people and the environments. One of the benefits of the framework of this research was the more positive outlook of it—people were not concerned about being interviewed or having a chat because they were telling me things with pride, joy, and enthusiasm. In many ways, this made the issue of consent and representation less ethically problematic—I wasn't, for example, interviewing

people about traumatic life experiences. Therefore, though the small 'e' ethics of the spaces was challenging to negotiate, I found that over time it became less of a concern as respect, trust, and familiarity grew between myself and the participants. My relationship with the broader sites and participants reflected one of everyday communism (Graeber 2011)—not in the way that all roles collapsed into a participatory mess, but that we respected each other's different skills, capacities, and purposes for being there, and in doing so we started to learn what different people bring to a common space.

Extending Graeber's (2011; 2014) notion of 'everyday communism' into the field itself is a fruitful way of understanding how cooperation might function between those with different skills and capacities. This is crucial since there is little justification that role differentiation in the field is itself unjust (Hammersley and Traianou 2014). For example, I have the privilege of extensive research training, theoretical knowledge, methodological tools at my disposal that a community gardener might not have (and may not even have the desire or inclination towards this type of work). Moreover, I have access to knowledge resources through the University— both physically in the libraries and through online library resources—that are crucial to contextualising this study, but are exclusive resources. Therefore, there is the question of how these skills can be used in such an intimate environment? As researchers, we become part of a broader community within but also beyond these direct engagements. Pragmatists often define this as a community of inquiry—where research is always carried out in relation to others work, thus it becomes a democratic and shared project through the engagement with work of others (and their engagement with your work) who share the same disciplinary concerns (Tavory and Timmermans 2013). Such a perspective is crucial in relation to the broader political principles and goals of this research.

3.4 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have described my methodological approach, beginning with an exploration of the traditional division between theory and practice, which remains at the heart of much academic work (and Western philosophy more generally). I claimed that the main practical efforts to transcend this problem—through PAR—remains problematic in other ways. I suggest that while this may reduce the authority of the researcher (through democratising the research

process), there remains broader problems as to how the research process itself (even a democratised one) can directly facilitate social change. Instead, I emphasised the importance of recognising the agency of participants, which extend beyond the possibilities of research. While starting from a point that recognises people's own capacities, agency, actions, and practices are foundational principles, I also cautioned against the desire to necessarily absorb these capacities into the research process itself. Avoiding what Graeber (2004) describes as 'vanguardist' research, I emphasised the value of ethnography in drawing-out the mundane everyday practices and actions of the gardeners, which I claim is crucial for exploring the dynamics of commoning. I then described the core elements of my research design, from the importance of "embeddedness" and considerations of positionality to the practical considerations of data collection methods, analysis, and ethics. In the next chapter, and from this point onwards, the other side of these methodological practicalities become realised through the analytical exploration of the empirical work.

4 QUIET SELF-VALORISATION IN THE VACUUM OF CAPITAL

4.1 Introduction

> *"The impulse and need which the existing economic regime chokes, through preventing its articulated expression, find outlet in actions that acknowledge a social responsibility which the system as a system denies." (Dewey 1999 [1930], p.44)*

The core question of the commons, according to Helfrich (2012b, p.35), is *"What do I / do we need to live?"*. De Angelis (2017) states that a commons strategy must find solutions to the problems that capital systems cannot solve (and likely create in the first place), by replacing the commodity as the determining form of reproducing people's everyday lives and needs (Meretz 2010). Federici (2018) suggests that commoning is an activity of social reproduction that reproduces people's everyday basic needs—for example food, water, housing, and care. Therefore, there is a necessity to explore what types of *'needs'* are met in these gardens through commoning. Although a housing co-operative might explicitly meet a housing need, for example, it is less clear what needs these gardens are meeting, even though they are often noted to be born out of need and deficiency (Bigell 2015), and are generally regarded as spaces where individuals can experience need-fulfilment (Quested et al. 2018).

In accepting the political ambiguity and contradictions of these gardens (McClintock 2014; Barron 2017), as supposedly actually-existing commons (Eizenberg 2012), in this chapter I frame the practices and actions of these sites through the Marxist Autonomist theory of self-valorisation. Self-valorisation was originally a concept used by Marx to refer to the ever expanding reproduction of capital (Cleaver 2011)—a theory seen from the perspective of capital as a dominating, expanding and self-reproducing system. However, Autonomist Marxists, notably Negri (1991), re-defined the concept to refer to a process which goes beyond resistance to capitalism to creative and positive creation beyond it (Cleaver 1992b). Ultimately, self-

valorisation emphasises the crafting of new ways of being and new forms of social relations (Cleaver 1992a), and it is premised on people taking action in developing their own interests to gain greater self-determination and control in their lives (Shantz 2013b).

This reflects Holloway's (2010a; 2010b) emphasis on the 'cracks' within capitalism, and the small everyday ways that people act and "do" in ways that struggle with and travel in a direction beyond capital. Although Holloway (2010a) critiques the concept of self-valorisation as existing autonomously from capital, which he suggests is impossible, in the literature review I addressed this concern through the work of Cleaver (2011), who suggested that self-valorisation is a matter of degrees and contradictions. Therefore, while Holloway's (2010a) work is an inspiration for this chapter, I instead use the term 'vacuum' since it reflects the absence of something that can be filled, rather than a crack, which doesn't necessarily suggest such an absence but only a break or disruption. Moreover, such a vacuum approach helps think through the relationship between the exogenous and endogenous of the commons that I referred to in the literature review, since a vacuum always exists within a broader environment or relations. Finally, a lens on retirement (and, specifically, retired gardeners) opens-up some theoretical and empirical possibilities in this regard, by exploring the "commoning" that emerges in the vacuum of capitalism as people disengage from their working lives.

Although self-valorisation has also been tenuously connected with urban gardening (Valle 2012; Cumbers et al. 2017), there is a tendency to over-emphasise the political intention of such actions, and instead I suggest more empirical work is needed on the forms of "quiet" self-valorisation that emerge within these sites. In this chapter, then, I have identified what I consider two crucial (and intentionally broad) self-valorising dynamics in these urban gardens—sociality and self-determination.

4.2 Sociality

In the context of this research, I consider retirement to be an ambiguous yet important dynamic to explore in the everyday political-economic sense. It provides a lens to explore people's relationships with capitalism, and in particular the forms of activities and practices

might exist in the vacuum of work. Retirement is itself a partial release from capitalism's rigid scheduling of people's activities and time, that allows a reorientation and rediscovery of people's lives, their motivations, interests, and desires. Crucially, it allows for a deeper exploration of the types of self-valorising activities and practices of retired gardeners. First, I explore this through the dynamics of sociality in these spaces, which is perhaps the most common yet also vague aspect of urban gardens more generally (Glover et al. 2005; Kingsley and Townsend 2006; Martin et al. 2016). Indeed, understanding the social forms that create and maintain the commons is a crucial task (Jeong 2018).

4.2.1   Retirement and the Search for Sociality

The search for forms of collective doing and sociality is, at its most basic level, a form of commoning. These gardens were not individualised experiences, but of people experiencing a shared challenge (of retiring) and coming together for a common purpose—in many ways to confront the sense of "individual" loneliness or isolation in retirement. The many challenges posed by retirement seemed to create a sense of agency, but also introduced new "needs" into people's lives. A gardener at Aberporth Community Garden (APCG) suggested that *"you've got to go out there and do it yourself"* when you retire because it was *"easy to make your world too small"*. Another gardener at APCG described how quickly they became isolated, with the result being that they reached out for social activities:

> *"I think it was a shock to me when I took early retirement, I was only 58 when I gave up work…I was happy to leave, don't get me wrong. It was a shock how quickly I felt isolated, 6 months or a year. And I wouldn't go so far as to say I was bored, but there was definitely an element of being isolated and not quite enough to do. So, I started looking around for things to do, and when you start looking you find things."*

People's relationship with working life was complex, however, and gardeners regularly mentioned that the primary aspect that they missed from work was the social life and camaraderie that they experienced through work. As a result, many of the gardeners suggested that the social life within spaces helped replace the loss of the social life they experienced after

retiring. A community gardener who worked in the NHS as a therapist described the difficulties of this transition, especially regarding the intensity of work:

> *"There was always more work than I had time to do. And because I worked for the National Health Service, I wasn't freelancing where you'd have to go and find your work, but I'd just sit there and work would just come at me, full tilt. To suddenly be in a position where I had to organise myself...I looked forward to, but I think at the same time you can feel a little bit daunted by that because if you're not careful you can stay too much alone, or not get out and meet other people...So I made a conscious decision to develop other interests outside the house, meeting other people in the community and to put bits of structure in a space that's open, which is actually what I like about being retired—I like a blank canvass."*

This gardener reveals that the sense of the structurelessness of retirement was a significant challenge and opportunity, a tension revealed in relation to the familiarity of a rigid and busy working life, and the importance of creating new structures and habits in this vacuum. This gardener also describes that there is a transition from carrying out work that is necessarily "given" to you, to trying to develop a more self-determined life on their own terms. Given that the commons is partly dependent on liberating time from capitalist work (Valle 2012; De Angelis 2017), then people's apparent search for social experience during retirement is an example of commoning *outside* of capitalist work.

Wage labour is not the only determining factor in this regard, but the structuring of life through matters of social reproduction are also crucial, as Sandy at APCG reflected:

> *"The gardening is for the community...as you get older, you get different perspectives on your life. Obviously, your kids are grown up, so you're not forever running around after them you know. But that part of your life is gone so you need to fill it with something. I did work for a while and then you just think 'what else can I do?' As you get older you tend to be in your home and*

you don't want to be there on your own or with just your husband so you branch
out, and then the community becomes your life, it really does."

The explicit articulation of this was important, since the gardener suggests how capitalism absorbs people's times and energy through both the spheres of production and reproduction (Cleaver 2017; Federici 2018), and therefore Sandy notes the importance of filling their life with something, reflecting a vacuum of time in retirement. This reflects a type of "micro crisis" within people's own lives—whether or not it is articulated necessarily as a crisis is unclear, but it is at the very least a significant rupture within people's usual rhythms, times, habits, etc. Huron (2015) argues that the reclamation of the commons happens during points of crisis, which is also an apparent phenomena with urban gardening (Ginn 2012; Schoen and Blythe 2020). I argue that this is also apparent in these sites, and though this should not be romanticised as a "reclamation" of the commons, it is the distinct practices of commoning and participation in "latent" commons which means that retired people (often strangers) come together to create new social life. Therefore, if capital's ability in turning all life into work leaves no space or time for self-valorisation (Cleaver 1992b), this period of retirement offers the opportunity to redefine social values, where such forms of self-activity can subvert and extend beyond the reach of capital (Cleaver 2011), through the creation of time outside of the capitalist mode of production (Valle 2015).

The commons is inherently related to forms of enclosure (Linebaugh 2014)—including the enclosure of non-waged forms of "doing" (Humphries 1990; Moselle 1995; De Angelis 2004). During retirement, several participants reflected on this sense of reaching out to find new purpose. People's lives become somewhat released from the enclosure of work, and the result is the search for social activity. APCG was a good example of this through the creation of entirely new friendship groups, which I experienced in "real time", as did a Community Inclusion Officer for Cardiff West who worked with the garden:

"You'd never know that they may never have known each other before rocking
up to that group. It's like an old married couple some of them, and that's the
point they've got to that stage where they comfortable with each other, and they
trust each other and it's possibly a whole new circle of friends for those people."

Therefore, while some have suggested that it is the "stranger" element that defines the urban commons (in particular in comparison to the traditional rural commons, where there was arguably more familiarity) (Harvey 2012; Huron 2015), the "stranger" element becomes quickly dissolved as people share these experiences together over a period of time. This form of "stranger" socialisation was more apparent in APCG than HDCG, which was more based on the coming together of individuals in a working class estate amongst people who already had pre-existing social relationships. While communities are not a pre-given, but are constituted *through* the act of commoning (Gibson-Graham et al. 2016), this reflects how such gardens can also be about nourishing pre-existing communities (Hond et al. 2019).

Euler (2018) claims that the commons must be built around two spheres: the first being basic livelihood and biological reproduction; and the second being involvement in directly reproducing and producing the conditions for this livelihood. This contrasts with the capitalist satisfaction of needs which is determined overwhelmingly by profit-making (Euler 2018). However, focusing on physiological or biological reproduction, particularly food, is problematic since it doesn't represent people's lived experience of the meaning of these sites. Moreover, doing so can neglect the processes of sociality, which unlike food or water, for example, isn't as distinct a physiological or biological need. Cangelosi (2014) and Quested et al. (2018) argue that social motivation is often the most significant element for gardeners, moreso than food production. However, Katrini (2018) claims that if food is the principle physiological need of these sites, and it is exogenously met (by buying food), then people no longer engage in that activity (of urban gardening) and as a result lose several other fulfilling elements of those sites (participation, identity, creation, understanding and freedom). However, I am reluctant to suggest that the social experience is a by-product in this way. Several gardeners explicitly noted this also, suggesting that it was far easier to simply buy food than to grow their own.

> *"It's not only the gardening, it's meeting people and having a chat and having a coffee—a social life occasionally. We meet up on a Thursday once a month and have a few sherbets. It keeps the community spirit going. I wouldn't say that I'm really into gardening--it's nice to grow your own veg and if it fails you've always got Sainsbury's. You can't rely on it...You come up and have a chat do a bit of*

exercise, put a couple of plants in and if they come up, they come up, if they
don't, they don't.”

Instead, it is about the simple pleasure of collective and social life—as Elin at HDCG claimed, *“I couldn't be here if it was miserable.”*

Some long-term plot holders at the allotment described how this was a space that changed based on their position and relation with work. Thus, rather than being a form of a "third space" beyond work and home (Veen et al. 2016), these spaces in fact exist in relation to them, rather than *beyond* them, and are often structured by other necessities, like family or work responsibilities. Though a lot of the allotment gardeners were new retirees, others had also been members for much longer, and therefore often reflected on their experience at the allotment now, as a retired person, compared to during their working lives. One gardener, who has been a member of the allotment since 1969, and used to work in the Steelworks in Splott (as did many gardeners here), stated:

“To come up here after a week's work was a wonderful release...It was like a
therapy at times to get out of the steel plant and in the fresh air and enjoy.”

Figure 1: Splott Steelworks in 1964

Image source: Wales Online (2019)

Today this gardener is retired, but still comes to the allotment several times a week—primarily for *"the social aspect of it all"*, he told me. In this sense, the meaning or value of the allotment has shifted from one of escaping the harsh environment of a steelwork factory to a distinctly social experience:

> *"Initially you do (miss working), because you miss the comradeship and the banter, but that's available up here...There's lots of varied workers here— Doctors, bank managers. It's interesting to talk to people and get different perspective and their history of work. And Ahmad is from Afghanistan, he's one of life's characters. He's an Imam from the Mosque. He was telling us how the culture works and you have a better understanding, it's wonderful..."*

These spaces can therefore be defined by people's various needs, from the social side to getting fresh air away from the factory environment (quite a common understanding of the traditional allotment, which developed in industrial areas (Acton 2015)). As another gardener at the allotment noted, who was retired but his wife was still working, *"I've retired now so things are different for me but Laura has a pressurised job so it means something different to you and she comes down for relief."* Therefore, while there was some amount of ability for the space to be flexible to people's specific needs and "vacuums" within their lives, in the next section I explore the spatiality of this social side in more detail.

4.2.2 Spaces of Social Practice

Though I have noted the importance of the active search for sociality in retirement, it is important to pay attention to the spatial dynamics within which these occur, in particular because the commons and commoning have to assume a shared spatiality to some extent (Chan and Zhang 2019). A retired person could quite easily find social experience through other means, such as in cafes or pubs, for example (and they do, of course). As Holloway (2010b, p.911) notes, such self-determined practices beyond capital are inherently spatial, e.g. *"here in Chiapas, here in this social centre, we shall not submit to capital, we shall do otherwise"*. I would argue that this experience of social gardening is distinct from other social experience in other places (e.g. meeting friends at the pub) precisely due to its potential for self-valorising social practices that are facilitated in the garden (unlike in a pub, which is generally a less enactive social experience).

A gardener at APCG recognised the spatial dynamics as interconnected with the social aspects:

> *"It is that being part of a group, not being isolated, being involved in something is what I get from it. Because I've got my own garden if all I wanted to do was get my hands dirty."*

The distinction here between their own garden and the community garden (in this case in APCG) was clear—it was not about gardening, but it was about how this space facilitated a social experience which is not possible in their own garden. One gardener told me that they intentionally joined the allotment in preparation for retirement, and I asked why they had chosen the allotment specifically:

> *"I think if I had the garden the same size as my allotment, I think it would mostly be lawn. It's the camaraderie of the people in the allotments."*

Again, this gardener is referencing an explicit spatial dynamic here, contrasting his own hypothetical personal garden with an allotment space which is inherently social. Therefore, these are not spaces of private retrenchment but a search for cooperative and social experiences, and these spaces seem to provide the structures for such desires. This also demonstrates how neither *gardening* nor *food growing* are satisfactory explanatory dynamics for involvement, since it is the social experience of these activities that people tend to prioritise, which again disrupts the subsistence oriented perspective seen in Katrini's (2018) adoption of the Max-Neef (1991) scale of needs.

Figure 2: Aberporth Community Garden Gates

Figure 3: Hendre Community Garden Gate

However, what much of this ultimately reflected was a relatively binary understanding where gardeners separated "the inside" from "the outside". This was most notable in the general spatial dynamics and distinctions of each of these sites. All of them are fenced off to the "external" world, and while community gardens are often celebrated for being more open and inclusive, they usually remain gated, and in this case were only accessible on particular days and times.

Despite this, it was also apparent that the boundaries of community gardens are much more porous and open than within allotments. In these two community gardens, somebody who wanted to participate could turn up on the day of gardening and become a member through

simply participating. However, the allotment requires formal entrance through Cardiff Council's waiting list, as well as then signing of contracts and annual payments to the Council. This results in a stricter boundary within allotments that is not only "physical" but institutional, bureaucratic, and financial.

These social dynamics are perhaps most obviously articulated when they held events for the broader community, during which times they attempted to reach beyond the "participants" of such spaces to the broader neighbourhood. The Resident Participation Strategy Officer from one of the Housing Associations (related to Hendre Community Garden (HDCG)) described this as a more porous and "outward-reaching" form of sociality:

> *"When I've been there, a lot of people come past and they'll say 'hello' or they are pop in even if they're not that interested to do the gardening sometimes. I know some people come and they don't do a lot of gardening, and I know there's this Polish lady who comes and she makes food for them and she makes lovely stuff if they've got an event on and she'll make all these lovely dishes and bring them over. But I don't know how much gardening she does so people are contributing in these different ways...they do quite a lot of different events, will do a summer fete and they'll do a winter one, they'll do a bit of a sale and they can raise some funds through donations. So the community come for those types of things."*

Figure 4: The largest marrow

Figure 5: The unusual veg competition

Figure 6: The produce

Figure 7: People socialising at the allotment veg competition

These types of events are quite common in such community gardens, where they might hold a BBQ or lunch for the wider community, as a way of introducing them to the garden. Although the allotment no longer holds such community events, it does often carry out events, parties, and gatherings for the whole allotment site which produces a much wider social experience. One of the main events at the allotment that I witnessed was the harvest competition, where

people would enter fruit and vegetables into various categories and prizes would be awarded. However, while it is often understood that these spaces enhance social capital in the community, where social bonds in the community are developed and nourished (Firth et al. 2011; Veen et al. 2016), further questions need to be raised in terms of the reach of this social capital. As Kingsley and Townsend (2006) note, these forms of social capital don't always transfer into the wider community or beyond the garden itself. Indeed, there are tenuous links to the broader community, especially in the allotment but likewise in the community gardens.

While Bigell (2015) argues that the decline of social events in allotments are reflective of the individualistic environment of today, the gardens not only mirror the "outside" in this way, but also can contrast with it. This most obviously appeared in relation to people's suggestion that the social and friendly space *within* an allotment contrasted to *outside* it. Though of course such an inside-outside binary is problematic in many ways, an issue that I contend with throughout this thesis by demonstrating their interconnection (not only spatially inside-outside, but also in terms of relations with the state and capital), it was interesting to see how the gardeners themselves framed it in this way. People tended to reflect on how their participation related with broader social and political dynamics in society. While there was an element of "escaping" here, it was more a creation of social life that countered or contrasted something, rather than necessarily escaped it:

> *"Allotments are good socially. They're quite good if people want to talk to you. In the modern world nobody bloody talks to you anyway, would you say that? You know you say 'morning' and they look at you as though it's some strange word they've never heard of before. To me, it's just bloody ignorance and rudeness."*

This gardener reflects the type of social experiences that contrast with what he considers to be an unfriendly "modern world", a process recognised as a deeply neoliberal dynamic of neighbours becoming increasingly alienated and withdrawn from one another through the impoverishment of everyday life (Federici 2018). Similarly, Bigell (2015) claims that the place-bound and territorial nature of these gardens (and their empowering dynamics) contrasts with (and appears anachronistic in relation to) the decontextualised postmodern world of unglued

and placeless individuals—where such enclosed places provided a sense of meaning and social engagement for people.

Therefore, while there are debates as to the role of borders within the commons and commoning, in particular its potential for creating a defensive and exclusionary commons (Cumbers 2015; Thompson 2015; Cayuela and Tornaghi 2019) but also potentially being important for the commons to thrive (Cayuela and Tornaghi 2019), it is important to understand what work borders are doing, since they are complex and not inherently negative (Ince 2012). During the fieldwork, it became apparent that such borders were important forms of protection and safety for gardeners themselves—especially many of the older gardeners, who were concerned with crime, antisocial behaviour, or vandalism. This was also the case within the allotment itself, where borders were often monitored internally due to past experiences of theft. This is an issue that De Angelis (2017, pp.164–166) also reflects upon in relation to non-participants in the commons in Exarchia (Athens) and their clash with the participants and surrounding neighbourhood through forms of anti-social behaviour. Of course, while such forms of petty crime and anti-social behaviour are undoubtedly linked to the destructive dynamics of capitalism (poverty and inequality, as well as the destruction of strong societal and community relations) (Cowling 2011; Jacob 2011; Lynch 2013), it remains necessary for the gardeners (in the commons) to deal with some of the social issues that capitalist society produces—again, demonstrating the impact of the "outside" world on the "internal" dynamics of a garden. This reflects a theme identified by De Angelis (2017) that is pursued throughout this thesis, whereby the endogenous and exogenous are not separate (a binary reflected in the institutional commons of Ostrom and the anti-capitalist commons of the Autonomists), but that they are deeply interrelated dynamics that impact each other.

However, as I have touched on above, the spaces—as bordered spaces—are also inherently social, and the gardeners tend to contrast the *inside* from the *outside,* which is not only felt but is a physical and territorial distinction. It is possible that these borders create and maintain a sense of common purpose and common identity, which of course can be recognised without over-generalising such claims as reflective of the dangers and evils of parochial and exclusionary politics (of nationalism, for example). It is the richness of this social life that is important and distinguishes it from broader social experiences in other spaces. For example, a public park

which is open to all does not necessarily facilitate a rich and meaningful social engagement, whereas these spaces are bordered and restricted (thus, are much less open than a public park), yet the quality and richness of the social relations is notable.

The enclosed nature of these spaces contains an internal social system which is actively created and nourished by the people themselves, which in turn creates a distinct space that further facilitates and provides the opportunity for social practices. I explore this in more detail in the next chapter, but ultimately there is the creation of a constantly reproducing and mutually reinforcing relationship between the space and the practices which define it. For example, in the allotment there are several communal areas, but the most obvious one is a shared meeting space/kitchen area, as well as shared tool shed and small shop (where they sell seeds, compost, bamboo canes, etc.). This area is where the most obvious social interaction occurs, when people meet for tea and biscuits, or share tools together. This is an inherently spatial and structural dynamic, since without this shared social space, the social interaction would be more fragmented (though, of course, social interaction also happens more informally with neighbouring plot holders). Likewise, this shared space is constituted by specific social practices and habits, such as having tea together, sharing stories and ideas, having general conversations, fixing machinery, and in general enjoying time together. This in turn creates a set of habits and expectations around these particular spaces (for example, in the allotment they ring the bell, and people meet in the shed to drink tea), which in turn reproduces and strengthens the social aspects of these particular spaces. The same situation occurs in the community gardens, where gardeners meet in specific areas to "rest" together (have tea, coffee, and biscuits), usually around a shared table and chairs area. Thus, even though community gardening is at all times a social experience, sitting together in a particular area such as this brings a distinctly communal interaction in a communal space (a shared table). These spaces were also the one's where people practiced the most explicit and organised forms of self-management, through collective decision-making and planning, which I explore in chapter 6. I probably spent as much time sitting and drinking tea with the gardeners as I did gardening, and though initially I felt like this was slightly wasted time (since I wanted to witness how they gardened together and what they exactly did), I quickly realised that these were far more than simply "rest" periods and were as significant a part of these spaces as digging, planting, or watering. In fact, many of the interview quotes that are central to this thesis were the product of conversations had during such

intermittent periods—thus they were inherently part of the ethnographic method. It was clear that these were the moments in which people built social bonds in a more direct way.

This general sense of it being a space for respite from an "outside world" was certainly significant:

> A: "I miss work, I'll be honest with you. To me, it was like losing a limb, it affected me that badly. And on a personal note, I lost my mother in June last year 3 months after we finished we lost Laura's father and her mother and brother aren't very well at the moment."

> B: "But it does give us an escape from all of that."

It was also the case that it offered the space for people to express their own concerns and worries—often to do with health (their own or a family member, usually), or again, things happening *outside*. Such forms of offloading worries were extremely common, and demonstrate how forms of social capital allow for the development of social support and social connections (Kingsley and Townsend 2006). I witnessed an extreme version of this, where I offered to help a gardener at the allotment who was struggling with their plot, because his daughter had leukaemia. I documented this experience in my fieldnotes:

> "Midway through, his wife came to the allotment (he had earlier told me she usually doesn't, she looks after the flower garden at home and he looks after things you can eat), and she was crying. I was thinking 'oh no, I've just met this poor man, and I'm about to witness him finding out about the death of his own daughter'. He asked why she didn't ring, she was flustered, couldn't speak...I turned and Dave (another gardener) was there luckily, so we started chatting. I could see Dave looked worried too...Steve was also crying and hugging his wife, and he came over and said; 'don't worry, it's good news, she's in remission'...Steve had tears in his eyes, I was so happy I couldn't believe it. I'd

only met this man about half an hour ago, and it was hard to understand how I was so emotional about this. Dave was so delighted, and said he wanted to give Steve's wife a hug. You could sense a change in the atmosphere now, like when a thunderstorm takes the humidity out of the air."

This was an important example, in my opinion, of how these sites nourish social relations and forms of care that are distinct within these spaces. Though Gibson-Graham (2006) suggest that these aren't simply acts of coping, the importance for people to find a space to 'cope' shouldn't be underestimated, as another gardener noted:

"You're out in the fresh air, you're doing some physical exercise and also if you're feeling a bit depressed you meet somebody and you're chatting and it helps you sort of forget about your worries and things."

Another gardener suggested that *"up here you don't get that animosity that you hear about everywhere, but you have a good joke".* Again, both of these suggest that the social life of the garden contrasted with their worries and concerns "outside". These are perhaps examples of how the commons develops around a social need that contrasts with the dominant neoliberal city (Cumbers et al. 2017), which can manifest itself in such gardens being a space that is an escape or relief from the city and the "system" (Snajdr 2011). Indeed, Scott (2008 [1985]; 2012) has noted how such forms of "escape" are deeply political processes in other contexts, and in this situation it can be seen that such forms of escape are not simply passive moments but active moments of creating lives beyond these problems. As highlighted by the gardeners, part of this is not only the vague alienating nature of the neoliberal city, but central to this is the alienation of people from each other.

In the next section, I explore the ways that such sociality requires the negotiation of difference within the garden.

4.2.3   Negotiating Difference in the Garden

Gardeners regularly suggested that these were spaces where people would come into contact with, negotiate, and ultimately take pleasure in diversity. Crucially, this diversity was a strength of these spaces where there was the "levelling" of carrying out a common task which contrasted with the "outside" world. This, of course, is one of the primary principles of Oldenburg's (1999) concept of third places—places which are partly defined by the creation of a greater sense of equality amongst peers. This diversity was more apparent in the allotment, partly because of its larger scale, but also it was in an area of Cardiff (near Roath Park) that even though it is considered one of the wealthier parts of Cardiff, is a diverse area (in terms of class and race). Therefore, this was apparent in the differences between the gardeners at the allotment, where some would drive in their Land Rovers while others would catch the bus, for example. I think this was also apparent in the aesthetics of the garden—on a slow day at the allotment, I would walk around and try to guess how 'bourgeois' a plot was by their use and aesthetics.

Figure 8: The bourgeois shed

Figure 9: The recycled shed

Though of course any pre-existing structural inequalities are not challenged here, people appeared to appreciate the diversity of these spaces that tended to dilute these hierarchies (especially in terms of social status):

> *"Paul here now, just now, he was deputy head or head of a department in the school doing geography. We got Dr Peter Jenkins here, Ron Walker there he was a professor. There's the Mad Professor as we call him over there. There's Dr Gwyn Evans, I think he's just retired. Next up there's a GP who has just retired, Mair. She was a consultant in sexually transmitted diseases, and she had a nice long title, and she said; 'don't go through all that, if you want to do that just call me the Pox Doctor'. So that's how it works. When you're up here you're all talking about the same thing, you're all supporting the same thing, all together."*

Thus, it is the flattening of social relations that is important, whereby certain social statuses are not *necessarily* the point of conflict (especially of feelings of superiority or inferiority), but become to some extent bypassed through *what is done* on site. For gardeners at the allotment, it doesn't matter whether you were a Doctor or a steelworker, this social distinction was in the "outside" world, which contrasted to the allotment, where everyone was simply a gardener:

> *"It's a great levelling thing. Status doesn't come into it. We're all getting on with it, we're all helping each other. Like we used to go to the annual dinner dance [at the steel works], the men had to wear the black tie, but during that everyone was the same. You're all equal. If you're rich or poor, doesn't matter, you can't tell."*

Thus, it is a suggestion that such spaces provide the context whereby such inequalities are momentarily transcended by what is done together. These spaces are not defined by feelings of inferiority/superiority, even if they continue to exist *outside* in the "real world". Another plot-holder at the allotment described the loss and replacement of the camaraderie that he felt (as a retired construction worker), linking this with the diversity at the allotment (and also giving me a lesson in ethnography at the same time):

> *"In one sense, it (the camaraderie from work) was replaced by what happened up here. But a different type, because I don't know if you noticed it when we*

were having a cup of coffee, but the way the conversation was jumping from
subject to subject, did you notice that? Because there's so many people up here
that have a variety of occupations that the subjects can jump from one area to
another."

While this might demonstrate that gardeners became involved in a process of learning, doing, and being in the presence of difference (ideas, cultures, social classes) (Crossan et al. 2016), it does little to challenge the existence of these inequalities in the first place, of course (especially where experiences of retirement might remain fundamentally unequal, due to variations of accumulated wealth and status throughout people's lives). This does not mean that such forms of pluralism are simply shallow, but it demonstrates how people value the sense and feeling of equality that is "mimicked" in such spaces.

In the two community gardens, this was a dynamic that was also apparent, but due to the scale it seemed to be less noticeable. APCG was defined by a very mixed immediate neighbourhood with a mixture of working class housing estates and middle class homeowners all on the doorstep of the garden. One of the gardeners, Sandy, lived in a council house on the same street as another gardener, Ruth, who owned her own house. Sandy once reflected on the fact that *"there's private homes and council homes and that caused a bit of a segregation"*, to which Ruth was quite surprised and said, *"do you think so?...I never thought of that."* Again, Sandy tended to suggest that community work such as gardening was able to transcend such divisions, though was evidently more aware of these class distinctions than Ruth. HDCG was far more homogenous, since it is within a traditional working class suburb of Cardiff dominated by estates (now predominantly Housing Association estates). But even within both of these gardens, the gardeners themselves often noted the importance of meeting strangers in their community, especially those that they would not usually meet in their ordinary day-to-day lives. One gardener at HDCG, who I only met once or twice during my fieldwork, was often at the receiving end of jokes from other gardeners, because they were renowned (and teased) for being a bit of a "half-arsed" gardener who turned up only now and again, but also because they were the only one who owned their own house. This gardener mentioned that this site was important for him because in his neighbourhood, people tended to shut the doors behind themselves after work and not communicate with each other. Thus, he contrasted the isolated

middle class community with this working class one, which he experienced *through* the community garden itself. Understanding the social and class distinctions within these urban gardens is under-explored, especially since people within them often emphasise egalitarian instincts whereby people might downplay their social status (Verk 1994; Bigell 2015), as evident here. I have suggested that these distinctions are certainly perceptible, *felt* and articulated by the gardeners themselves, but they likewise tend to downplay these distinctions in favour of the egalitarianism of the relations within these spaces.

However, while these differences can also provide the context for greater co-operation, learning, and mutual respect amongst difference, they were also far from cooperative utopias. Since urban life consists of a number of people from different backgrounds with different capabilities, skills, and interests, etc, then Sundaresan (2011) claims that antagonistic conflicts in the *urban* commons are unavoidable. Although any outright form of antagonistic conflict was less apparent—especially since as I note later, these spaces tend to attempt to avoid conflict above anything else—I do suggest that there are much "softer" forms of fragmentation and disintegration that are not overtly conflictual. These spaces can easily facilitate the formation of cliques that in many ways contrast this process of "levelling" and plurality. This was particularly the case in gendered terms, where undoubtedly there was a gendering of certain tasks (women made the tea and coffee, men did the heavy and "dangerous" jobs—which I explore in the next chapter), but also of social arrangements within the allotment. One of the gardeners at the allotment told me that they don't go up to the shared shed for tea/coffee because it's all men and *"you can't swear around them you know?"*, suggesting that the social experience within these sites can also be quite conservative. Another woman at the allotment reflected upon this:

> *"I think if you spoke to all the women who got in here, they would probably say that it's a male dominated constitution and the boys go up to the clubhouse and they have their brew and a little banter but very rarely would you see any women up there. I couldn't be bothered...I think it's just a gender difference, it's an extension of probably some of the older gentleman's workplace experiencing and clubs, I don't know what their professional backgrounds is but I'm not a great one for small talk anyway so I would see half an hour spent there as a waste of time."*

Again, this gardener references (without prompting) how this is linked to the "outside" world of work, whereby men's experiences of a strong work social life (through clubs, associations, etc) tends to become reproduced within these spaces. Therefore, while some of the gardeners above noted that there was a transcending of people's work lives through their common interest in the gardeners (and that they were no longer distinguished by the status of their career), it was also the case that people could carry their habits (men's workplaces and clubs) from the workplace into these so-called "third places". The types of antagonistic conflicts that Sundaresan (2011) claims that exist within the urban commons are of course a crucial part of democratic practice (Purcell 2017). However, given that urban gardening is often admired and celebrated for the way that it facilitates democratic and participatory encounters of various sorts (Glover et al. 2005), this deserves further questioning.

Given that the urban commons is defined by the coming together of strangers (Huron 2015), and these spaces were not activist spaces defined by a particular political agenda, then it was also apparent that gardeners possessed a range of different Political opinions. Indeed, the political discussions in these spaces were frequent, which was to be expected given that the fieldwork was carried out in 2019 on the lead up to the UK General Election, in the midst of Brexit negotiations, during the Extinction Rebellion and Climate Strikes, and with Trump in the White House. These were all topics that were regularly discussed in the gardens, but likewise were at times explicitly avoided. This was evident in one of the community gardens (APCG), where there were some strong Corbyn supporters (who were active Labour members in their community), and others who were Conservative voters and vocally despised Corbyn. The result was that when politics did come up in these discussions, it usually soured the mood of the group and the conversation was quickly changed. This demonstrates the difficulty in separating the (formal) Political from the (everyday) political—another example of the interrelation between the exogenous and endogenous within the commons.

Figure 10: The Corbyn fans at Aberporth Community Garden

Yet, this was the experience predominantly of APCG, the community garden that was in a diverse neighbourhood, and was less apparent in the more homogenously working class HDCG. Likewise, in the allotment, disagreement was easier because of the structure of the space—a gardener could quite easily retreat to their plot if they wanted to, thus there is no necessity to maintain "peace" amongst the gardeners by avoiding conflict or disagreement. This was one of the primary distinctions between Kropotkin and Ward. Ward (1966) has often emphasised the importance of small face-to-face groups, but for Kropotkin these small experiments were inherently problematic. Kropotkin (2001) argued that in small experimental communities, the *"asperities of everyone's character...attain an undue importance",* whereas in larger communities these difficulties are *"smoothed, less important, and less remark".* This dynamic is even noticeable within the small scalar differences in these sites. Therefore, in the allotment, given that the social dynamics were a little less "close" and intimate, any potential disagreements were unlikely to affect the broader allotment environment or atmosphere.

Despite this, in the allotment, there were also some clear divisions here between the left and right wing gardeners. There were people who were outright socialists and, on the other hand, some working class people who completely despised Corbyn, as seen in this Corbyn scarecrow in the allotment.

Figure 11: The Corbyn scarecrow at the allotment

Such forms of negotiating difference were not only an observation, but likewise were apparent in how I negotiated the practicalities of fieldwork. As Noterman (2016) notes, it is important not to smooth over these cracks which reflect a contrast between the ideological discourses of commoning and its everyday enactments. In one conversation with a group of gardeners in APCG, the discussion turned to the Extinction Rebellion protesters that were occupying Castle Street in the city centre. One of the gardeners said; *"why aren't they out in China where the real pollution happens?"* These were circumstances which I learnt how to manage without direct confrontation—since I was deeply aware that I had to maintain a relationship with the gardeners over a long period, and directly confronting someone's views in the wrong way would likely sever that relationship. In this particular situation, it was a matter of questioning this viewpoint in relation to our privileged position within a wealthy country that is the typical consuming end-point of this intensive production in China. However, this difficulty was noted in my fieldwork notes:

> *"Someone mentioned Boris and Trump together as a lethal combo. Lots of us*
> *agreed. Don said, 'well better than Corbyn. He'll ruin the country just like every*

*other Labour government has'...It went quiet, a sour atmosphere. I wanted to
say something to counter this but realised I had to maintain a relationship with
him for the research."*

HDCG, which was the most distinctly working class space, was the only place where these political discussions didn't divide people, but there was certainly an underlying disenfranchisement and anger about politics. The political ambiguity and contradictions throughout these distinctions and differences was also intriguing. As noted throughout this thesis, at an everyday level people often practiced forms of mutual aid, which is a common perception of such garden spaces (Crouch and Ward 1997; Crossan et al. 2016). One gardener at the allotment claimed that *"some of the Tory voters here won't agree but they're basically socialists because of what they do here...we help each other."* Though almost everyone here was practicing some form of mutual aid (and were far from rugged individuals detached from society), this evidently did not translate directly to their macro Political beliefs. Therefore, though the types of everyday "doings" that Holloway (2010a) rightly celebrates are active here, there remains a question in such a context as to how this relates with broader Political dynamics. For example, the same anti-Corbyn gardener quoted above (who was also an active member of the local Conservative club), regularly complained about the state of the NHS, in particular in reference to long waiting lists and issues with his wife's knee surgery operations and a recent diagnosis about his heart. It was an appropriate example of how privatisation of the NHS was not something that turned this gardener leftwards or against the Conservatives (for example, to claim that the NHS had been deliberately underfunded, privatised, and dismantled by the Conservatives and centrist Labour governments), but instead produced an intense loathing of the NHS itself, due to its failings in his eyes. This is an honest and relatively bitter account from my perspective of the reality of fieldwork—somebody who I disagreed with several times during the fieldwork, but felt I could not properly discuss these points. This was I think symbolic of a broader dynamic in these spaces, where political disagreement could become limited because people were conscious of maintaining these tight social relations.

Urban garden spaces are often considered a micro fix to some of the problems of urban isolation and fragmentation, while acting as "third spaces" beyond work and home (Oldenburg 1999; Veen et al. 2016). However, as noted, these spaces are not necessarily separate or

autonomous from work or home, but should be understood in relation to them (Schoneboom 2018). In the first half of this chapter, I've noted the various ways that people use these spaces to fill in the vacuums in their lives—ones which are related to their changing relation with capitalism. This was seen in the example of the retired steelworker at the allotment describing their changing use of the allotment over the years, from when they used the space as an escape from the steelworks (and getting some fresh air), to now as a retired person using it as an active social space. I've also noted, some gardeners see these spaces as a way of escaping the isolating and lonely "home" during retirement, as well as the alienating, unfriendly, and lonely city, and in this final section, as a way of creating a *sense* of egalitarianism in a world of inequality. In this sense, these spaces are somewhat open to creation and redefinition based on the particular "vacuums" which emerge within people's lives—vacuums that are structured in relation to the function of capitalism but also to a sense of the "outside". Therefore, these spaces don't simply mirror external social dynamics. Instead, what I am suggesting through such a vacuum approach, is that people don't necessarily challenge capitalism in these mundane everyday ways, but that they negotiate and construct ways of doing and being that nourish and fulfil their lives in aspects that are neglected by capital—which ultimately are self-valorising. Therefore, these practices do not emerge from an explicitly articulated refusal of capitalism (Holloway 2010a), but for positive and creative ways to fulfil their lives *despite* and sometimes *beyond* it.

4.3 Self-determination

In this section, I focus on self-determination as the other aspect of self-valorisation (Cleaver 2011; Harrison 2011), and one linked to the dynamic of alienation (Holloway 2010b). Here, it is also necessary to distinguish this with other related terms—in particular autonomy and autogestion. Autogestion in general refers to self-management through the re-appropriation of something, its use, and its value, such as a factory or land (Purcell and Tyman 2015), while autonomy refers to *"non-capitalist, egalitarian and solidaristic forms of political, social, and economic organization through a combination of resistance and creation"* (Pickerill and Chatterton 2006, p.1). Without wanting to over-simplify or dilute their meanings or differences, or to become burdened by definitions and distinctions, I instead propose the concept of self-determination, which refers to a social process whereby people develop control over their *doing* (both socially and individually) (Holloway 2010a).

The focus on self-determination largely emerged as a result of frustration with understanding the politics of these spaces, and their noted ambiguity (McClintock 2014). Indeed, why do people come to this space several times a week, year after year, when they don't materially depend upon it nor is it enforced in any way? I am still not convinced that this has been answered very well within the academic literature. Research to-date on community gardens and allotments has highlighted how their rationale remains inconclusive (Turner et al. 2011; Veen et al. 2016), and I do not want to provide a conclusive closing-off of the debate, but to draw attention to the under-represented elements of this.

In attempting to understand these spaces more clearly, I regularly reflected on how Colin Ward understood this:

> *"He enjoys going home and digging in his garden because there he is free from foremen, managers and bosses. He is free from the monotony and slavery of doing the same thing day in day out, and is in control of the whole job from start to finish. He is free to decide for himself how and when to set about it. He is responsible to himself and not to somebody else. He is working because he wants to and not because he has to. He is doing his own thing. He is his own man."* (Ward 1996a [1973], p.94)

Ward (1996a [1973]) was not ideologically posturing here, but was speaking to impulses that people enacted in mundane spaces, such as in allotments and community gardens. While Ward (1996a [1973]) doesn't articulate the collective nature of these tasks in this passage— which I touched on earlier in this chapter and explore more in the next chapter—it remains an important point about self-determination and alienation. From the perspective of this thesis, this provides a foundation for understanding the importance of these spaces to retired gardeners. One of the most crucial aspects of self-determination is in terms having control over one's own activity and seeing the direct result of that, which I will explore in the next section.

4.3.1 The Interrelation of Means-Ends in Commoning Practices

It is very common for these gardens to emerge in sites of neglect and destruction, which is well-recognised in the literature, articulated often through a Right to the City narrative (Mattei and Quarta 2015; Purcell and Tyman 2015). This position suggests that these gardens are reflections, however explicitly or implicitly, of people's desire to influence their environment beyond the alienating and undemocratic neoliberal city. Therefore, while Cumbers et al. (2017) argue that their self-valorisation lies in meeting a social need through the reclaiming abandoned land, I argue that it also goes a lot deeper than this through the micro forms of self-determined processes. Rather than a Right to the City or explicit reclamation of abandoned land, a narrative which I contest in chapter 6, I argue that it is in general a far more vague instinct than this, and one that isn't necessarily a confrontation with the neoliberal city, but confronts a more general sense of alienation through direct manipulation of one's environment through a particular form of *doing* (Holloway 2010a). It is about a sense of control over one's own tasks and practices, where people can *"attack their environment"* (Ward 1996a [1973], p.72), not in a destructive way, but in a way whereby people are able to manipulate their own environment to meet specific needs, rather than being alienated from this process. People told me with pride, often showing me pictures, about how they had transformed this space from wasteland (even in the allotment, where people regularly told me stories about how they'd turned around a neglected plot, or described the whole site as neglected in the 90s). This was also described by a gardener at HDCG, where they took down an old fence and reused it:

> *"They told us we could have this side of the garden, Duw[1], we had the fence down before they could say 'don't take the fence down'. But we used all the wood then, to build the pergola, the fence, the raised beds, we recycled quite a lot of it. Course then there was the pond."*

This is a process of creation through reusing scrap materials in creative ways to construct and change the space. In this sense, the means-ends dynamic I am referring to is in relation to the ways that people directly experience, see, feel, and sense the consequences of what they do. This is fundamentally a process of self-determination, as a specific set of actions that take place within and directly shape a specific space or environment. For Holloway (2010b),

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[1] A Welsh word that literally translates as 'God', but is usually used to express shock or to emphasise something.

understanding the self-determined nature (or not) of labour is crucial to understanding Marx, especially in terms of the contrast between useful (concrete) labour and abstract labour. The former is self-determined while the latter is not. As Holloway (2010b) describes, in the process of something becoming abstract labour, the enjoyment of *doing* is removed, since it becomes structured by other needs and pressures, and thus alienated from the doer. Some gardeners articulated this as a sense of freedom through the simple pleasures of being able to rest and work based on their own needs and desires:

> *"I'm the type of person I don't want to stay up here all day digging my garden, 'cause I gets a bit bored...I want to come over here to enjoy it, do something else, and enjoy it and then the next day, or whatever day it's nice weather, I want to come back up here to do something else...But if you stay up here all day I might think 'oh I'm not going up the garden today, I've had enough of the garden like, I've been up there every day'. And when you comes up here, you got a load of weeds there and you think 'oh look at the work I got to do there'. And in the end, you lose that little bit of interest. But if you can keep the interest going all the time."*

This element of freedom provides the gardeners with the ability to slow down and experience time (Müller 2012). For capitalism, time is everything (Valle 2015), thus whether people have control over their time in such spaces is crucial. This includes the ability to determine how to use one's time, including the time to rest. A frequently articulated sentiment amongst many was highlighted by one gardener who told me that *"now we're retired, sitting around isn't as much a pleasure as it used to be"*. Another gardener stated that retirement is simply *"permission to sit and do nothing"* (which of course contrasts it with unemployment and oppressive welfare regimes). Therefore, while the garden can be a place to recover and recuperate from the exhausted self (Müller 2012), this must also be understood in relation to activity. As Ward (1972, n.p.) notes, *activity* is a necessity of life, since even *"when we say we are doing nothing, we mean that we are doing nothing with a purpose."* In other words, there is a mutually reinforcing relationship between activity and rest—one without the other makes little sense, though in these cases both are freely chosen.

Therefore, there was a sense of a "freeing" of time in such gardens (Valle 2012), which people tended to contrast with the structured and "enclosed" nature of their working lives. As noted, an important element of "doing" in the commons refers to the practice of socially useful work that is pleasurable and joyful, in contrast to the alienating work within capitalism (Chatterton and Pusey 2019). While participants of gardens tend to develop a deeper sense of well-being when they experience a greater autonomy and freedom (Quested et al. 2018), the control over the set of activities within these spaces directly contrasts with many people's experiences of work, as this gardener at APCG described:

> *"Any job you have a certain level of rigidity imposed upon you, no matter how rebellious or chaotic you are. The National Health Service certainly did, but most jobs put a rigidity around you. But this is one of the things that's appealing here is that you're free from that kind of rigidity."*

This reflects a common dynamic within such gardens which offer the opportunity for people "*to take control of their own lives and futures"* (Hond et al. 2019, p.47). An ex-construction worker at the allotment noted a similar "release" from work-based authority:

> *"Really speaking here, you don't have authorities you have to answer to. The only thing that's demanded of you is that you keep your plot tidy, and that's about the only demand that's made. And really speaking if a person is genuine, it's not a demand, it's part of what you do. So, no, it's a freedom from authorities. I don't have to do that, I don't have to go to work today, I don't have to go up the allotment today. I know I'll just do something else. It's that freedom of choice, it makes a huge difference."*

This dynamic was also apparent in the earlier discussed aspects of sociality and mutuality during retirement, whereby people refuse their subordination in retirement through engaging in these activities in the first place.

Marx (2011 [1932], p.55) also highlights that in a non-alienated form of activity, the worker *"contemplates himself in a world that he has created"*, suggesting that this is also a matter of being able to express oneself through one's own activity, and to see the consequences (the mirroring) of that. The result of this is a satisfaction in "improving" a space and seeing, sensing, and experiencing the rewards of that work. This is a process where the means and ends are closely interrelated—a gardener carries out a specific activity and sees or directly experiences the results of that activity. This was not just vaguely important to gardeners, though, but also provided a sense of achievement and innate pleasure through carrying out "work" with their own hands. For example, a community gardener described the psychological significance of doing "something constructive", linking the action with broader political worries and concerns:

> *"I find it very soothing to the despair that I can feel about what we've done to our environment and how difficult it is to shift from a destructive interaction as a species, but then as I put my hands in the dirt and do something constructive, do something for the earth in a very direct but small way."*

This is a distinct sensory experience, where people are able to discover their bodies by using their hands to actively create things around them (Müller 2012), which appeared to be also important for retired gardeners:

> *"I was looking for things to do and I didn't want things to do just for the sake of filling time. I can't do that just to pass the morning, I wanted to do something constructive."*

To some extent, this might be understood as a form of prefiguration (Raekstad and Gradin 2020), but specifically one that is attentive to the quiet politics of everyday life and micro practices within it, rather than grand strategic plans (Guerlain and Campbell 2016; Hankins 2017; Dyson and Jeffrey 2018; Carroll et al. 2019). As noted by the gardener at APCG, Mary, there was a fundamental value in simply having your hands in the soil, digging, or planting a seed and seeing it grow:

> *"Sometimes it's just being outside. Even if I'm not really getting very far, my garden is a bit of a mess, it is just an interaction. There is a feedback from the space you're working with. And this is even more organised than my garden, substantially more organised, and that has a knock back effect for me on my own garden, it helps me think about what I'm doing."*

This reflects the importance of purposeful activities within these sites (Quested et al. 2018), but ones that were directly engaged in a type of doing *with* the non-human world—including the soil, plants, and so on, in what the gardener described as a type of interaction whereby there is a feedback from these aspects. While the non-human world is beyond the realm of this thesis, it is an important point of possible intervention in understanding the practices of commoning. But, as I've noted, it is not necessarily grand strategic plans that define any particular "ends" here (even the small harvest is highly unlikely to be a satisfactory end to strive for), but it is a processual dynamic between means-ends and, specifically, being able to see and feel the consequences of one's own activities in that process.

Gardening is ultimately a set of inter-related activities (not a singular activity) and to some extent there is an inherent satisfaction in growing a tomato plant from seed, seeing the plant grow, and then enjoying the fruits of that labour a few months later. What is important is the process whereby the gardener(s) is in full control of this process and experiences and reacts to every element of this unfolding dynamic. However, aside from planting the seed and enjoying the product itself, the majority of activities in fact consist of far more mundane practices (Rogge and Theesfeld 2018). Gardeners regularly suggested that the "boring" work of the garden was in fact the most important—planting seeds and harvesting, for example, are the more "spectacular" elements of what occurs here. Beyond this, many of my fieldnotes also refer to processes which aren't necessarily considered "gardening" at all:

> *"Huge amounts of the work done here and setting these places up doesn't actually involve any gardening, e.g. painting fences, making sheds, clearing rubbish etc. Lots of it is just mundane and boring work but why it is done, how it is organised, etc, is crucial."*

While some of these "unproductive" tasks (painting a shed), do not have a particularly direct relationship with any productive outcome (harvesting food), such basic maintenance work remains crucial but also reflects the general form of self-determination. It was the most experienced gardeners in the allotment, especially, that understood this the most—quite often, new plot holders would under-estimate the hidden work that happens around a garden (preparing beds during the winter, maintaining soil, collecting water, watering several times a week, and weeding). This type of work extends beyond the understanding of labour as either productive or unproductive (in capitalism) (Valle 2015). Large amounts of the work is around the basic maintenance and reproduction of the spaces, and in many ways these simple acts delay the necessity for further engagement with capitalist markets, and can, when extended, contribute to the autopoiesis (De Angelis 2017) of these sites to some extent. However, while this may be the case, it is also certain that watering a plant, or nourishing the soil through composting, is to some extent "productive" in the way that it contributes to the ultimate end of growing and harvesting food. But, again, it is doubtful whether the amount of work required within this process is worth the small outcome or reward (of the food harvested). Therefore, while I argue that it was more about the satisfaction and pleasure of growing something from start to finish (including all of the inter-related activities above), and being directly involved in this process, the sense of having a tangible outcome as a result (even if it is minor) cannot be discounted:

> *"I think we are output powered generally in society, with so much electronic stuff and you don't have a product and I like to have a product, and so this gives me a product whether it's a bag of beans or some sweet corn or pumpkin. I've done something and it's tangible."*

This gardener at the allotment contrasts it with the lack of a tangibility in an electronic world, again reflecting on a type of "vacuum" which contrasted the *inside* world of the garden with the *outside* world. In this sense, these weren't just vague self-determined "processes" that happen without any outcome, but there is also a constant negotiation with means and ends here, with both regularly shifting. At the beginning of the planting season, a gardener's ultimate end is to have some good veg (perhaps) by the summer. However, over the winter, the gardener is more concerned with improving soil, mulching, tidying, repairing sheds and beds, cleaning tools,

preparing seeds, planning for next season, etc. In other words, these ends are constantly shifting and reproducing themselves (seasonally), and as all gardeners would say, a garden is never finished.

While Colding et al. (2013) argue that the right to manage land is a crucial aspect of the urban commons, the right to manage the processes that underpin the management of land are as significant to the commons, if not moreso (since they underpin this macro land management).While the processual element is crucial for understanding self-determination, the gardener above also points out that the output of what he does at the allotment is significant, since it is technically possible to be self-determined in other ways without anything tangible or physical to show for it (if taking a purely processual approach). It is very unlikely that a gardener would keep doing all of the above if they were not getting anything tangible from it as a result, even if the types of sociality I referred to earlier were crucial. As a semi-retired academic mentioned, this contrast with his own work:

> *"Because I'm an academic and the outputs I have are research papers, that's it.*
> *But this is something tangible which is really nice...and it's not REF² driven."*

This gardener therefore certainly connects this tangible outcome (of food) with a process that is self-determined and not driven by external means and processes (the REF system in academia). Another gardener at the allotment suggested the same:

> *"It's also you get to eat fantastic vegetables that taste good, so you get wonderful*
> *outcome...so you're not just going for a walk, you dig in the veg and then you're*
> *eating it."*

Therefore, food *is* significant, but it is more in terms of pleasure and the process of growing food (including the pride and pleasure of a tangible outcome) than a particular physical or

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² Research Excellence Framework (REF) is the system for measuring and evaluating research quality and impact in UK Higher Education Institutions

biological "need" of eating that food. Bigell (2015) also claims that even during the 1970s in Germany (where there was greater focus on food growing), growing food in gardens was not about material necessity but the pride and pleasure of growing your own food. Several gardeners referred to this in terms of pleasure, a dynamic that reaffirms Holloway's (2010b) emphasis on the pleasurable aspect of concrete (useful) labour:

> Laura: "Yeah people do like doing that in terms of getting something out of the earth."
>
> Pete: "I mentioned earlier to you from an economical point of view if you look at your labour rates it just doesn't make sense."
>
> Laura: "Yeah, like bags of carrots cost 39p. Okay they don't taste as nice as the ones here, but we often say when we go home, we take beans, carrots, potatoes and we say, 'we wouldn't get them any fresher than this'."
>
> Pete: "But we had enough for a meal that's it."

Therefore, there are no productivist illusions within these spaces, even in the allotment which are far more productive than community gardens. Time is not money here—gardeners do not relate to the activity through the logic of quantity, efficiency, production, etc. If thinking in these capitalistic terms, then these sites would ultimately be considered failures. Therefore, pride seems to be a fundamental aspect of this dynamic, which is important, since food growing has not always provided people with a sense of pride, freedom, or autonomy, something that is often forgotten within the literature today. As Müller (2012) noted, in the economic boom of 1960s West Germany, many people gave up their vegetable gardens since they wanted to demonstrate that they could now buy food rather than grow it themselves. Thus, food growing is not necessarily or innately an empowering act, but can often come from desperation and lack of alternatives—something also noted by Ginn (2012). In these scenarios, it seems highly unlikely that people considered this as an autonomous or "freeing" activity, since they were undoubtedly coerced into growing their own food out of absolute necessity (due to the various social, political, and economic circumstances) rather than any genuine choice. Today, in contrast, *"people need not be ashamed of showing their fingernails, black from gardening, in public"* (Müller 2012, p.219). Instead, such forms of urban gardening are usually *"imbued with*

deep social and cultural meanings and associated with feelings of exuberance, joy and a sense of achievement rather than with constraints, necessity or a sense of obligation." (Smith and Jehlička 2013, p.155).

Marx (2011 [1932], p.54) also highlighted the importance of going beyond a basic subsistence approach:

> *"For in the first place labour, life-activity, productive life itself, appears to man merely as a means of satisfying a need—the need to maintain the physical existence. Yet the productive life is the life of the species. It is life-engendering life. The whole character of a species—its species character—is contained in the character of its life-activity; and free, conscious activity is man's species character."*

Therefore, while it may appear that Marx (2011 [1932]) is emphasising an innate human desire for productive labour, he is more importantly emphasising that the process of free conscious activity in the process of labour itself is fundamental. This, for Marx (2011 [1932]), is also an inherently creative *and* practical undertaking. This was also crucial for understanding the distinctions with community gardens, where certainly the pleasure and satisfaction of the process was more significant than the extremely small "outcomes" produced in these spaces.

Although I have tended to articulate these forms of self-determination through a more individual lens, it becomes entwined with the other in a social process, thus self-determination is a collective dynamic in these sites. This becomes more apparent in the next chapter, but even in the earlier sections of this chapter, where I argued the social importance of these spaces, it is apparent that the forms of creativity, the ways that people engage with the soil *through* their hands, and the innate satisfaction of direct engagement with these activities, is to some extent a collective matter. When people create something in the community garden, it is often through a social process of deciding what to do, how to do it, and then carrying out that action together. Likewise, in the allotment, people build sheds together, construct things, design things, and give advice and help to others all the time. This was also realised by Marx (2011 [1932]), who not

only appreciated that the individual worker became alienated from the object of their creation, but that they simultaneously became alienated from one another.

One gardener at APCG even told me that this was a reflection of the socialist ideal when I asked if they considered this a political space; *"Of course it is. It's a socialist ideal isn't it? To work together, to benefit from the fruits of your labour."* Another gardener at the allotment reflected on the simple pleasure of achieving something:

> *"That's exactly what you do, you switch off when you go home. You've worked hard, but you feel as though you've achieved something. You think 'I've achieved something today, I've done that instead of sitting in the bloody chair'...you come up here and I go home shattered sometimes, but feeling pleased with myself. I've achieved something. I've worked hard today and in 3 months' time I'll get the benefit of that when it's grown. And there's nothing better, I've picked a few beans now this morning, and it'll be on my plate for tea tonight. Nothing sprayed, nothing like that, just pick the beans, fruit, tomatoes. It's good. I love it I do."*

I think this was a significant part of its importance for a retired gardener—the progress and movement, rather than the static sense of hopelessness that many suggested they struggled against in the process of retiring (as a springboard for coming to these sites). This very ordinary sense of movement through achieving and striving for particular ends in a garden space is crucial more generally, whether referring to the ways that the gardeners interact with and shape their environment, or the pleasurable process of growing food (including harvest).

As Eizenberg (2012) argues, these environments provide the space for alternative social practices that confronts the alienation of people from their environments, as well as a psychological environment that provides an increased sense of control and belonging. This is a crucial process, since through labour people become alienated from the object that they create, but for Marx (2011 [1932], pp.50–51) the *"more powerful becomes the alien world of objects which he creates over and against himself, the poorer he himself – his inner world – becomes".*

Therefore, if labour becomes something that exists outside of the worker, as alien, independent, and with its own force (Marx 2011 [1932]), then self-determination is a crucial concern for non-alienated labour. In the next section, I explore how this self-determined process exists through the creative practices within these sites.

4.3.2 *The Creativity of Tinkering and Reclaiming*

Although I don't think the gardeners ever thought of what they were doing as necessarily *creative* per se, all of the gardens had elements of creativity, seen in how gardeners reconstruct an often abandoned space, but also in the more micro dynamics of creative practices through the creative use of materials and space. This primarily involves a constant "tinkering" process, one which is highly creative. This was evident in each of the spaces, since they were all defined to some extent by a DIY ethic, through the creative use and reuse of materials, for example. This was seen often in how people appropriated scrap materials from various sources, which I described in my fieldnotes as like *"birds making a nest...they use any material they can find"*. This was a fascinating aspect of it from my perspective, and I think without over-politicising these dynamics, they do demonstrate the ability of the commons to appropriate from the capitalist circuit, which can contribute to their autopoiesis (De Angelis 2017). I further described this dynamic in my fieldnotes:

> *"Significant amount of gifting and reproducing of materials, plants, etc. People turn old boundary fences into garden beds, receive tables and chairs from neighbours, use old tyres to grow food, and sometimes take cutting from random plants (in a public garden or overhanging onto a footpath, for example). Gardeners often describe taking cuttings or full plants from an unwanted owner as "liberating" the plant. Equally, some groups develop relationships with local supermarkets through a scheme called 'neighbourly', resulting in the garden being given bags of compost that cannot be used (perhaps have rips in them), or plants that are half-dead and need some TLC."*

Smith and Jehlička (2013) suggest that these are examples of a type of quiet sustainability. Elin, a gardener at HDCG, was particularly skilled at appropriating plants through cuttings in this way, as I noted in my fieldnotes:

> "Keith tells me a story about when they went to Trafford House for a gardening course, and around midnight, he was outside having a cigarette, and heard some rustling in the bushes. It was Elin taking cuttings...Elin also told me, 'if it's hanging over, it's mine'."

Figure 12: Recycled fence as beds at Hendre Community Garden

In HDCG in particular, the gardeners regularly took materials from skips or other sources where they were going to waste, where they turned an old gazebo into a decorative arch and built the raised beds from an old fence that divided the garden. A gardener at APCG described this:

> "I've seen somebody digging a garden and it's all boulders... 'what you doing with them?'....'putting them in the skip'...and I said 'I'd like them' and he says 'take them'."

Müller (2014) suggests that the creative processes within gardens are seen in how people manipulate their environment and learn new skills—such as learning new ways to garden or collect water, or simply by using water bottles to slowly release water to plants. This was also apparent in each of these sites, where people would regularly experiment and devise new ways out of necessity—whether that was through building water butt collection systems, making sheds and raised beds from scrap material, or taking cuttings from public or private spaces (hanging-over the pavement) in order to reproduce these plants. This demonstrates how the simple pleasures of creation are crucial for engagement in the commons more broadly (Benkler and Nissenbaum 2006).

Bigell (2015) has argued against the simplistic understanding of allotment aesthetics as being parochial and conservative (especially in contrast to community gardens). The allotment was defined by a lot of creativity, certainly, and while there were common elements between the plots, there was also a certain amount of freedom for gardeners to be creative. The space is somewhat adaptable to people's own needs and desires—some may include a space for their children with a swing, others have a big shed so they can sit around in between gardening (especially those that spend a lot of time there), and others may be a more pragmatic approach that keeps their workload as little as possible (simple planting, easy-to-grow stuff, lots of fruit trees and bushes rather than annuals, etc.). One gardener suggested that people's plots mirrored their different personalities in their plots:

> *"The guy up there is really organised... everything is bang bang bang (reference with hands if everything being in squares etc)...I'm sure he gets the tape measure out...Ours isn't like that. We just use things, recycle them, reuse them, remake things. You think of material differently. We grab stuff from skips you know"*

In the allotment, there were the more bourgeoise types sheds (which were pre-made), as well as the more ad-hoc and random sheds that people put together out of scrap material, as a gardener described:

> *"Yeah, it was all recycled. An old shed someone gave us that was rotten, I used bits of that. The door and the windows were secondary double glazing from my house. The back windows were from a skip. The roofing material I was given because it was left over, and the wood was an old fence...it was a lot of work, but now I am retired you've got time."*

This gardener also crucially links this to the time that he now has during retirement, where it was possible to spend an afternoon *"picking over a lot of rotten wood and picking the good stuff out."* Another gardener at the allotment, Steve, who used to work at the Cardiff medical school, uses metal poles around his plot that he rescued from a skip when Heath Hospital (the University hospital) was being built (in the 1960s/70s). This was seen almost everywhere, in the way that people tinkered with their space through creatively reusing things—from old CD's to repel birds in an allotment, turning old baths into ponds, or using old tyres appropriated from a garage as planters.

Figure 14: Tyres as planters in Aberporth Community Garden

Figure 13: Old CDs in the allotment

Therefore, certain commodities become the seed for the production and reproduction of the garden (autopoiesis) through these creative practices. Though of course capitalism can use the commons for its own ends (and regularly does), it is also the case here that people are able to turn the products of capital into non-commodified material, actions, and practices (for example, the creation of compost created from the waste of commodified food). As I noted previously, gardeners exploited ruined commodities through a scheme called 'Neighbourly'— where the gardens received damaged items from supermarkets such as Lidl, which included bags of compost with tears in them or plants that were considered unsellable. In both of these examples, Lidl were unable to sell them, and therefore they were considered of no use to them, and therefore they no longer were considered commodities.. However, for the gardeners, their usability did not change—the compost was the same with or without a tear—and the plants required a bit of care and attention to nurture them (and were then given away for "donations" to members of the community, in the process raising funds for themselves). Thus, even if they no longer had an exchange value, their use value remained the same. These are examples of how gardeners engage with the "external", but in doing so can even reclaim elements of the capitalist market for non-capitalist purposes (such as making their own compost). One of my contributions to both of the community gardens was establishing a wormery—a tiered worm system (out of plastic boxes) where the worms broke down the scrap food and produced compost fertiliser. The worms were purchased from a gardening shop on Amazon, which was delivered by post to my home address (since worm composting depends on a particular type of worm, not a usual garden earth worm).

Figure 15: The worms delivered by Amazon
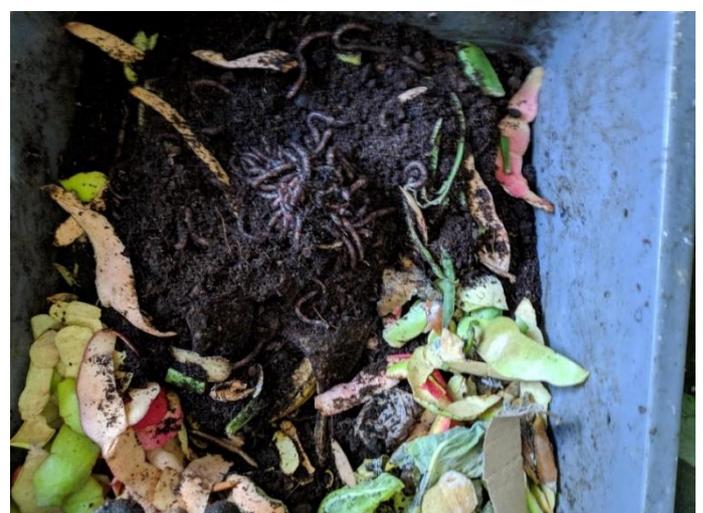
Figure 16: The wormery at Hendre Community Garden

It often appeared that a lot of vernacular creativity emerged due to a lack of resources, but also a DIY ethic and people's desire to experiment with materials, which was the type of constructive and tangible aspect that I have already mentioned. Some of the distinctions and variations between the gardeners in the allotment was also interesting, especially when understanding the diverse class dynamics of the gardeners. One morning, I interviewed a professional couple (the man was still working in a university, the woman was retired) who occupy a plot in the allotment that is known as "the experiment", based on their no-dig method of gardening. Though this type of gardening contrasts with the traditional method of allotment gardening that remains predominant in the allotment, it is also highly organised and ordered, and the gardeners in general were well-read on the matter, went to workshops, and spent huge amounts of money to create and reproduce this method (which amongst the majority of the more working class allotmenteers, was certainly considered a bit of a bourgeois method).

Figure 17: The Experiment at the allotment

The following day, I spoke to a working class man, in his late 80s, who used to work in the Steelworks in Splott. His humility in suggesting *"I don't know why you want to speak to me, I don't know anything, I just do a bit of gardening"* was not the case, since he had a very well-articulated philosophy about what he was doing. I spent a bit of time at his plot, and it became

apparent that the methods he was practicing were similar in some ways to the "experiment" from the previous day, except it emerged from vernacular practice and learning by doing, as he explained:

> *"Well, what happened was, the fella that was there (next door), he was an old fella like, he died he did like, and I noticed he never used to chuck anything away. Up the top there, there used to be a place where you'd take all your rubbish like you do get in gardening. Sprouts when you get the stem you got a job to get rid of them, because they take a long time to rot away. And he used to be over there, and he'd be digging a trench, dig a trench and he'd put all the stems of the sprouts at the bottom, and he'd cover it up, and what he was doing, I didn't realise it, is like with allotment you can't say come over here every 5 minutes and water runner beans and all that, but when that was rotting, the sprout tops, they rot away and it's keeping the moisture in the ground... Because my experience, I didn't go to college or anything like that, my basic learning about my work I was doing, I worked in the steelworks like...It's the same when you talk about gardening, you're learning all the time. You say 'why isn't that growing? What's the matter with it?' And I don't go and test the soil, but my brain tells me I've took something out so I've got to put something back in."*

Ultimately, what this gardener is describing is the importance of learning through doing and through vernacular knowledge, which is itself a highly creative process, though he claimed that it was just *"common sense".* Such knowledge ultimately emerges out of necessity, with the gardener stating *"I can't afford to go to the garden centre and pay £5 a bag of compost"*, but also about experimentation to make their lives easier because, as he continued, *"it's hard work fetching buckets and watering every day, but you can do something like that, the moisture is in the ground."* This reflects a type of trial and error approach of creativity, where people tinker and experiment in ways to meet their own needs. Though 'trial and error' is a word closely associated with Dewey's (1997 [1916]) philosophy, it is also one that was repeatedly used in my fieldwork by the gardeners themselves—in fact, a gardener at the allotment claimed *"everything is trial and error, and trying to solve a problem",* a statement that resembles Dewey's philosophy extremely accurately. However, while it suggests an almost scientific approach to

these spaces, trial and error is itself a highly creative process of engaging in activities over time. These are practices that highlight the forms of joyful doing that negates alienated work and useless toil (Chatterton and Pusey 2019), where ordinary people have the opportunity to shape their own landscapes (Crouch 1989) through these practices.

However, I also caution against seeing these forms of vernacular knowledge as always progressive, since at times they appeared to be conservative and risk averse. This is seen in people's adherence to traditional gardening techniques, methods and aesthetics, in particular in the allotment. In fact, many of the retired gardeners mentioned that they learnt gardening from their grandparents, and in this sense, they might be referring to gardening methods from around the late 19th century at least. Most obviously this was articulated through a sense of scepticism towards "new" methods, such as "the experiment"—one gardener described it as *"bloody rubbish...just dig it"* and there was some talk in the committee about policing people's approaches to gardening (including aesthetically). Therefore, trial-and-error and experimentation can also be inhibited by increasingly rigid cultural habits and expectations that develop over time.

Indeed, vernacular knowledge doesn't necessarily suggest that it is inherently progressive in this way, but can result in extreme resistance to change, too (even if it might be positive, such as banning use of chemicals). While allotment gardens create and sustain norms and social pressures that govern these spaces, including through transferring knowledge over time around gardening practices (Barthel et al. 2010; Colding and Barthel 2013), these norms that are sustained over time can also become rigid and resistance to change in a negative sense. This, I suggest, results in a form of creative impotence, that is not only reflected in the maintenance of conservative practices (such as pesticide use) but also in the aesthetic rigidity of the allotment at times. Bigell (2015) argues that the design of allotments remain relatively sporadic and incoherent, in particular in comparison to formal city parks. While I've also suggested that this is the case, this informality can also be highly conservative, since there remains some resistance to creative design. I walked around with two allotment gardeners who had volunteered to judge for the annual veg show, and what became apparent was that there were clear allotment aesthetics that were appreciated—neat, tidy, clear lines and borders, ordered, with perhaps some mix of flowers (but not too many flowers). From my perspective, there were some far

more creative designs of the sites that were overlooked in the competition from a pure gardening perspective, or others that were considered "not an allotment" because they were predominantly growing flowers on them (with some veg intermingled).

Figure 18: The newer floral plot at the allotment

Figure 19: The traditional veg plot at the allotment

This is a distinction between what Bigell (2015) describes as the struggle between the utilitarian vegetables vs decorative flowers. Therefore, as Müller (2014) notes, creativity can only truly emerge when there is a certain amount of freedom for people to experiment without too many

rules or regulations. It is clear that allotments are defined by very strict rules guidance, and plans [Appendix E] (the contracts always state that the site must be used for food growing, and there are regularly guidelines and advice regarding design for allotments), but this is not only a formal matter, since there are historically-developed and concretised social and cultural expectations that contribute to the sustaining of this rigidity. In this sense, being creative within that space is hindered both by the relatively strict bureaucracies, but also by the lack of consistent co-operative and social work in comparison to a community garden (where the whole design of that site is social in nature), which can and does disrupt these ideas through cooperative design. This might reflect the historical development of these sites, with the allotment often considered a relic of industrial modernisation (and working class culture) and community gardens as part of the post-industrial modernity (and the counter-culture of the sixties) (Bigell 2015).

Even today, there is a lot of scepticism towards more aesthetically-minded plots, or towards different methods of gardening, as one gardener mentioned:

> "At that time there was the real old guard here with Keith and the gang of people who were all in there, and they run the committee and they were pretty old fashioned guys. There was a lot of casual racism and that sort of thing. I was the first one to try and put raised beds on this site. I remember one guy coming around and saying 'why are you doing it like this?' And I was like wow this is quite a common way of gardening in lots of places…But now you see the majority of people grow in raised beds, there's very few people doing a traditional open allotment."

This is an example of how allotment culture and aesthetics can change over time, but it is relatively slow to do so due to its conservative tendencies (Follmann and Viehoff 2015). I would therefore suggest that while vernacular knowledge can be a source of creative experimentation, it can likewise be quite restrictive to this process too. Bigell (2015) argues that this idea of allotments as proto-fascist, competitive, and exterminating (of "weeds") is problematic, and does a disservice to their ambiguity, complexity, and change over time. As Bigell (2015, p.114)

notes, this reflects an *"elitist demonization of working class culture…[which] denigrates the creation of a vernacular landscape by common people as being in bad taste"*.

However, there was an aesthetic rigidity that was far more prevalent in the allotments than the community gardens, where there was a much more general appreciation of experimentation through gardening and with the aesthetics of the space. This openness to creative experimentation was important—seen in how people reuse material to reshape their environment through creative experimentation. As a member of APCG told me, explaining her idea to weave recycled parachute rope through the steel council fence surrounding the garden:

> *"Well because that area is just tarmac, and steel fencing. Visually it looks dreadful. Even with flowers it looks dreadful. So, we needed to soften the outlook. I think it just personalises it."*

Figure 20: Softening institutional boundaries at Aberporth Community Garden

This was also relevant in terms of what people tried planting—the community gardens were on the whole more open to experimentation (and, ultimately, failure). For example, in HDCG they had tried (and failed) to plant monkey nuts and ginger. Because community gardens are more collaborative in design, and don't rest on such traditional or rigid aesthetic values, there tends to be more creative openness in this way. As noted, all community gardens look and feel different, but this is largely because a community garden should by its very nature reflect a diverse set of people and their ideas, aesthetics, values, principles etc. In many ways, both community gardens were a type of deliberation through doing—consensus emerged through doing, as much as through speaking, directly reflecting a type of epistemology of the hand (Brinkmann and Tanggaard 2010). I explore this dynamic more in the following chapter.

Though these spaces always rely on ingenuity, such creative processes never reach an end (Müller 2012). This demonstrates the contrast between community gardens as providing an environment of untidiness and openness in comparison to the predefined and regulated nature of allotments (Müller 2012; Follmann and Viehoff 2015). Thus, the creative process is itself determined by the social relations within the sites, as well as the structures and histories of them. In the allotment, though it was also apparent that the aesthetic design of the plots remained quite diverse, there was undoubtedly a stricter element of what an allotment garden *should* look like. This is the primary difference between a community garden which is entirely collaborative in design, and an allotment site which is separated into individual plots, and while this does remain a social process (since gardeners regularly mirror and reflect each other's design), it can also result in it being relatively slow-changing and less creative.

Therefore, while Müller (2014) suggests that gardening is a set of practices for finding one's own expression in the products of one's own labour, I have suggested here that this remains a fundamental process of self-determination, and one that is a creative process of tinkering and reclaiming materials to meet people's needs.

4.4 Chapter Summary

I will briefly summarise by using the words of one of the gardeners, which I think is reflective of the general principle of this chapter, but couldn't neatly fit into any of the above sections since I found that it crossed over each of them. Although it is a very long quote, I feel it is necessary to be read in its entirety to do it justice. This man was another ex-steelworker in Splott, and in this discussion he was trying to explain to me his philosophy about gardening and why he did it:

"Talking about my works, a lot of the fellas would go fishing like, and I say, 'what the hell you go fishing for?' I seen them fishing in the lake, pelting down with rain, I thought 'they must be mad'. They sit there all day and they don't catch nothing...if they don't catch a fish what do they do?

...And so, I thought if you don't go fishing, you don't know what it's all about. Anyway, I went with them, and I used to sit over there fishing, never caught anything...and in the end I used to go over there straight from work 6-2, 2 o'clock or half past 2 I'd be over there with my rod and it'd be raining like this and I'd be fishing out there, I'd be on my own and I used to come home and I'd say 'well what was you thinking about over there?'...nothing...your mind just goes. Your mind goes in a blank, with the pressure of work and all of that, I went over there with a fishing rod and all that, on my own not talking to anybody. I'd be looking at the channel and you might see a ship going through, and you might watch the ship, and you see something else moving in the water...

What I'm trying to say to you, if we don't do these things, you don't know...you say well 'what the heck do you get out of this?'...My two sons they don't have no interest in the garden, and they say, 'what do you do all that for?'. I say, 'I'm going over the garden for an hour or two hours.' They say, 'what for?' 'Right well I'm growing all this.' 'But what do you get out of it?' and they say, 'what was you thinking about when you were digging?'...but it's relaxation. It's like you know your studying, you're trying to learn...there's some things you can't explain properly because the point is you never actually study like things like what do

these people see with a rod and all that going over there, hammering down with
rain...and coming home and saying 'good day of fishing, never caught anything
like...' It's something you can't explain it."

This gardener is also speaking about the quiet forms of self-valorisation that are relatively hidden, and are difficult to decipher until they are *done.* It is possible that the workers from the steelworks would use this fishing experience as a self-valorising activity that directly contrasted with their work—in other words, it operated in the vacuum of capital, not only physically (located elsewhere), but also mentally, socially, and practically-speaking. In this chapter, I set out to explore the self-valorising aspect of these urban gardens. Since it is unclear what "need" these spaces are meeting, there is a necessity to develop an understanding of this through the process of self-valorisation, which exist in the "vacuum"-like spaces of capital. This is an approach that deserves further attention to understanding where *latent* political power lies in such spaces, while also cautioning against over-romanticising these practices. I explored this specifically through two broad themes of sociality and self-determination—aspects which contrasted in various ways with *the outside*—ultimately, as dynamics which emerge because they are unable to be met directly through capital. As Holloway (2010b) notes, these are not autonomous practices, but more *pushes* in that direction, that push against the *logic* of capitalism.

Using this chapter as a springboard, in the next chapter I explore the dynamics of everyday communism as an important act of commoning in the sites.

5 EVERYDAY COMMUNISM IN THE GARDENS

5.1 Introduction

> *""Communism" is not some magical utopia, and neither does it have anything to do with ownership of the means of production. It is something that exists right now—that exists, to some degree, in any human society, although there has never been one in which everything has been organized in that way, and it would be difficult to imagine how there could be. All of us act like communists a good deal of the time. None of us acts like a communist consistently. "Communist society"—in the sense of a society organized exclusively on that single principle—could never exist. But all social systems, even economic systems like capitalism, have always been built on top of a bedrock of actually-existing communism."*
> *(Graeber 2011, p.95)*

From Darwin's bulldog Huxley, to Hardin's (1968) tragedy of the commons, Thatcher's claim that *"there's no such thing as society"*, and Dawkins' (2006) "the selfish gene", the idea and justification of the self-interested and maximising individual is embedded in the logic of capitalist society. In the literature review, I highlighted a general binary tension that understands urban gardens as either neoliberalised spaces and practices or as potentially transformative post-neoliberal opportunities. This was most explicitly seen between those that emphasised the process of neoliberal subjectification in these gardens (Pudup 2008; Rosol 2012) and those that identified their importance as sites of sociality, community, and mutual aid (Crossan et al. 2016; Cumbers et al. 2017). The problem with the former is that it not only reduces the gardeners to passive agents (as being duped by broader forces), but it can also unintentionally reproduce and prioritise the centrality of capitalist domination, and in doing so provide a surprising justification for the logic of Huxley and Hardin, an issue also noted by Graeber and Grubačić (2021).

In contrast, I have drawn on theoretical strands that tend to emphasise possibilities beyond this logic, including anarchists (Ward 1996a [1973]; Graeber 2011; Kropotkin 2014 [1902]), Marxist Autonomists (Holloway 2010a; Cleaver 2017; De Angelis 2017), and theorists who occupy a more ambiguous political position (Dewey 1954 [1927]; 1984; Ostrom 2000; 2008; 2015b). These three theoretical strands are all closely attuned to the possibilities that lie in the interstitial moments of everyday life, and how these everyday dynamics can undermine and challenge some of the most fundamentally accepted notions of human relations within capitalism—for example, that humans are self-interested, selfish, competitive, violent, by their "nature" (Ince and Bryant 2019; White and Williams 2020). I consider the most fundamental challenge to this to be Kropotkin's (2014 [1902]) seminal work on mutual aid. Mutual aid is often considered to be a core element of commoning (De Angelis 2017) as well as in urban gardening (Crossan et al. 2016; Izlar 2019), though it is often most closely associated with distinct and explicit social movements and activist culture (Firth 2020; Ruiz Cayuela 2021). Indeed, mutual aid practices and networks have come to the fore recently, proliferating during the COVID-19 pandemic (Firth 2020; Spade 2020; Springer 2020). This is one example amongst many of how mutual aid becomes an important and common practice during times of crisis—what the Out of the Woods Collective (2015) called disaster communism, to intentionally contrast with Klein's (2014) disaster capitalism. Despite this, mutual aid has frequently been pointed out to exist as something that is likewise a quiet and tacit practice in everyday life (Ward 1996; Scott 2012; Kropotkin 2014 [1902]). Kropotkin (2014 [1902]), for example, documents not only mutual aid within union organisations, but also within "apolitical" realms, such as football and cycling clubs, and amongst neighbours.

However, since definitions and specificities of mutual aid remain relatively elusive (Ince and Bryant 2019), I frame this chapter with Graeber's (2010; 2011; 2014) notion of everyday (or baseline) communism. While everyday communism is in many ways an extension of Kropotkin's (2014 [1902]) work, it is also distinguished by drawing simultaneously upon Marx and Mauss. In fact, one of Graeber's final pieces was his introduction to the new edition of 'Mutual Aid' (see Graeber and Grubačić 2021), framed through his concept of everyday communism. This concept invites an ethnographic analysis to the classic Marxist phrase *"from each according to their ability to each according to their need"*—a dynamic which Graeber (2011) suggests is prevalent at the everyday level, including in the commons (Graeber 2010). However, Graeber stops short of detailing this form of everyday communism beyond these

initial insights, but claims that it is *"a potentially enormous field, but one which, owing to our peculiar ideological blinkers, we have been unable to write about because we have been largely unable to see it."* (Graeber 2011, p.100).

These urban gardening sites offer the possibility to empirically explore this dynamic. Initially, I do so through exploring the spatial dynamics of everyday communism.

5.2 The Spatial Forms and Practices of Everyday Communism

Though Graeber (2001; 2011; 2014) attempts to distance the term communism from relations of property and into the sphere of everyday life, in this section, I explore the ways that such forms of everyday communism are themselves shaped by the spatial and territorial dynamics of the spaces. These are dynamics which I pointed towards in the first chapter, and are broadly reflective of the distinct elements of allotments and community gardens (Bigell 2015; Follmann and Viehoff 2015).

As noted, Graeber's (2001; 2011; 2014) theory of everyday communism leans heavily on the work of Mauss (2009 [1947]) and his work from 'the Manual of Ethnography' in particular, as well as Kropotkin's (2014 [1902]) Mutual Aid. For Mauss (2009 [1947]), all societies are built on forms of communism or individualism, with both always present to varying degrees. This reflects Kropotkin's (2014 [1902]) own theories of mutual aid. Though Kropotkin's (2014 [1902]) work is often critiqued as idealistic, Ince and Bryant (2019) argue that it must be understood in terms of its political intent as a direct challenge to Darwin's followers who emphasised rugged individualism and competition, a point that Graeber (2001) also makes in defending Mauss. Despite common efforts to dismiss this type of work as utopian, Kropotkin (2014 [1902]) did not dismiss individualism, competition, or violence (within species and between them, and within human relations). For both Kropotkin (2014 [1902]) and Mauss (2009 [1947]), the task was to judge the respective proportions of communism and individualism in a society, which is also how I am approaching this chapter.

In the last chapter, I touched on the ways that these sites were imbued with dynamics of sociality and self-determination. To extend upon this, I explore how everyday communism is distinctly spatial, which not only produces space but likewise is produced by it. As Creswell (1996, p.112) notes, *"society produces space and space reproduces society"*. Eizenberg (2012) argues that unpacking these spatial dynamics are crucial for understanding how the commons is produced, managed, and sustained, including the social relations that produce it (the commons) and the social relations that it produces.

5.2.1   The Communal Practices of Everyday Communism

If everyday communism is a fundamental aspect for people working on a common project (Graeber 2011), then this was embedded not only in the community gardens, where such communal practices are foremost, but also in the allotment, whereby the site itself demands a large amount of communal work. This reflects De Angelis' (2017) emphasis on communal labour as an important aspect of *commoning*, which is the collective labour that a community of commoners bring together for common objectives, and generally benefits the whole community (and therefore is distinct from general social labour, which doesn't necessarily have common objectives). This is how I understand communal in this context, too, though I intentionally distance it from the loaded term 'labour' and instead use the term 'practices'.

Community gardens often share space, water, and tools (Opitz et al. 2016), reflecting its overwhelmingly communal spatial practices, which was evident in Hendre Community Garden (HDCG) and Aberporth Community Garden (APCG). Even though the allotment space was relatively divided amongst plot-holders, there remained large "common" areas (Drake and Lawson 2015). In the allotment, the communal practices therefore primarily took place around communal areas, or at least any area that was not individual plots: the office/kitchen room; the shared tool shed; the bathroom; the shop; the roads; and the shared borders (e.g. the hedgerow). These are things that all of the plot-holders depend on, yet unlike individual plots, there is no specific agreement as to who should carry out this communal work. Now that the allotment is predominantly self-managed, meaning that the council are less involved in maintenance of the site, the committee would regularly organise work parties in order to achieve certain communal tasks—a litter pick, hedge cutting, or road maintenance—as this gardener described:

> *"I understand that they [the council] will maintain certain jobs. The hedges out on the roadside, they sent the tractor up. I can't think of what else they do. Because this place here now [the office/kitchen], we insulated the roof, painted it all up. Same with the toilet down there, we cleaned it all out, we put the tiles splashbacks up, painted the floor to get it into a nice state, because there's nothing worse than having a rotten toilet in the allotment. Put the toilet rolls in there, we put the soap in there, and the paper hand towels."*

This gardener constantly refers to "we" in this instance, even if he wasn't necessarily taking part in all of these activities he described which, as I note later in this chapter, tends to sometimes be individuals carrying out specific tasks for the common good. Some of the gardeners at the allotment associated the development of this communal aspect with becoming self-managed:

> *"50% of our fees now stay here and we decide how to use it. Water buckets down there, solar panels are going to go up here, shipping containers. A big change, and all for the better. They've cleared more ground so we have more plots. Before all the money went to the council and we'd depend on them...and as with everything it goes in the pot and gets diverted."*

This gardener highlights the way that the gardeners had managed to creatively improve the communal spaces themselves through the installation of various things, such as large water butts, solar panels, and shipping containers. This of course links to the creative aspect of the previous chapter, through re-appropriation of particular materials for communal purposes (such as a shipping container for storing tools). This certainly contrasts with their previous usage, likely as a container for shipping commodities, and demonstrates the ways that elements of the capitalist circuit can become reappropriated within the commons circuit (De Angelis 2017). These practices not only strengthen community and social relationships, but contrast with the forms of top-down organising and planning where people feel unable to influence the process or outcome (Hond et al. 2019). The gardener later mentioned to me, as we were sat in one of these liminal spaces outside the shipping container drinking tea and eating biscuits, that the committee *"don't do this for just one or two people, it's for everyone...it's universal...it's all in the social programme"*. Therefore, this gardener is describing these communal practices as

something that can benefit everyone on the site, with a shared outcome and a shared purpose between them, which is part of the (re)production of social life in the space. As I will explore in the next chapter on the nature of forms of self-managed governance, others highlight how this resulted in them being more responsive and efficient than waiting for the council to do these things:

> *"So, somebody knew a builder or something...3 loads of chippings, see how many people we can bring together to help spread these chippings...bring your spade and rake...and this lorry came and spread it all the way down to the first junction. Needed a little bit of tidying up, but lovely though. If we had to wait for the council to do that, we'd be waiting forever."*

Indeed, this is one of the primary points of the work on disaster communism (Out of the Woods Collective 2015), where these forms of self-organised mutual aid networks do not wait for the state, which can often be unresponsive and disinterested. Martin, the quoted gardener, again reflects on this not only in terms of efficiency but likewise the way that this communal practice is distinctly spatial. It happens in a particular space, in this case the roads, which are a liminal space in the allotment that do not exist as individuals' plots, nor necessarily as communal (such as the sheds) but provide the infrastructure that link the whole site (both in communal and individual terms). Thus, everyone at the site benefits from this type of maintenance of the road, while it also is socially carried out (through collective organisation).

Given the size of the allotment, coordinating this form of collective work was not easy, but all of these communal aspects need a particular set of practices—the shared tools are not simply shared, but require constant maintenance, for example. As I will explore in the next section, this requires a particular set of collective and individual skills and arrangements to manage and maintain these areas. However, it is also important to note that this type of communal practice is responding to a social and collective need. This is defined by the relatively borderless (at least internally) spaces, where communal practices ultimately mirror and take shape in communal spaces. In these situations, the individual and the collective is less divided or fragmented. This is not a frictionless or unproblematic process, though.

Gardeners at the allotment regularly suggested that there were problems of participation in these communal practices, as Rhian, a plot-holder at the allotment states:

> *"Some people just want their own space I guess, so when we do have site work parties, it will be the same faces, which is the same in any organisation or club that you belong to. You're always going to get the same ones who chip in and that's always the case."*

This type of unequal participation in communal events and work was apparent in my discussion with many of the gardeners at the allotment. It was also apparent that it was, unsurprisingly, the retired gardeners at the allotment who participated most in these communal practices. Ultimately, it seemed that a lot of this was quite narrowly distributed amongst the gardeners, an aspect that Noterman (2016, p.436) also identifies, as a process of "uneven commoning", which can threaten the ongoing (re)production of the commons. Paula reflects upon these difficulties:

> *"Some people sometimes they're like, 'oh I can never get a strimmer' and I'm like 'well you can join the committee and help us loan them out'. A lot of people assume when I come along that I'm a council employee. No, we do it voluntarily, you know?...like if you want to volunteer, and do it, you can have a key you know, but you just have to sit there on a Sunday for an hour helping other people."*

Therefore, there appears to be an issue whereby people can become dependent on the existing communal structures without necessarily taking part in them. As Paula noted, by *giving* something to the tool-sharing system (of being there on a Sunday for others to access the tool shed), they benefit from it by ultimately improving that same system as a whole. Dan, a committee member who runs the shop on site, also linked this to the nature of voluntary work:

"The first thing you have to remember is it's volunteers, so if you fancy doing it, off you go...why it takes time is because you've got to get people together to do it. We've got to get a work party, we don't have an established pattern, we have a committee meeting every month where we sit and talk about what we talked about last month and get nowhere...you need to have work parties so things get done, as opposed to saying, 'that would be a good idea'...but you can't push people, it's voluntary."

Dan likewise links these problems to their voluntary nature, suggesting that there are too many meetings and ideas but not enough action, and tenuously links this with a lack of ability to coerce people into carrying out such work (as it is voluntary). This was reflected by other gardeners, with one suggesting that the work parties were like *"Fred Karno's bloody army"*, a reference that I didn't understand but apparently meant very disorganised and chaotic. He then referenced some work that the work party had done, where they built a rainwater system, and claimed *"that thing down there, it's amazing it's standing."* Robbie also stated similarly; *"see this is what gets on people's tits...you've had that solar panel there for at least 6 weeks and nobody's got a plan for what to do with it."* This links to my next chapter on the struggles of self-management where, as noted here, it certainly wasn't plain sailing but also involved a lot of internal issues. This was more of an issue in the allotment, where the division between the individual and the collective was more apparent, whereas maintenance of the communal areas was not an issue in either community garden, since it was essentially all communal work and there was an expectation of broad participation at all times. When the starting point of the allotment, and the norms and expectations embedded within it, is to primarily maintain one's own plot, what happens to the broader collective needs of the space—which, ultimately, all plot holders benefit from—is far more challenging.

In many ways, this is one of the perpetual questions posed to anarchists—around how to organise based on voluntary association, at any particular scale. For White and Williams (2018), these voluntaristic practices mirror anarchistic principles, since it is labour carried out without coercion and for more-than-economic purposes. However, voluntary labour carried out without coercion can also create its own inequalities and injustices. These are therefore problems to be grappled with, as a process (beyond an endogenous/exogenous binary), rather

than one's that can be eliminated (Noterman 2016). Given that anarchists often provide an important analytical point of suggesting that anarchistic behaviour already exists in the ordinary situations of everyday life (Ward 1996a [1973]; Springer 2014; White and Williams 2014), ignoring these difficulties tends to produce an incomplete and relatively selective picture of everyday life. Drawing on Kropotkin's work, Ince (2012) notes that it is possible to see how certain spatial and territorial dynamics can be antagonistic, individualistic, and competitive, while others will seek connection, collaboration, and cross-fertilisation. However, individualistic and competitive practices can simultaneously co-exist alongside collaborative and connective ones in the same spaces, as is the case in the allotment. It appears that the same territories and spaces can ebb-and-flow between these two poles. At times they can depend on, if not exploit, each other. This is seen in the allotment whereby the individualistic environment of caring for one's own plot depends on the ability to use shared mowers and strimmers, to have access to water (provided within the allotment but also through state infrastructure of mains water), and even to rely on the social networks when they are unable to attend the plot (which I explore in detail in the next section).

In contrast, people in the community gardens are not segregated into separate plots like allotments, therefore, all practices are essentially communal. In one discussion amongst the gardeners at APCG, a gardener suggested the possibility of dividing up the plot in order for people to take on more responsibility for particular areas:

> Ruth: "I came up with the suggestion that would anyone want to show a particular interest in a particular area. Like I'd like to be the person who gives the most attention to the courtyard, but it doesn't mean doing it on your own, it means taking notice of the fact that it's full of strawberry plants and their needs weeding out and is that something needs to be done? The obvious one would be the two planters, or the wildflower garden. It's just an idea but people might want to feel that this is their project."

> Sandy: "I worry it might put people off, I don't know."

> Miriam: "No, it's a communal thing, it's a community thing."

> Sandy: "I could very easily say 'I'll do the wire fish' but then I don't know how to do it, so I'm stuck straight away. Or I could say, 'well I'll plant the wildflowers' but then maybe I don't know when or how. You know, I'm just saying it's a community thing so we could take a lead and we could be like 'yeah, let's do the wildflowers today', but I think if it's on someone's shoulders it puts a bit of pressure."

This conversation demonstrates the other gardeners' resistance to both individualising responsibility of the garden and certain tasks within it, but also to physically and spatially dividing up the garden. Miriam's intervention of it being a communal and community practice is also mirrored by Sandy. Sandy claims that communal practices allow for people to bring their creative ideas and knowledge together—which touches on the importance of the creativity from chapter 4 as being socially and collaborative, and one I explore later in this chapter through the process of complementarity. In this sense, Sandy is suggesting that, as individuals, they are less able to carry out a task effectively. This reflects Graeber's (2011) own observations, who states that everyday communism is the baseline of how most people carry out collective tasks, ironically (since this is often the quotidian argument *for* capitalism) for efficiency reasons. This was primarily how both community gardens were organised, and my fieldnotes are filled with examples such as:

> "The gardeners were organising some old tyres they got hold of. Some of them cleaned them, others dried them, and then eventually they painted them. They then helped each other lift them as they were too heavy, without asking, it was just done sort of spontaneously."

These are small and mundane things, but they demonstrate how people practice forms of cooperation in what appears to be a "spontaneous" way, but is an important learned skill (Sennett 2012). One particularly memorable example of this was in HDCG, where the gardeners had a bulk delivery of bark chippings that required spreading. Of course, such a task

would have been quite monotonous, long, and boring had it been done by an individual. Instead, we (including myself) organised ourselves into smaller groups to carry out this task. We had two wheelbarrows, and three rakes. One of us filled the wheelbarrow, and then another then wheeled that barrow over to various points at the garden, where the other gardeners spread the bark mulch. That person then returned the wheelbarrow to where the chippings were, by which point the second wheelbarrow had been filled. When gardeners got bored or tired of a repetitive aspect of this (such as shovelling), we would rotate roles, and would chat about things to take our minds off the mundanity of the task.

As such, this demonstrates how communal work simultaneously (re)produces the social relations and the physical, material, and spatial aspects of the site. Mary, at APCG, also reflected upon this, saying that *"it's really nice doing a shared task, at the same time you learn a little bit about a person and what's going on for them, and you learn to understand."* Therefore, this was a way for gardeners to learn about each other's histories, stories, tastes, skills, capacities, needs, pleasures, and worries, etc. I have covered some of this in the last chapter, but ultimately an aspect of this everyday communism is about how people engage in collective and communal practices with others, and in doing so collectively shape the space, as noted in my fieldnotes:

> *"Harry died [an old gardener, pre-fieldwork], everyone was very upset, even talking about it now full of emotion and sentiment. They called him JCB because he liked digging. He dug the pond, Keith turned it into a kidney shape, but Harry kept turning it back into a square shape, so Keith just gave up; 'let him have it that ways it's fine'."*

As we sat around the pond on a bench chatting about him, the gardeners were telling me stories about Harry, and showed me the tree that they planted on site in memory of him. In recalling these stories, they reflect on both the social life and humour of that space ("JCB"), but also how it relates to a specific memory of doing something together, and how they directly shaped that space in doing so. Harry's legacy, and the memory of him, is therefore associated with a particular space—the pond with his tree planted beside it. This sociality is related to the production of these spaces, socially and materially-speaking, where people carry out tasks

together which not only shape the space itself but shape their relations together, and form memories through doing so.

Figure 21: The consensus pond at Hendre Community Garden

Therefore, these communal practices are not simply practical in orientation, but also form the foundation of mourning and worrying together, but likewise celebrating together. Elin at HDCG reflected this:

> *"We've had some really good times, some really good social events. We had little one's before, but we've had a Christmas thing down here, that was a riot. We had turkey, pork, beef, cooked it all at home. My daughters had cooked things at school, she made us gallons of gravy, and we put it in this, warmed them at home, brought them down. We had something that we could keep them warm...We've had BBQs. We've had good social things here."*

As Graeber (2011, p.99) notes, *"the most pleasurable activities almost always involve sharing something: music, food, liquor, drugs, gossip, drama, beds. There is a certain communism of*

the senses at the root of most things we consider fun." This was also apparent in the allotment, where people pooled their resources for BBQ's and other events:

> *"We'd have all the homemade cakes and stuff like that, and this fella 'BBQ Martin' and his wife, he used to do the BBQ and she'd put them in the bap and pass it to you...Amy would make a big pot of pumpkin soup. And the kids would be up there with sparklers or whatever. And there'd be at least 50 people up there. And it had to stop, so the social side of it went downhill and the wine turned into a kettle."*

This gardener recalls memories of past social events that they had at the allotment, which many gardeners noted had declined over the years—largely due to the creeping bureaucracy into the space, a dynamic I describe in the next chapter. But, what is apparent, is how these events facilitate the social nature of the space, where certain people (BBQ Martin, his wife, and Amy) contribute to a communal celebration. The gardeners also have a Christmas meal every year at the communal shed/office/kitchen room, where people pool together £5 each, and they have scrambled egg, smoked salmon, and Prosecco as a group.

Kropotkin (2014 [1902]) likewise demonstrates, much like Ostrom (2015 [1990])—who Carson (2012) considers to be Kropotkin's heir—that the pooling of resources is a crucial aspect of mutual aid. The gardeners at the allotment pooled their resources for the shared machinery and tools, which would be too expensive for many of the plot holders to own individually (and to only use infrequently). One of the gardeners reflected on how this benefited the individuals in the allotment, demonstrating the inter-dependence of the individual and broader collective:

> *"It's [self-management] been most beneficial and we've had a very enthusiastic committee for the last few years. We've got five mowers I think, and more strimmers than that, all the instruments are there to do the garden paths, because they want you to keep the garden paths tidy. Whereas previously, before anything like this happened, all you had was you could borrow a hand*

shears and that was it. So, if one person had it, you knew they had it for a while. Whereas these now they go back and forth, lovely."

The pooling of people's £5 for these tools helps pay for their purchase and their upkeep and maintenance. This again relies on the instrumental relationship between the commons circuit and the capitalist circuit (De Angelis 2017). In this situation, not only do the gardeners depend on the purchase of these tools from the capitalist market (e.g. Stihl strimmers), but they often rely upon skills of other gardeners who have often either developed these *through* paid labour (i.e. in capitalist work), or are maintained by externally paid companies (if it is beyond the realm of the gardeners themselves). The gardener demonstrates how, as noted, this form of pooling resources benefits individuals, but also the broader site (by allowing people to maintain paths).

This is also a reflection of the type of sharing culture that Katrini (2018) reflects upon, but Belk (2010) argues that such forms of communal sharing do not create social relations or obligations in the same way that gifts do. On the contrary, a sharing culture such as this depends on social arrangements and obligations. The sharing of tools (that are not individually owned amongst the gardeners, but by the association itself) requires gardeners to ensure that they maintain the tool well, return it to its original communal place, so that the next person can use it. These are fundamentally social dynamics of obligation. As Ostrom (2015 [1990]) argues, commoners share a past and expect to share a future. Given that there is a longevity to these social relations, people are conscious of such matters since they are important for maintaining healthy social relations on site based on trust and respect for each other.

Figure 22: The shared tool shed at the allotment

However, as I noted above, Kropotkin (2014 [1902]) and Mauss (2009 [1947]) were also concerned with forms of individualism that also existed. These self-interested behaviours do not simply exist separately from these forms of everyday communism but become intertwined with them. This inter-relationship was also apparent in the example of the tool sharing, where the head of the committee claimed that some people didn't have the same care for the shared tools as they were not their own property. This, of course, is a highly capitalistic justification for individual ownership and reflects Hardin's (1968) critique of the commons. But, such forms of social ownership take time to develop and require ongoing practice and negotiation, which is particularly challenging in a broader neoliberal societal context where such social practices and responsibilities are actively discouraged (Sennett 2012; Federici 2018). In Ostrom's (2015 [1990]) understanding of the commons, such instances would need mechanisms for monitoring, graduated sanctioning, and perhaps even conflict resolution, in order to ensure that these individualistic aspects did not become too destructive. However, this doesn't just suggest that the individual and social are in conflict, but it more likely demonstrates the problematic binary between the individual and social in the first place. If such social systems are created and

maintained by individuals—who, when they come together in a shared process such as this, it ultimately becomes a social system—then ultimately the individual and social not only depend on each other, but also affect each other in various ways. In this instance, by not showing due care to the shared tools, the individual affects the social system (the broader group of sharers), which can often result in planting seeds of distrust and frustration within the system more broadly. It is therefore important to recognise the effect that such individual behaviours have on this social process.

In the allotment, the gardeners were regularly concerned with individuals dumping rubbish in the liminal spaces. Paula, a gardener and committee member at the allotment, said that *"the place gets inundated with rubbish, like rubbish in the corners that's been there for years because nobody is responsible for it."* Though Paula mentioned earlier that they had work parties to help organise some of this, it also demonstrated how individuals within the allotment can act in ways that are in conflict with the broader communal needs of the site. In one of the committee meetings, somebody suggested that they hire a skip for green rubbish (plant materials that cannot be composted), because the council had closed the local tip. The secretary of committee responded:

> *"I'm dead set against it. The minute we start on that route then everybody says 'it's not my responsibility anymore, the committee can get the skip in'. There's no way that you can police that it's green waste. I've seen first-hand here where we've said hard waste, is it hell, you got everything in there."*

There are several colliding dynamics occurring here. Firstly, there is the process of austerity (of the local tip being closed by Cardiff Council), and the resultant individualisation of responsibility to take it back to their own house bins, which has resulted in people accumulating a large amount of green waste in the first place (especially since many of the gardeners did not have cars). But, the secretary was against the idea of getting a skip in since he thought that people would not only exploit the system, with an inability to monitor it effectively, but also that it will reduce individual responsibility since people would become dependent on it. He then states that this is because of experience in the past where individuals have abused these systems. This reflects a dynamic whereby the collective intentions of the site can be

undermined by a minority of individuals who, through various practices of ignoring collectively agreed upon expectations and norms, cause a broader distrust amongst the group and can easily undermine the possibility for such collective arrangements. Another example at the site, as a gardener told me, was that *"there has been an issue with the toilets, excrement was not disposed of in the correct manner, we don't know who it was"*. Again, this points towards a similar dynamic whereby the allotment provides a communal toilet which can then be undermined by an individual, and again points towards the difficulty of monitoring who had actually done this. These are not issues to be bypassed in such collective situations, since the result is that they create distrust, watchfulness, and ultimately isolation from one another. Such forms of communal practices are deeply vulnerable to such minority disruption, which can have substantial ripple effects across the broader social space.

In the next section, I explore what Graeber (2011) refers to as the individualistic forms of everyday communism, which I suggest require a further understanding in terms of the spatial context in which they emerge.

5.2.2   The Bordered Practices of Everyday Communism

Graeber (2001; 2011; 2014) vaguely differentiates between forms of individualistic communism—which are one-to-one relations that are communistic—and communism as a collective task. Graeber (2011) considers both to be defined by an everyday dynamic of 'from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs'. They extend more freely with some people than others, for example in impersonal communities such as contemporary western cities, may only extend to sharing a cigarette with a stranger, but in more intimate communities this may be more significant, such as through sharing the necessities of life, such as food (Graeber 2011). In the last section I detailed the communal practices of everyday communism, and here I hope to extend this spatial dynamic by demonstrating its differences with forms of bordered and individualistic practices.

The bordered practices of everyday communism were extremely apparent in the allotment. The community gardens, as noted, are communal spaces and there are no individual areas to care for, but everything (the physical space, the tools, the sheds, the toilets, the greenhouses) is

shared and not differentiated by individual responsibility or ownership. I have previously noted that there are communal aspects to the allotment site, but it still remains quite divided into individual plots—and within that, people have their own sheds, tools, compost, water butts (attached to their shed), as well as general responsibility for their own plot. This, as I have suggested, can create quite a territorialised space of watchfulness, and more broadly a sense of individual responsibility. However, the individualised aspects of allotments do not exist separately from the collective and social sphere within which they exist. In this chapter, I have so far described how the communal practices of everyday communism can be disrupted by individual dynamics, especially in the allotment. In this section, however, I describe how these individualised spaces (of separated plots) are supported by a social system which reflects another spatial form of everyday communism.

Robbie, a gardener at the allotment told me that; *"Everyone's willing to help you in times of trouble...it's like a magic therapy it is."* This was apparent throughout my fieldnotes and interviews, where people regularly told me how, when they were sick, they depended on the help of others at the allotment, as I described in my fieldnotes:

> *"Maddie took a nose dive into the greenhouse, had an open wound from her eye up her head. When she was sick and wasn't able to do the allotment, people helped her there".*

This form of individualistic communism (Graeber 2001) is shaped primarily by the dynamics of a territorial and divided space. Kropotkin (2014 [1902]) documented various forms of mutual aid from large-scale forms of cooperation and communal work (of communal and shared forestry, for example) to the borrowing of clothes amongst households. The latter might even be understood to be a form of individualistic communism. While I've noted the spatial aspects of this work, unfortunately Kropotkin (2014 [1902]) does not detail how these different spatialities shape and are shaped by the dynamic of mutual aid.

However, it is important to caution against the possibility of appearing to be geographically deterministic—that these spaces themselves structure certain practices—whereas I am instead

suggesting that the spaces and the practices within them co-produce one another. These forms of individualistic communism across borders can also disrupt this logic of a bordered and divided site, which becomes temporarily transcended through helping one another during difficult times, or through sharing produce and seeds with each other. As I have noted, this is often most apparent during times of a particular need, usually when a gardener cannot attend their own allotment. Tom, an ex-construction worker at the allotment described this:

> *"His [Nathan's] son Lou said he'd like to have a half of it [Tom's allotment], so that's how we're sharing because Nathan and I became great mates, and now his son and I have become good friends. So this is all part of the social side. And now Lou's not well at the moment so I'm doing mine, Lou's, Paul's on holiday so I'm now looking after his greenhouse, and when Rhian was away I was looking after her place."*

Tom is reflecting on the way that this form of everyday communism is fundamentally social in nature, where people help each other by looking after their plots when they are away or sick. While this sociality is the foundation of this form of everyday communism (since ultimately this help tends to depend on existing social relations in this case), it in turn also reproduces it, thus these communistic practices of mutual aid also reproduce and strengthen sociality in the allotment. Tom goes on to describe this in more detail:

> *"I mean I've come up here sometimes, opened the greenhouse and there's trays on the floor in there. People know I'm up here a lot, and they have a surplus of veg or whatever it is, ready to go in...again you have the one thing in common, and none of us like to see things go to waste. So yeah, put it in my greenhouse, I'll pass it on. Like this morning, Paul's on holiday, so I watered his greenhouse, Lou I haven't seen for a while, so I watered his greenhouse. When I'm on holiday, people water my greenhouse."*

The previous quote is now elaborated upon and expanded in various ways. Firstly, the gardener refers to distinct social practices of sharing produce, which he links to having something in

common (of gardening at the allotment), but also of wanting to avoid waste—a well-recognised aspect of sharing and gifting (Smith and Jehlička 2013). Secondly, the gardener then describes this as a process that creates mutual obligations, which he then benefits from when he is on holiday. This gardener is not watering people's greenhouses, or receiving surplus plants, because of a calculative dynamic of expectation (of having something in return, for example), but it is simply a part of the social life of the allotment. Such social obligations are well-recognised as a dynamic of mutuality, gifting, and sharing (Arnould and Rose 2016), which distinguish it from the intentionality of exchange (only doing something based on maximising what you receive in return) (Graeber 2011). What is also notable is that this is always territorially related to distinct plots—other gardeners leaving things in *his greenhouse*, and he waters *someone else's greenhouse*. They are not shared spaces, but these forms of everyday communism (of helping another plot holder, for example) not only produce social relationships (by building trust and obligations) in the site but socialise and communalise the space, too, temporarily making it less territorial.

De Angelis (2017) suggests that there are two forms of labour in the commons—the first being communal labour, which I explored above, and the second being a form of reciprocal labour. For De Angelis (2017), reciprocal labour is about circuits of reciprocity, gifting, and mutual aid, and he claims that it is based around the principle of equality matching. Though De Angelis (2017) points towards a notion of a circuit of reciprocity (suggesting it is social), the aspect of equality matching in particular is problematic, which I will briefly address. Mauss (2002 [1925]; see also Graeber 2014) was keen to emphasise the social system of gifting, which produced social relations and forms of ongoing obligations, which were not based upon equality matching (which suggests the desire for limiting that relationship, often with strangers) but quite the opposite, and Sahlins (1972) likewise proposed a form of generalised reciprocity which were far more vague and less calculative forms of exchange. Thus, equality matching tends to propose a relatively calculated form of reciprocity. Instead, while Graeber (2011) briefly pointed towards distinguishing 'mutuality' from reciprocity, this was detailed much more finely by Arnould and Rose (2016) and Ince and Bryant (2019). Mutuality is important since it suggests a distancing from tit-for-tat reciprocity, where there is no strict or immediate obligation of return, but it emphasises the social relations that create and reproduce this system, rather than the exchange per se (Arnould and Rose 2016). In "mutuality" (or generalised reciprocity), one may give without the intention of receiving something directly (Arnould and Rose 2016), and it is

therefore not calculative (or equality-matching) but based on more open-ended forms of obligations (Graeber 2011). This form of mutuality is essentially what Graeber (2001, p.159) calls *"individualistic communism...in which specific individuals are bound together by such open-ended obligations"*. This is distinct from the classic gift-counter gift scenario, which as Graeber (2001a) notes, is a closed form of reciprocity which bears a striking resemblance to forms of market exchange. De Angelis' (2017) narrowing of the possibilities of mutual aid as simply reciprocal is problematic. As noted already, mutual aid extends far beyond reciprocal dynamics, a point Ince and Bryant (2019) also make. In the previous section, I demonstrated how Kropotkin (2014 [1902]) detailed forms of mutual aid that were communal, although mutual aid does not form part of De Angelis (2017) concept of communal labour, but is only considered an element of reciprocal labour. Moreover, it is important to note that Kropotkin (2014 [1902]) very rarely even uses the term reciprocity throughout that whole work.

The interview with Tom, above, was one of my favourites and demonstrates the importance of an ethnographic interview. I bumped into him at his plot one morning, and we started chatting and he showed me around his plot—what he was growing, why he enjoyed it, and so on. I quickly realised that he was a passionate man who liked talking about gardening, and had a lot of interesting insights, so I recorded the conversation (with consent). The spontaneous and less organised element of the interview I think came across in terms of how he articulated the dynamics of the space so clearly—it didn't feel over-thought, or prescribed, like formally arranged interviews can. Following some prompting, the gardener described something else equally important that others also mentioned:

> *"They just say, 'Tom, I'm going on holiday, water the greenhouse for me'...The other thing is, they'll say, now Paul is away for a month, 'if these are ripening, Tom, don't let it go to waste, pick it'. So it's very much a shared-interest community...[bell ringing] Do you know what that is? It's coffee time."*

Therefore, to some extent, this gardener does highlight a reciprocal dynamic—he waters their greenhouse and now is given access to the produce on the plot. But, this is not *why* he waters the greenhouse in the first place—he does not bargain with them, saying that he would only water it if he had access to the produce in return. Arnould and Rose (2016) claim that it is

important to understand the intention of the person "giving" in such relationships. This is where it is distinct from forms of capitalist exchange and barter, where the exchange is the forefront of that activity. In this case, it is the helping of another person which is the most important thing, and the person reciprocates that simply as a way of thanking them. As I've noted elsewhere, picking somebody else's produce on the plot is considered very problematic, therefore by helping somebody when they are away (or sick), they are given temporary access by the gardener to their produce, which in turn changes the relationship between the people and the space, since it temporarily transcends its bordered nature. Before we hear the bell from the shared kitchen/office that signals that the kettle has boiled (and we go for a coffee with some other gardeners), Tom describes this as *a "shared-interest community"*, partly reflecting, again, how the individual becomes dependent on the social system of the allotment.

This dynamic between the individual and the social system on which they depend is also apparent in Kropotkin's (2014 [1902]) work, noting how the individualism of small property holders in rural France at the time could only survive due to the collective and mutual aid networks that proliferated amongst it. Thus, not only do forms of mutual aid act as a "check" against rugged individualism, but they demonstrate that the individual and collective (or social) are not necessarily in conflict but are often deeply interdependent. Similarly, since people become dependent on the broader social dynamics of the allotment during times of need, it suggests further investigation in terms of the relationship between the individual and social realms. In the final chapter of 'the Public and its Problems', Dewey (1954 [1927], pp.186–187) highlights this binary as deeply problematic:

> *"In its approximate sense, anything is individual which moves and acts as a unitary thing. For common sense, a certain spatial separateness is the mark of this individuality. A thing is one when it stands, lies or moves as a unit independently of other things, whether it be a stone, tree, molecule or drop of water, or a human being. But even vulgar common sense at once introduces certain qualifications. The tree stands only when rooted in the soil; it lives or dies in the mode of its connections with sunlight, air and water. Then too the tree is a collection of interacting parts; is the tree more a single whole than its cells? A stone moves, apparently alone. But it is moved by something else...We*

are compelled to say that for some purposes, for some results, the tree is the individual, for others the cell, and for a third, the forest or the landscape."

Dewey's (1954 [1927]) words here demonstrate his broader frustrations with binary thinking, and highlight how the individual and social are a mistaken binary. Dewey (1954 [1927]) suggests that individuality appears as a result of an *appearance* of separateness, but such separateness is ultimately impossible. Instead, rather than an individual and social dynamic, a focus which can reproduce this binary, it might be better understood as more like a web of interconnections and interdependencies that always vary in structure and form—at times, this web is looser than others, so that it appears to have separate elements (of segregated individuals, for example), and at other times this web is so tightly connected that separating these various elements appears impossible (thus it is considered to be a social whole). Ultimately, this web may be pulled apart, restructured, pulled back together, to varying extents, but it remains always a web of interconnections. This also appears to be the sorts of distinctions that Kropotkin (2014 [1902]) and Mauss (2009 [1947]) were making, though less articulated than Dewey's (1954 [1927]).

Once thinking in this way, the binary makes little sense. A gardener at APCG described the consequences of this perfectly:

> *"I can't give anybody the continuity of presence and that's disruptive if you're trying to help somebody...but with this kind of community, they are very accommodating. Other people like Ruth who herself goes away and she said to me from the very beginning that will be fine, because other members will be there some of the time and away other parts of the time...so you can maintain a thread of continuity which is really important to me, but at the same time there's a tolerance for the fact that I need to be away for periods of time."*

This gardener regularly visits family in the US. She highlights how when she is unable to be at the garden, the group can continue without her—there is no dependence on her as an individual being there, because the broader collective can continue, adjust, and step-in, to

provide continuity when a specific individual isn't there. In this scenario, the web is not disrupted because there are tight interconnecting points within it that can reshape itself accordingly. This social basis provides a certain amount of freedom for the individual that isn't apparent in the allotment, where I met some gardeners who would only go on holiday in the winter months for this exact reason.

Graeber (2001, p.159) proposes to look at the aspects of access and distribution when exploring the functions of everyday communism— *"when someone has the right to take what she feels she needs without any direct payment or reciprocation, then this is communism"*. However, property relations and the *felt* sense of ownership can shape the form of communism and vice versa. This is also apparent in terms of what access people have in these spaces. There are large amounts of sharing practices that occur in the allotment, informally between individuals (sharing tools, seeds, compost, manure, sheds, etc), but also people may regularly share their produce with others (especially to avoid wasting, when people have a surplus). However, because of the division of responsibility within the site, and the "common-sense" practices that this territorial division of space creates, there are always questions of consent and permission. Thus, while Graeber (2001) argues that communism is not a matter of property relations, even the *felt* aspect of property (or territorially divided space) in this case determines who has rights of access and distribution. In the allotment, theft from each other's plots is one of the greatest sins and tends to occupy people's minds to a disproportionate extent. One of the main accepted norms on the site is that you cannot take something from somebody's plot without their permission, and this is closely monitored within the site by the gardeners themselves. Gardeners do, however, often use an abandoned plot, for example by picking the fruit from a tree. If this plot was occupied, it would not be done, as a gardener at the allotment described:

> *"At the moment, that plot is empty and I don't mind taking some raspberries from it. But otherwise I don't take, you just don't do it. Just invite only on to others allotment."*

This principle was widely articulated to me in the allotment, with several examples of people being given consent to pick produce on other plots when people were away. The gardener

therefore distinguishes between the ethics of taking produce from another plot when it is empty, compared to when it is occupied, when it is by the consent of the plot-holder only. This logic is generated by the conditions of the site and the agreed-upon formalised rules and responsibilities (see Appendix E), and informal norms and expectations. The gardener is ultimately distinguishing between something being consensually shared or gifted and being stolen, which are two sides of the coin of property relations (and exclusion)—ultimately, gifting or sharing something often starts from the point of owning something in the first place, as Belk (2010) notes. This gardener, however, is reflecting a type of usufructian (see Bookchin 2004 [1971]) principle of property based around use—when something is being used by someone, it is unavailable to others, whereas if it is not being used, it is open for others use. When there is a territorial border (with accompanied responsibilities), then it is a matter of whether that plot-holder consents to somebody else using their produce—in other words, the boundary is constantly constructed and monitored. As Ince (2012) notes, territories are made and remade through practice, and thus territories are entwined with social relations. They co-determine each other, since territory can produce, shape and reproduce practice, and vice-versa. Thrift (2006) likewise notes that all borders and boundaries are to some extent porous as a result. This pattern was also apparent above, where Tom described being allowed to pick produce from someone's plot when they were on holiday, which was a common occurrence in the allotment. Again, this is due to the plot-holder giving the consent for others to pick their produce, where that boundary becomes momentarily more porous. Such sharing and gifting practices are not open-access but are imbued with power relations that are based around the divided spatial territory of the allotment in the first place. Thus, to share produce in the allotment, it must be "allowed" by the plot holder.

The allotment committee would meet the first Sunday of every month, and I attended these throughout the fieldwork period. This dynamic was reflected upon in my fieldnotes about a discussion of responsibility and theft on site:

> *"There's a lot of communal work, volunteering getting together to look after the shared spaces or neglected areas that don't clearly fall into the boundary of individual plots."*

"Individual plots are largely down to the individual to look after. Clear boundaries. If the individual is struggling, people will offer to help out."

"Some talk about theft of fruit from a plot holders cherry tree. They said theft happens within the plot holders themselves. This is deemed a problem. There's a huge amount of voluntary sharing, but when it is theft, it's different. One of them said, 'the whole thing is about trust, and if you don't have trust, what do you have?'"

These fieldnotes are from the same committee meeting which neatly summarise the dynamics of this section. Firstly, there is the way that the spatial dynamics of the site (not only as divided, but communal) relate with the type of practices and responsibilities that are embedded within it, which I have already detailed. Secondly, there is the related concern of theft from plots, which is contrasted to the forms of sharing that is voluntary. This suggests that sharing/gifting, when there are divisions between plot holders as there is here, must emerge from somebody voluntarily sharing in the first place, since they feel possession over the thing being shared. This is why the primary distinction between sharing/gifting[3] and thieving in the allotment is simply whether the plot-holder has given consent (to share or to gift), or whether it has been taken without such consent (to steal). The committee member then claimed that this was a matter of trust, which they suggest is a fundamental principle on site.

Sharing or gifting produce between plots can only happen in this way because of the construction of territorial divisions, but also sometimes because one person has something, and another doesn't—i.e. from a point of inequality (Chan and Zhang 2019). In contrast, as I've noted earlier, the community gardens do not have territorial divisions within them, and therefore at the end of every session, people share the food amongst themselves. The difference is that there is no need for "consent" to share because nobody technically can claim ownership of produce more than any of the others.

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[3] for a detailed discussion of these differences and their ambiguity see Belk (2010), Arnould and Rose (2016), and Pottinger (2018)

Figure 23: Shared produce at Aberporth Community Garden

However, the community gardens weren't borderless. Produce was not exactly "open access" here either—the wider community, for example, cannot access the produce without being given it by the gardeners. Despite this bordering, in HDCG in particular, which was more embedded in the community, it also became apparent that they often depended on the wider community for various things. There were numerous examples of how forms of gifting and sharing occurred across the community garden 'boundary' with the wider community. People would regularly drop off unused and unwanted things for the gardeners, such as pots, plants, and old furniture—which as I noted, was an aspect of the creative self-valorising practices. However, the gardeners also reached-out to the community in various ways, too, as noted in HDCG, in a discussion I was having with two of the gardeners about clearing the site at the beginning:

Keith: "No, we didn't hire a skip, we took it to the Wales and West building, they have a big bin. In it goes to recycle anyway."

Owain: "Do you still run out of water now in the summer?"

Keith: "Yeah we do, don't we?"

Leah: "The neighbour there has an outside tap, and they let us fill it and Wales and West gave them £10 then."

Keith and Leah reflect on how they used the big bin in the Housing Association building to get rid of waste material, but also how they depended on their neighbours' water (since the garden itself does not have water mains access). One of the important elements of this was that Wales and West, who own the site, provide £10 to the neighbour as a result. This is an example of a form of reciprocal exchange, and notably it happens with the outside, and was also apparent when a charity donated and helped build a shed for the garden, and the gardeners held a BBQ for them as a way of thanking them. As Graeber (2011) notes, such forms of direct exchange (and ultimately, the cancellation of debt) are usually apparent when it is with a stranger or outsider, whereby the immediate reciprocation or exchange of something signals the lack of an ongoing relationship.

However, this reciprocal dynamic with the outside wasn't always the case, as members of the community would help when the additional capacity was needed, as Keith described:

"Those raised beds used to run down the side of the path here. We also take it in turn on the Friday, we dug it all out, and then the following Friday then seven of us fellas lifted it and moved it. With the scaffolding poles tipped on its side, put the scaffolding poles through it, and then lifted it. Any boy who went walking past there I was like 'come in here and help me here.' They would say 'we're not going to manage that', 'yes we are' [he insisted]."

Keith demonstrates how a challenging task (of moving a very heavy raised bed) became possible through bringing together a random collection of people who were walking past the garden at the time. Even when the community gardeners engaged with the outside in this way, it

appeared to be more a type of vague "help" where there was not necessarily an ongoing form of obligations, but it also extends the social bonds into the community itself, even temporarily.

In this section, I have highlighted how forms of everyday communism are spatially shaped in various ways, and the contradictions and inversions within this, but in the next section I want to attend more explicitly to the ways that this everyday communism is underpinned by a diversity of skills and abilities.

5.3 From Each According to Their Ability, to Each According to Their Need

Graeber's (2011) concept of 'everyday communism' invites an ethnographic analysis to the Marxist phrase *"from each according to their ability to each according to their need"*—a dynamic which Graeber (2011) suggests is prevalent at the everyday level. Considering the questions of "ability" and "need" in this anthropological way disrupts the static and deterministic understanding of Marx, and points towards a basic dynamic of cooperation in which people's diverse skills and abilities contribute to both an individual and collective need. In this section, I initially root this in the experiences of retired gardeners and their acquired skills, before I explore the process of complementarity in this diversity.

5.3.1 Retirement, Everyday Communism, and Acquired Skills

As Graeber (2011) and De Angelis (2010; 2017) note, capitalism itself depends on highly functioning forms of social practices, seen particularly in cooperative practices in the workplace. While this contradicts the notions of the competitive and self-interested individual at the heart of the logic of capitalism, Graeber (2011) instead claims that capitalism can simply be understood as a very undemocratic and authoritarian way of organising these communistic relationships. Both Graeber (2011) and De Angelis (2010; 2017) describe this as happening at the point of production, in terms of how workers regularly co-operate to carry out a shared task. In this section, I highlight how the retired gardeners utilise their acquired skills (acquired within capitalist work structures) and reorient and redirect them in these sites. This act of

commoning, through utilising one's skills for collective purposes and needs, is apparent in the examples I highlighted above in the communal and bordered forms of everyday communism. One gardener at APCG described this:

> *"Well, all the other people here are retired, so we're all in the same situation. We're all getting older, so that's it really I think. William was saying about his job as a telephone engineer, in the post office, Ruth was a finance officer so she is the treasurer of course, and actually did a lot of social work type work....so we all bring those skills I think."*

Gardeners therefore have varied skills that are brought together for a common purpose, which was also apparent in Noterman's (2016) research on commoning. As I highlighted earlier, a significant element of the (re)production of these sites was also material and physical—for example, maintaining machinery, spreading mulch, building sheds and raised beds. This, therefore, required a lot of physical work through the ability to use tools, understand machinery and mechanics, and construction and maintenance skills. In the allotment, this was very apparent, which was not surprising because the larger scale of the site (of approximately 150 people) meant that they had the ability to draw on a wide-range of skills. As I noted, a lot of the people at the allotment had worked in manual labour, as Dan described:

> *"You need somebody who's mechanical. But if it breaks down, don't look at me. But Martin is quite good, he was in the steelworks like about half of them up here."*

This gardener likewise links the skills that Martin had learnt in the steelworks with being mechanical and being able to fix the machinery on site. Another gardener described a similar process:

> *"I started off as an engineer pattern maker and when the foundries closed, I had to find something else. The foundry was in Penarth Road, a production foundry*

doing lots of car parts...and then went into window fitting and then doing
kitchens, which was using more of my skills as a pattern maker, using timber. I
suppose I can work accurately, and I suppose once you can work accurately with
your tools you can turn your hand to most things."

The way that this gardener describes this as a cumulative process, through various work experiences, that ultimately are based around having certain abilities to use tools and apply them to different situations. This gardener then described his role within the broader collective:

"The committee is very good, but I'm not interested, I couldn't be on the
committee. But I do help out with the plumbing around the site if there's a
problem with the plumbing then I have a go at that."

This again demonstrates how people utilise their existing skills and abilities to a broader collective goal—some, by working on a committee, and others by helping with the plumbing on site. While volunteering on the committee was itself also an acquired skill—the secretary of the allotment committee was a retired headmaster—the dynamics of the committee is an aspect that I explore in more detail in the following chapter. While Tsing (2017) notes how capital uses people's non-capitalist skills and abilities for its own ends, these gardens also demonstrate how people re-direct their skills and abilities towards non-capitalistic and non-commodified practices and actions, as an almost reverse form of salvage accumulation. For example, the retired plumber is now able to re-direct skills learnt *within* the capitalist sphere (i.e. paid employment) towards non-commodified practices and labour in the allotment. This again reflects the interaction between the exogenous (skills acquired through capitalist work) and endogenous (De Angelis 2017).

Figure 24: The installed sink in the allotment

A gardener at APCG described the importance of bureaucratic skills in their contribution:

> *"I don't mind the paperwork. In social work I used to fill out a lot of forms for people because I was an advocate for people, and I used to say, 'a form will get you something'."*

These bureaucratic skills were crucial for the community garden in dealing with the necessities of funding, which was a constant frustration for many of the gardeners. They regularly noted the difficulty of online forms, with many suggesting that they were not very knowledgeable or experienced, digitally. However, gardeners who had the acquired bureaucratic skills, as above, were able to use this experience to meet this demand. This was also apparent in the allotment, where a gardener reflected on their bureaucratic skills in helping run the committee:

> *"I think one of the things that people do when they retire, one of the opportunities of being on the committee, is it gives people an opportunity to continue using some of their skills. I'm quite bureaucratic, see, I was a*

> *bureaucrat. Doing all the admin and stuff and doing the minutes, so you*
> *continue using those kind of skills. Like today, I got up and spent an hour and a*
> *half knocking up emails after the plot inspections we did yesterday."*

However, such bureaucratic demands were not as apparent in HDCG, where they intentionally avoided constituting the group as they wanted to avoid the bureaucratic element (of meetings, funding, etc) and instead focus on the gardening. This was, I think, partly a class distinction. HDCG, for example, was run largely by a group of working-class people—with both developed labouring "hand" skills (mostly men, such as the sheet metal worker) and caring skills (mostly women, who had experience in the care industries). APCG was defined more by middle class professionals (orthodox office workers, administrators, etc.), and some care workers (social workers, NHS workers, psychiatrists etc) and in many ways lacked the confidence and abilities of the other two spaces with regards to the physical labouring skills. This was evident by the "pre-made" raised beds and the difficulty in attaching a hanging basket to the metal fence—in comparison to HDCG, where the beds and many of the other structures were built from scrap materials and wood from a removed border fence. However, it was also clear that the "professional" and middle class gardeners in APCG (who had spent their years in offices) were far more confident in dealing with the bureaucratic elements of these spaces—from the vast amount of paperwork that comes with funding applications (in the community gardens), including knowing the right language and an awareness of "what they'd want to hear".

While I have noted the bureaucratic, manual and physical skills, one of the fundamental dynamics was also people's social and caring skills. This required not just ordinary forms of social skills (like working with others) but a much more explicit and detailed skillset. Elin, an ex-carer at HDCG, explained this:

> *"I was in my 50s [when I retired] and I thought 'I'd give anything to be back in*
> *work'. I was seeing different people every day from early in the morning to the*
> *night-time, I enjoyed my job, very much so. With people! That's why when we*
> *first had people coming down here, and they'd say we're not carers so we can't*
> *look after them, and I used to think 'come on, they're people...doesn't matter'. I*
> *think 'by the grace of god, we haven't got their ailments', but it didn't bother me*

at all. But I did say when they'd come down they'd have to come with their
support worker, not just put them through that gate. I wanted to know what was
wrong, because if something was wrong down the garden we wouldn't have had
any ideas. So I did want to know something of each one of them. Without being
too personal and I don't pass that on to anyone, but I've got an emergency
contact number and you know...Like I've always said if anything's wrong down
the garden you just call the paramedics."

Elin's experience meant that she was confident in dealing with this situation, but also recognised their own limitations within the garden to care for people in worst-case scenarios and the necessity to depend on others (such as paramedics). Thus, an awareness of one's own skill is also an awareness of limitations to those skills—and in this case, meeting those limitations with somebody else who has that particular skill (a paramedic). This meant that Elin had the experience and ability to communicate with the support worker in terms of safety, providing emergency contact details, and to *"not just put them through that gate",* as she said. However, not all gardens, of course, have people with the confidence to deal with such vulnerabilities. This issue became apparent in APCG, where gardeners were concerned about what they felt was a grey area of having vulnerable people at the garden and whether they had the capacity to provide adequate care. They agreed that this was difficult but that they'd always insist on somebody having a carer or parent with them, if necessary. However, many of the gardeners here also had histories and experience of care work. Miriam, a gardener at APCG, described the "social" skills that she had acquired, however, from working as a social worker:

"I think if you've got a background in mental health, we always did lots of
training and learning new skills all the time, and I think that just helps in life in
general. Because you know, we've had people with different mental health
issues come here, some of which don't come very often but I think it's a useful
thing to be able to relate to people in different ways. I think everyone in the
group is quite open about their communication with people and people are
always very welcome when they come here, even if they just come once."

Again, this gardener describes how the skills that she learnt as a social worker in mental health could be useful in the community garden. What is also clear, is that such skills (or abilities) can directly meet somebody else's needs in the garden, which is apparent throughout all of these examples above. I explore this dynamic between needs and abilities in the next section.

5.3.2   Complementarity: Its Possibilities and Problems

> "If you want to get something done, allocating tasks by ability, and giving people what they need to do the job, is the most effective way to go about it." (Graeber 2014, p.68)

In the last section, I highlighted the ways that people can re-direct their acquired skills to use in these sites. Graeber (2014), in this quote, is suggesting that people combining their various abilities in a common task is a key aspect of everyday communism. This reflects Bookchin's (2005 [1982]) concept of 'complementarity', which refers to people's pooling of a diversity of skills and services. As De Angelis (2017) noted, division of labour within a commons system does not have to be alienated. The acquired skills that I described above do not act in isolation, but combine with a number of other interacting dynamics that help meet each other's needs. This can work in terms of how a group of people draw on a diversity of skills at different times, as Paula at the allotment describes:

> "I think it works very well because we've split up the responsibilities significantly to get more people involved. We've got somebody responsible for all the equipment and we've got somebody responsible for the shop, Jim is the secretary and site representative, we've got a chairperson, Dan and Jim sort two different kinds of accounts and other people are on the committee and take active roles. Somebody taking the role of organising the annual show, somebody taking the role of organising the teas and coffees, so there's quite a lot to be done."

Paula seems to suggest that dividing up responsibilities according to people's skills ultimately is an efficient and effective way of carrying out collective work. Sandy at APCG also describes this:

> "Well, we've got personalities that will clash or complement or work together, so our rules are not there. Ruth is really organised so if anything needs to be done we'll turn to Ruth. Miriam is sensible. Mary knows all the right procedures so we'll turn to her. Don is the joker. I'm a bit of a rebel and I'll stamp my feet and say 'I don't want to do that'. All I'm saying is we're lucky because we haven't got rules and that is in our favour".

Therefore, while Sandy isn't describing specific skills per se, but what she calls 'personalities', she suggests that they can complement each other in the community gardens because of this diversity. Moreover, Sandy vaguely contrasts this with a lack of rules, suggesting that this complementarity emerges more organically, where in such a collective, people fill in for each other's weaknesses with various strengths. This form of complementarity that I refer to here has been articulated in other ways as a type of differential commoning, which *"includes a diverse set of practices, occurring at different times and sites around the community"* (Noterman 2016, p.446). In doing so, these practices weave together to form an ongoing and flexible means of managing the commons (Noterman 2016). Again, this refers to the type of web of social relations that I highlighted earlier, where such a tight web means that people can develop complementary systems which are flexible to each other's various needs and abilities. I noted this in my fieldnotes in contrasting the two community gardens—HDCG having been established for almost ten years, and APCG being one year old:

> "There's a dynamic of self-reliance and trust in what each other does [in HDCG]. Clearly a well-developed teamwork compared to APCG, which is new and people are still learning each other and their ways of doing. People here [in HDCG] know each other's strengths and weaknesses which benefits cooperation."

This was apparent in the ways that people made each other tea or coffee in the community gardens. In HDCG, people knew exactly how each person liked their tea, and which biscuits they liked with it. In APCG, they were still learning about this, and usually made the tea, but put the milk in the middle of the table for people to adjust themselves. Such minor distinctions are also important, with one gardener at APCG once asking, *"would anyone prefer a mug to a cup?"* Tea out of a mug is far superior, but the questioning of this demonstrated how people were not entirely familiar with each other's needs or likes, yet.

Moreover, there is the question of what constitutes a "skill" and how a person and group decide who has the skill to do a particular task or to respond to a particular need (whether that is the need of another person or the need of the site itself). The first element (what constitutes a skill in these situations) is relatively simple, to the extent it is generally accepted in everyday life, and that is having the acquired set of abilities and knowledge to achieve a particular task with confidence and competence. For example, to hang a hanging basket on to a metal fence, aside from possessing the appropriate tools, somebody must have the knowledge of what is needed (the type of drill and drill-bit, the correct screws and sometimes plugs to attach the hanging basket), and the physical capacity and confidence to drill the hole safely and accurately. Therefore, deciding who does what was usually not difficult to organise since people would volunteer for tasks that they felt comfortable doing—from the more complex tasks (such as, for example, fitting a sink in the allotment meeting shed) to simple tasks (such as weeding or painting, or allotment clean-ups). The former, of course, requires quite specific learnt skills, and fortunately in this example there was somebody who had work experience of plumbing. In this scenario, or when fixing garden machinery, for example, someone without those particular skills is unlikely to volunteer. With the more mundane tasks where most people could contribute in some way, it was slightly more complex. For example, watering or weeding doesn't necessarily depend on an acquired skill (like plumbing), though it does depend on certain capacities (to be able to work comfortably on hands and knees for long periods of time, or to carry a heavy watering can, for example).

I also noted, however, that through the summer of the fieldwork period, the forms of cooperation within APCG became more developed over time as people became accustomed to each other, their various skills, habits, abilities, needs, and personalities (as the previous

gardener described). In both community gardens they developed a rota system for watering. Therefore, complementarity isn't simply about what skills and abilities people have to contribute to the group, but also the rotation of time for work such as watering the garden. The rota system within a group system means that individuals are less burdened by daily visits to the site, unlike in the allotment where, as I noted before, this can become difficult for the gardeners if they are unable to do so.

The complementing of each other's abilities happens at various scales. For example, Elin at HDCG has a bad back so cannot pick strawberries (as they are low on the ground), and so other people specifically carry out this task. Elin described this herself:

> *"My illness has got worse so I can't do digging anymore. I can't bend down so I take the role of teas maid, paperwork, that kind of stuff. But I can do bits and pieces. If I'm having a good day, I can do it, if I'm having a bad day, I can't do it. And everybody understands that...I'd hate to give it up, because a couple of months ago I really wasn't feeling myself. I just burst into tears and said, 'I can't do this anymore.' And they said, 'yes you can, we can do this, we can do that'".*

Elin describes how her illness meant that she couldn't do much of the physical work on site anymore, but that instead she found other outlets such as being "teas maid" and doing paperwork. Elin also highlights how this emotionally impacted her, to the point of wanting to abandon the community garden altogether, but instead the wider group were able to reassure her that they could step in to do these other aspects of the garden and she can contribute in other ways. A gardener at the allotment described this balance between he and his wife:

> *"I have some physical limitations, so Laura does the digging which I'm very appreciative of. I do all the brain work if you like, because Laura doesn't want to do it, she wants the opposite after the whole day in work."*

Pete, the husband, is describing how their abilities complement each other in working on their plot, but it also demonstrates my point in the last chapter, whereby these sites can also develop in contrast to people's working lives. Thus, rather than always being a continuation of learnt skills, for Laura who is still working, the allotment provides the possibility for doing things that explicitly contrast with her working life.

Therefore, a crucial element of this is recognising people's diverse abilities, and indeed, their limitations, as Elin at HDCG continues:

> *"You can come and go whenever you want to, to just come down and have a cup of tea if you want to, to come down and have a chat. I've come down and just had a chat with a couple and I'm thinking 'I haven't done anything', but the chat was more important in that respect."*

Above, Elin was describing her own difficulties in gardening because of illnesses, and the way that gardeners responded to help and to "step-in" in ways that she felt she no longer could. However, Elin then linked this with her coming to the garden anyway, just for the social aspect. Therefore, even if a gardener cannot explicitly contribute to the garden, it didn't really matter. She notes the invaluable experience of being there for a cup of tea and a chat with others, highlighting the importance of the social experience that I highlighted in the last chapter. This was what made the community gardens important sites for caring for others, because there were no demands on anybody, and people could always find things for each other to do that suited their own abilities, needs, skills, or interests. This reflects an important element of communism which is based on people uniting in a common task and the inputs and outputs being organised by *"the actors' capacities and requirements"* (Graeber 2001, p.227). A gardener at HDCG described this:

> *"He has Alzheimer's, and he comes down with his carer just for an hour. Sometimes he just likes to come and have a cup of tea and a biscuit, and that's fine. To see everybody and whatever. And then another time he'll come down*

and he'll do things...but when the winter comes it does get too cold....We've bought a heater, he can go in the potting shed with the heating on."

This openness for people to define their own capacity was crucial, since in doing so it directly met their needs. In this sense, abilities and needs exist in a process and continuum, whereby abilities and needs are negotiated in these spaces through what people do.

A gardener at APCG likewise described this dynamic between a recognition of limitations and an ability to contribute in other ways:

> *"It's good to encourage people who are retired to come because even if you can't get down on your knees, you can still say 'I would do it this way', and that's helpful. So there's a lot of possibilities for cooperation, and working together to think about things, and there's brilliant people with different ideas. Like making that space into having the exercise equipment, it's a brilliant idea, to be able to appreciate the garden and make use of the garden."*

However, while De Angelis (2017) argued that a division of labour does not necessarily result in alienation in the commons, there were difficulties also in terms of particular gendered divisions of labour and perceived "limitations" as well as "expectations". As Euler (2018) notes, the broader societal environment can influence the practices of commoning, and this was apparent through this lens, where it's possible for gendered norms around work to be reproduced within these micro commons. Gardeners sometimes mentioned that certain tasks were for men, for example, a dynamic which was reflected in a conversation I had with two gardeners in Hendre Community Garden, Keith and Leah:

> *Keith: "This side here was so overgrown with brambles and everything, and when we were digging the pond out we took out a full size mountain bike, car gearbox, car batteries, car wheels. It was unbelievable wasn't it this stuff we took out?"*

Leah: "and only the men were allowed on this site."

Owain: "How come?"

Keith: "Health and safety...you had to have steel cap boots."

Leah stated that it was a man's job only, and Keith claimed that this was due to having steel cap boots. Therefore, though Leah associates this with being gendered, Keith associates it with being a matter of access to PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) to carry out a particular task. In this scenario, it is gendered because a couple of the men on site were the only ones with access to this PPE, from their past experience working (Keith, for example, was a retired sheet metal worker), therefore both statements were fair. But, it also reflects a form of acquired skill relating to people's working experiences. Of course, this is gendered in the sense that professions that require steel cap boots are predominantly occupied by men, again demonstrating how the broader dynamics of capitalist society become embedded or related with the dynamics of such spaces.

Likewise, tea-making, when carried out in a group, was almost always done by women. Of course, making tea does not depend on access to PPE, but it is a socially constructed role (West and Zimmerman 1987; Lorber and Farrell 1991). In this sense, I want to caution against reproducing a *"political vision that naturalises femininity and domestic labour"* (Gonzalez 2019, p.249), while also recognising how these are understood from the perspective of the gardeners. Unlike some of the other tasks carried out, such as plumbing or machine repair in the allotment—which are two male-dominated professions and remain gendered within the allotment—tea-making does not depend necessarily on specific skillsets, since it is not unreasonable to assume that most people in these spaces have the capacity to make tea. In fact, I witnessed men making tea in the allotment regularly, though usually when meeting in small groups, informally. During large community events on site, women always took on the "catering" roles. Thus, while such ordinary dynamics of making tea can reflect a generative site of care in the commons (Williams 2018), it is also evident that these dynamics can reflect and

reproduce the problematic aspects of socially constructed gender roles (Vas and Barbagallo 2019).

There is therefore a problem in terms of how this fits into the notion of complementarity in the sites. For example, a gardener at the allotment, Cath, suggested that she'd become the toilet monitor on site because *"I'm not mechanical and I'm not technical, but I can put a bit of bleach down the toilet",* suggesting that she wanted to contribute to the broader communal practices on site, but did not have the skillset to carry out what she considered mechanical or technical work, and therefore took on the role as a cleaner. This is an example of how practices in the commons, especially around gendered norms and expectations, can be carried out in a supposedly voluntary way (without any explicit coercion), yet is evidently carrying the baggage of broader societal norms and expectations around gender roles and responsibilities (that are, in essence, oppressive structures). Therefore, while women's work in the community is well-recognised as a facet of social reproduction (and the unpaid labour of women) (Dominelli 1995; Federici 2018), it has been suggested that community gardens can extend this exploitation of women through increasing the amount of work women are expected to do (Engel-Di Mauro 2018). What is most apparent in this research, was that it is not simply a matter of increasing the amount of work per se, since men are also widely involved in each of these spaces, but it intensifies the amount of a *type* of gendered work. This points towards a necessity to further explore the dynamics of complementarity, and co-operation more generally, and the ways that it can both reproduce or undermine particular roles, norms, and structures (especially around gendered roles).

5.4 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have explored the various types of everyday communism that exist in the three sites. Drawing on Graeber's (2010; 2011; 2014) work in this area, I highlighted the importance of recognising the spatial dynamics that shape, and are shaped by, everyday communism. I firstly explored this through the types of communal and individualistic forms of everyday communism, highlighting their everyday possibilities and challenges. I noted how communal practices can be disrupted by various individual dynamics, such as difficulties in participation in volunteering systems, which can create new forms of inequalities and social

problems (such as distrust). I then explored how the forms of individualistic communism in turn depends on a wider social network on site, especially during times of need. In the second part of the chapter, I explored the types of acquired skills that people possess in these sites, and the way that they might complement each other through co-operation. This did, however, raise an important issue in terms of the continuation of gendered norms within these sites.

The broader point that I have also tried to make in this chapter, is that the individual-social binary is problematic. I tentatively explore the possibility of exploring this dynamic through a web-like network, that varies in shape, size, form, and is infinitely changeable. This is also apparent in the forms of complementarity that I defined later in the chapter. In this sense, the binary between individual and social makes little sense, but it is the understanding of the ways that this web changes shape, is disrupted, formed differently in various contexts (including spatially), that is important. Thus, I would argue that the type of neoliberal subjectivity that is sometimes associated with these sites (Pudup 2008), is not necessarily homogeneously or universally apparent, but it is also important to recognise how it is present in the mundane everyday challenges of these sites. It is present in the difficulties of carrying out broad communal and collective work, for example, which doesn't mean that people have been entirely determined by a neoliberal logic of individual interest, risk, competition, and so on, but it suggests that there is a conflict within the cooperative work itself. The struggle exists not simply as individuals are fragmented into divided and alienated subjects (Read 2009), but with the everyday difficulties of cooperation, which is itself a learnt skill (Sennett 2012). In this sense, these are not communistic utopias nor are they individualised sites of neoliberalisation. But, these two spheres interact. This builds on the idea that these sites are neither neoliberal or radical, as McClintock (2014) states, but that these contradictions deserve further empirical detail.

In the next chapter, I turn to the ways that this quiet and implicit form of everyday governance—what I describe as the vernacular—relates with and often comes into conflict with the "official".

6 THE STRUGGLES OF/FOR VERNACULAR GOVERNANCE

6.1 Introduction

In the Literature Review, I highlighted that the general understanding of the commons has largely shifted from one that sees it as a static one of governing a resource (the commons) to an active social process (commoning) (Gibson-Graham et al. 2016; Bollier 2020b). In the last two chapters, I have also continued the theme of exploring this commoning process as fundamentally rooted in everyday life (Huron 2015). One of the general principles of commoning is that it appreciates "on the ground" vernacular knowledge in contrast to the alienating, detached, and distanced management by corporations or the state (Carson 2013; Shantz 2013a; Bollier 2019). In this sense, vernacular governance is a form of living governance that produces and reproduces the commons (Eizenberg 2012; Bollier 2019) based on everyday, grounded, and practical knowledge (Carson 2013). Further, I draw on Scott's (1999; 2012) pioneering work in this area, which contrasts forms of official order with vernacular order—the former seen in top-down plans and blueprints that attempt to provide logic and order, and the vernacular order which is based on practical, intimate, and informal knowledge.

Given that one of the foundational pillars of the commons is self-management (Stavrides 2015), where people themselves determine the rules, traditions, and values of the spaces and resources (Bollier 2020b), a deeper exploration of the *everyday* dynamics of governing is crucial for understanding how the actually-existing commons (Eizenberg 2016) of these gardens is managed. Though the previous two empirical chapters in principle engage with the everyday vernacular management of the commons (Bollier 2019), in this chapter I will more explicitly engage with the ways that these vernacular practices of self-management have internal struggles, but also come into conflict with the institutions who own the land (the official). As Bollier (2016, p.4) asks, can *"seeing like a state"* co-exist (and be combined) with *"seeing like a commoner"?*

6.2 The Foundational Importance of Self-Management

In this section, I explore specifically the foundational importance of self-management, highlighting why it is a basic principle of commoning in these spaces. It is worth initially highlighting, however, that that these are all only semi self-managed gardens—they do not exist in an autonomous zone separate from the institutions of governance (the Local Authority, Welsh Government, Housing Associations etc). In fact, they are deeply interrelated with these other governance actors, and thus it offers an important point to consider the ways that the commons relate to the state (Thompson 2015; Bollier 2016; De Angelis 2017; Milburn and Russell 2019), especially since, as I've noted, the idea of the nation state is often understood to conflict with the commons (Bollier 2016).

In general, self-management was recognised by many as a foundational principle, where there was an emphasis that those "doing" the work (gardening) should also decide and maintain control over the space. I interviewed a number of people who were directly involved in the governance of these urban gardens across Cardiff and more widely. Though I have chosen to anonymise these organisations and the interviewees, they included people working within the Council, and others who worked in four separate organisations across this urban gardening/land/food growing sphere. The founder of a community food growing organisation in the city, Nora, reflected on their experience with a number of different projects across Cardiff:

> *"I think absolutely the key thing is that people on the ground who are volunteering is it's their idea and it's their baby...my big lesson is I never go to a place and say, 'you should have a garden here' or 'wouldn't it be great if you had a garden there'. It just never works. You have to have people on the ground even if they've just got a piece of concrete. A piece of concrete will be a better garden if people want to look after it and grow on it than an amazing site where somebody else thinks you could and you should and that it'll be a great idea."*

Nora is reflecting a general principle of the importance of the vernacular understanding "on the ground", which contrasts with an outsider who imposes ideas onto this vernacular. Nora also

suggests that the sense of ownership is a crucial factor in terms of self-management—that it has to be people's own idea.

In this regard, superficially at least, it is not necessarily ownership of the land that concerns the gardeners nor defines its success, but ownership or control over how things are done. A gardener at HDCG described the importance of this:

> *"A community garden is our garden, and we wanted to do it our way, we didn't want to do it the way we were told to do it, because it wouldn't have been our garden."*

Thus, as Colding and Barthel (2013) argue, the right to manage land, rather than necessarily own it, is the most distinctive characteristic of the commons, which reflects a type of stewardship rather than ownership (Thompson 2015). Cangelosi (2014) also argues that ownership is far less important than access and use of particular land within the commons. In fact, this was even the case with the relatively romanticised understanding of the pre-enclosure commons (Linebaugh 2014), since commoners did not own this land, but had a right to use it. In each of these cases, the land was not owned by the gardeners—Derwen Allotment (DA) is owned by the council, Aberporth Community Garden (APCG) is owned by the council, and Hendre Community Garden (HDCG) is owned by Wales & West Housing Association. This is an important empirical observation for understanding how people relate to land, since it goes beyond the capitalistic perspective that emphasises private ownership, to one that is more based on a use-based logic, which is often referred to as usufruct property rights (Bookchin 2005 [1982]), an important principle for the commons. Usufruct property rights emphasise the right to use a resource (even if not owned) as long as the underlying resource itself is not diminished (Bollier and Helfrich 2019), and derives from a combination of two elements of Roman law on property rights of 'usus' (the right to use) and 'fructus' (the right to the fruits) (Segal and Whinston 2010; Reta 2016; Salvi and Krimm 2020). The third element of property rights (that are not part of a usufruct right) is 'abusus', which refers to the right to encumber, transfer, or gift the land (Reta 2016; Salvi and Krimm 2020).

Some of these principles were also recognised by a staff member of Cardiff Council who had worked with a number of community gardens and food growing projects:

> *"We are also working on the approach that this isn't the council doing it for the community but it is the community doing it for themselves, and thus enabling them to do stuff. The last thing people want is are saying 'you should be doing this'."*

The community development worker that worked closely with APCG also recognised this, claiming that *"we might provide the land...it's their community garden...it wouldn't be a community garden without them, it'd just be a bit of wasteland."* This is important, since it both reflects how the gardeners are able to make use of land that from the state's perspective would be wasteland. However, as I will demonstrate throughout this chapter, this wasn't always a process that materialised without conflict, and it would be naïve to suggest that the formal ownership of the land is an irrelevant factor in this democratic process, since it also fundamentally defines it and permeates the vernacular governance within the sites. This, I suggest, is at the heart of the struggle between the vernacular and official. Land ownership not only defines who *has* ownership of the land (legally), but must also be considered as a key factor in who *feels* ownership over it, since it also creates initial inequalities and sense of control from the landowners (and a lack of sense of control by those *using* it), as Nora reflected:

> *"But in Rumney it was always difficult because the council always had a huge hold over when people could and couldn't go on the site...Who owns that land and what you're allowed to do or not allowed to do is really important and sometimes people don't realise that until they get further down the line."*

Therefore, as Nora notes, this sense of control *over* land by the state can create a controlling dynamic from the outset in terms of what freedom the gardeners have in the space itself. I explore this dynamic throughout this chapter as a significant struggle and conflict in the sites, which to some extent complicates and contrasts my earlier emphasis on the forms of self-valorising practices. Far from being free from these constraints, these forms of vernacular

practices exist despite, and are regularly restricted by, these institutional structures of ownership. In the above scenario where there was a community garden on local council land, the local council control the usage of that land and thus they restrict the possibilities for self-management of the garden. The result is that a situation develops whereby control and ownership are divorced from direct knowledge of the situation (Carson 2013). A Housing Association community development worker described this difficulty in terms of the landowners (the HA) reluctance to relinquish control over the aesthetic "quality" of a separate site:

> *"I think definitely the main thing for Housing Associations is not to be too controlling. One of them I have made completely community-led, so this one is one of the most interesting ones. It's an old car parking space, at the bottom of a cul-de-sac, and I worked with them to lease the land, so we own it and they've got a 99 year lease. And they want to turn it into a community garden, and I helped them with materials, I gave them tools, they started doing it, and they literally built all these raised beds and are doing stuff...but then I got a few complaints in the Housing Association about it being messy and all this kind of stuff, and I went down and said like 'what's going on?' and it was summer so the weeds were growing and they weren't going to plant until autumn...but I was getting loads of 'yeah it doesn't look neat' and this kind of stuff, so I think Housing Associations find it difficult to actually change their expectations of what communities are open to do."*

The participant therefore reflects the principles of self-management that I highlighted at the start of this chapter, but also demonstrates the way that this, in reality, is a struggle for the landowners who are reluctant to trust communities in this way, and often attempt to control and order the space to their own liking (in aesthetic terms, here). However, even in this quote, the community development worker is using terms that refer to themselves as the active one in the process, not the community gardeners themselves. Thus, rather than it appearing to be a bottom-up process of the citizens taking on this initiative themselves, such facilitation also appears to be laden with top-down power dynamics, bestowing upon them the opportunity to be community-led.

Aside from recognising the issues with top-down control over projects in terms of developing a sense of ownership by those on the ground, there was also the related issue of over-reliance on external organisations, as a worker in an urban gardening organisation described:

> "One of the problems at Pierhead Community Garden (a separate site, anonymised) was from the beginning they always had a member of staff and that member of staff always set the tone of how people would work together. And then eventually after a couple of years, 10 years or so, they got to a point where they just couldn't get any more funding to pay somebody, so the volunteers had to just manage the garden themselves, and actually it was really bad to begin with because they'd been in a place where they had someone to do everything for them and manage everything for them, and I'd turn up and they'd say 'oh have you got some milk?' and I'd say 'no', and because the manager had always gone out and bought milk for them they had no independent skills or anything...So it's much better if you set a group up right from the beginning where you're facilitating and mentoring and not managing things for them."

Therefore, the sense of ownership was in general recognised by several organisers within these community organisations as key to establishing the long-term success of community gardens:

> "So that's always where we've got to rather than us manage the site and being left with that responsibility we try and train people up in order that they can run it themselves. So I think that's a much better model rather than people becoming dependent and it's a slower way of doing it so you don't necessarily get as much gardening then. But we think that's a much more sustainable way of doing things so that's how we always work."

Rachel, a development worker based in South Wales for a food growing organisation that worked across the UK, also noted that this had to have the broader "buy-in" of the community itself, since imposition can come from within the community, horizontally, not simply from above:

> *"The most successful ones are ones the set up not just by one individual, because quite often you find that there is one very enthusiastic individual that says 'I know what this area needs, it needs a community growing project', and they come to us for a bit support and I give them some information and we help them get together information on how to engage with the local community and find out what they want. But if it's something that's been imposed on people and someone has decided that's what's needed in this area, the community might feel differently."*

Therefore, whether a community needs or wants a community garden in the area in the first place is a crucial consideration for its initial democratisation. Such considerations are not necessary in an allotment, where again the individualised nature of responsibility and ownership (as well as the structures which facilitate this) mean that the social and democratic elements of this space are by-products that allow the space to function, rather than necessary foundations from the beginning. However, while Rachel suggests that such imposition can also come from *within* the community, not necessarily through top-down mechanisms, she goes on to give an example which was itself a top-down community garden:

> *"There's an example in Penarth, well the town council have set up a community garden in the front of their offices and they really wanted people to come and use it, but because they've done it and then they presented it to the town, they then struggle to get people involved in it because people just turned up and everything was already done. Whereas the most successful projects, they go out first before they even start anything and they have a group of people, not just one individual. You need small group of people so that you have others to share the workloads and if they go out and do a lot of research and find out what people want, so people might want to community growing project but they might not want it in a particular place or a particular size or they might only want it open on certain days of the week or just to involve certain support groups and not just the general public."*

Rachel also links this sense of it being community-led with having control over when and how the garden itself might operate, as well as the rules and forms of management that the gardeners will want to define within the garden. In contrast, community gardens that are embedded in the community are important aspects for its everyday functioning:

> *"If you haven't got the support and people are wanting to take ownership of a scheme that live right around, it's not going to work...because what they do, they look after it, and they are the eyes and ears of the community, so they stop vandalism, they help water every day, and they take ownership of that project."*

This is a crucial dynamic which reflects Jacobs (2016 [1961]) work, but also my observations about forms of mutual aid and everyday communism across borders and into communities, who offer the sort of help this participant describes. However, the reality that community gardens can emerge as an individual community member's pet project deserves further attention in the literature—in particular in terms of how this shapes the garden itself over time.

Therefore, the community developing a sense of ownership here is crucial for the longevity of these gardens (Pearson and Firth 2012). One of the crucial aspects of the commons is that there is a general appreciation that those who "do" the work on the ground are also those who make the decisions about the space—collectively agreed upon rules, mechanisms of monitoring and sanctioning, and the governance structures of this (Bollier 2014; Wall and Egan 2014; Ostrom 2015 [1990]; Arvidsson 2019). In the allotment, the committee are ordinary gardeners who volunteer their time as committee members, and as I noted in the last chapter, were all retired plot-holders (except for one). They therefore possess this vernacular understanding of the space, through a "closeness" both physically to the site but also psychologically, emotionally, and practically. A member of the committee, Paula, described this dynamic:

> *"Well they [the council] don't know anything about what's going on. They may come up occasionally and they've redrawn the little map and they get it totally wrong. There's some very vague areas there. Down at the bottom and at the far*

ends there are some bits that are really hard to figure out, so we do have a lot more knowledge about what's going on."

As Bollier (2019) suggests, beneath all macro laws and governance exist a range of micro "living" vernacular laws. This practical knowledge enables the production of the commons (Eizenberg 2012), since as Scott (2012) also notes, formal rules and ordering depend on informal vernacular interpretation and negotiation of them. In what appear to be trivial interpersonal relations between ordinary people, Bollier (2019) emphasises their importance in everyday governance, reflecting in many ways Ward's (1996a [1973]) emphasis that anarchist forms of organisation exist *despite* the state. Such vernacular understanding and knowledge of the site is crucial for enabling the production of the commons (Eizenberg 2012). However, beyond this being a matter of how well the site is known (in the map example above), this vernacular "closeness" resulted in them *"managing it more sympathetically than the council"* while also being more responsive:

> *"But it's in our interest to make sure the equipment all worked rather than the council just saying 'oh the allotment people are moaning that the mower isn't working, who do we send to sort that out, we've got to service them all'. Whereas when you're interested in it it's not a big deal to make sure they're all serviced."*

Jim on the allotment committee contrasted this with how the gardeners saw the council's response:

> *"It's such as big central body they propose that they exist for the greater good, and I'm sure that the philosophy behind it is actually there. However, what isn't there is the ability to react to various situations as they arise because they can't see on a local basis. They can only see it on a broader scenario."*

The inability to *"see on a local basis"* is a dynamic that reflects Scott's (1999) work that demonstrated the ways that the state are unable to process or understand the granularity elements of everyday life (and often try to simplify and order it in various ways). With such a sense of the committee being more responsive, it was understood as ultimately something that was empowering—something that could be changed:

> *"Well even if it's isn't more responsive, it's not more responsive because you haven't been responsive, 'cos it's up to you. If you think this isn't the right thing as it's not working, very well then go on the committee and change things, and you can."*

Though Gardiner (2004) warns against seeing "folk" knowledge and "specialised" knowledge in a dichotomous form, he also cautions against seeing them homogenously. However, I suggest that this is not a contrast between folk and specialised knowledge, but one between grounded and detached knowledge, an issue I explored in the literature review (see Dewey 2012). Who has "specialised" knowledge over an allotment or community garden if not the gardeners themselves, for example? The contrast I have explored is therefore related to how this "grounded" knowledge contrasts with formal knowledge within institutions, and how this relates with the dynamics of self-management.

However, self-management was not an easy process, even if these basic initial principles and intentions are in place. In the next two sections, I explore the difficulties and contradictions of this self-management process. Firstly, through the internal struggles of vernacular everyday self-management, and secondly through the ways that the vernacular comes into conflict with the official.

6.3 The Internal Challenges of Vernacular Self-Management: The Dictatorship of the Plot-holders

Each site had ways of making collective decisions regarding the everyday functioning of the site—from the basic plans of what was to be done on that particular day, to long-term plans regarding the physical structure of the site, or to funding bids and financial concerns. I described some of these in the last chapter through the concept of everyday communism. To add to this, all of these sites therefore required some form of democratic practice. Though the term 'democracy' or 'self-management' was very rarely used by the gardeners themselves, the gardeners often referenced how things were done, who decided, who had the final say, the difficulties of disengagement etc. Many of the community organisations, who had the experience of engaging with several projects such as these, suggested that the ability to practice democracy was one of the most crucial practices within these spaces:

> *"To be honest people are usually quite good at looking after the pears or the potatoes, but the whole 'how do we work together and how do we look after each other'? That's the bit that's the hard bit actually. And people don't think about that, and they have very different ideas about how to work. Some people are slash and burn—there shouldn't be any weeds. Others are like permaculture, let's have loads of weeds. And some people have it very tidy and some people don't like it tidy at all. And I just thought I'd mention that because that's something that causes a lot of friction. So how you work together and what is acceptable and not acceptable is really important."*

Ultimately, these are aspects which can and do cause internal conflicts between people which require forms of negotiation and sometimes conflict resolution mechanisms—a point De Angelis (2017) makes about the possibilities of the commons failing due to internal (endogenous) issues. This participant above, Nora, also noted that in her experience *"you've got to have people in the end who are willing to sit around a table in meetings, chair a meeting, manage the finances...you can't just have people that turn up, do the garden, then go away."*

This therefore is a crucial aspect of self-management, and one that reflects my emphasis on acquired skills in the previous chapter. However, the democratic processes within these spaces were quite diverse. As noted elsewhere, the allotment had an elected committee, each of whom were plot holders themselves, who would decide on the more bureaucratic and everyday matters of the site—from evictions and liaising with the council, running the site shop, organising the waiting list and welcoming new plot holders, and maintaining the financial books and records. The secretary (head) of the committee was a retired headmaster—again reflecting my emphasis on the importance of continuation of learnt/acquired skills—and all of the committee except for one were retired allotmenteers. The committee meet on the first Sunday of every month. In the two community gardens, which were far smaller in physical size and membership, it was far more fluid and less formally arranged than this. APCG did have an AGM and elected roles—since they were constituted—but HDCG had intentionally avoided a constitution and these more formal matters (such as funding) were dealt with by Wales & West Housing Association.

Aside from the AGM, the majority of democratic decisions in these spaces can be thought of as more of an everyday process rather than a formal monthly one (as was the case in the allotment). Each time the community garden would meet, there would be periods of discussion around what should be done, how to do it, etc—ultimately, an everyday process of democracy that decided the practical events of these spaces. In the first empirical chapter, I touched on the forms of sociality that occur in the interstitial spaces *and* moments (i.e. drinking tea) of gardening. While the allotment was more formalised through monthly committee meetings (which I also attended), there was also a large amount of vernacular democracy occurring less formally on-site, as well. Gardeners would meet for a cup of tea regularly and chat about the site, or people would discuss things with their neighbouring plot holder. These were instances where concerns, ideas, and plans would be discussed amongst each other more informally. While it is well-recognised that such spaces offer the opportunity for developing democratic citizens (Glover et al. 2005), I suggest that it's important to see this as a continuous unfolding struggle rather than something that is a static end to be achieved. In this sense, the democratic self-management of these sites was not easy, but a constant challenge of negotiation between people with different ideas and interests.

Within a space the size of the allotment, decisions could easily be made that did not please everyone—these spaces are filled with disagreement, discussion, debate, and sometimes conflict and drama. However, despite their smaller scale, the democracy within the community gardens was at times more challenging because it could not necessarily absorb this type of drama or disagreement. I suggest that this is because within such a tightly knit social group, there is an emphasis on consensus politics that intentionally avoids conflict, due to the apparent "closeness" of everything—an issue I explored in relation to political differences in chapter four. This ends up avoiding the important element of conflict and disagreement within the functioning of everyday democracy (Lake 2017a; Purcell 2017). In contrast, the structures to achieve democratic decisions in the allotment are relatively formal, but this to some extent protects the process from such everyday problems. If there is drama, one can return to their plot without interacting further with that person. The community gardens depend on more informal social organisation rather than structured organisation, meaning that there is a whole set of everyday dramas, conflicts, disagreements that cannot be detached from the democratic processes. As noted, these everyday issues and formal democratic processes are slightly more separate in the allotment, though, of course, they naturally affect each other.

One of the downsides of the allotment space is that the formal arrangements within the governance of it can leave it open to abuse of micro power. Although the present committee functioned extremely well, many plot-holders told me of a recent secretary who held the post for a long time. He was widely known as an authoritarian figure within the allotment:

> *"Kevin was a boss man here. If you didn't do what he said you were fucked...that's the problem with getting committees, you get somebody who's very dominant."*

However, these micro forms of authoritarianism within the allotment, seen in the example of Kevin the old secretary, was a bit of a divisive and contradictory issue. Many would both complain about this while also saying that he was efficient, hardworking, and passionate about the site:

"Oh yeah, he did [have a stronghold over everything]. He was quite a temperamental little guy. He was always really nice to me, but he fell out with a lot of people. But, you know, he was passionate about the place, he really was. He held court in here in a big armchair and he made sure it ran OK...And we had lots of fundraising events. We used to have a big bonfire event, fireworks that went on for hours because people donated them, everyone bought pumpkin soup, wine in here flowing freely. But the council put a stop on that, they got rules now on health and safety. It wasn't very safe I must say. There's rules now saying no alcohol. And we always had Christmas dinner that they would organise in one of the local restaurants so they were a good gang but they were quite old guard and now they've been replaced there's a different sort of atmosphere now."

Figure 25: The committee room at the allotment

This wasn't just an issue of exploiting formal committee structures however, since there were also struggles in the community gardens regarding authority, leadership, and expertise. Having a common space in which there are plural ideas over the ends (how the garden should be) and

the means (the practices to achieve that) often results in minor conflicts. These may appear trivial, such as the shape of a pond or the position of a raised bed, yet as Nora mentioned previously, these minor conflicts can be extremely disruptive and difficult to manage. Ultimately, this is not because the shape of the pond or position of the bed is that important to the people in conflict, but it is reflective of more fundamental matters of democracy—of who has a say over a matter and who does not. A worker in a local food growing organisation suggests that this requires some form of structure to deal with:

> *"So you've got to kind of have a framework…and you have to stick to that so that if somebody goes across that line you can say, 'hang on a minute, we all said we were going to do this and you haven't done that'. When you don't have that, you just have an assumption that all agree to work together and that's where you have trouble."*

These are again examples of the problematic endogenous dynamics that were rightly amplified by Ostrom's (2015) work, where there is a necessity for collective rules and decision making mechanisms, as well as forms of monitoring, mechanisms of conflict resolution, and potentially sanctions. Thus, while common projects can fail due to external pressures such as enclosure (Linebaugh 2008) or co-optation (Caffentzis and Federici 2014), it is also possible for internal dynamics to have negative effects (De Angelis 2017; Euler 2018).

As Bresnihan and Byrne (2015) note, it is possible for informal hierarchies to emerge in the commons, which should not be dismissed. The emergence of informal hierarchies in the two community gardens seemed to stem from those who were "natural" leaders within the establishment of the garden (in the sense that they appeared to be the "expert" gardener amongst the group), but also those who possessed a sense of personal ownership over the project (since in both cases there tended to be a figurehead from the beginning). The people who initiated these community gardens often became guarded over them—they considered the idea and the project theirs, and at times sharing this with other people appeared difficult. Therefore, this is a social process that emerges over time but has its roots in the establishment of these spaces, a problem that I referred to in the section above (in terms of broader community engagement). Community gardens are regularly started up by a passionate local

resident, or perhaps a small group of local residents. This, undoubtedly, contrasts with the emphasis on the collective and community-led nature of community gardens (Bigell 2015; Follmann and Viehoff 2015). As Bradley and Pargman (2017) note, the commons are often dependent on particular *key* persons—initiators, hosts, and contributors—which suggests that their collective nature can often be romanticised. However, during interviews with workers of organisations that operate across this scene in Cardiff and South Wales, and the gardeners themselves, there appeared to be a contradiction. While many would suggest the need for a strong leader to develop momentum in the initial phases, others would claim that groups should avoid it becoming a pet project of a single person, which could make it vulnerable due to lack of broader engagement and "buy-in" with the community.

Though there is somewhat of a celebration of people's everyday self-managed (or democratic) abilities that are already in existence—seen in the anarchist tradition (Ward 1996a [1973]; Springer 2014; White and Williams 2014) but also in terms of the commons (Carlsson 2008; Federici 2018)—this suggests that a more critical perspective of the seed beneath the snow (Ward 1996a [1973]) is necessary. Indeed, these buried forms of anarchistic practices are not without their problems, conflicts, disagreements etc, nor are they "finished" or necessarily well-functioning forms of self-management, an issue I touched on in chapter five in relation to the problems of participation. Such a practice should inherently suggest that such forms of disagreements and problems will also be self-managed (for an anarchist perspective on this, see Price (2013; 2016)). However, if commoning itself is about learning how to do democracy (Gidwani and Baviskar 2011), then understanding these internal conflicts is important, without necessarily relegating them to structural conditions (exogenous factors)—which only serves to dismiss these problems until such structural conditions are somehow overcome.

Ironically, in APCG, this "leader" had left a previous community garden due to it being too authoritarian and undemocratic. They were without doubt the most experienced gardener and had the most skills and knowledge on gardening, and were quite committed, at least verbally and sometimes in practice, to establishing a democratic community garden. They clearly felt a sense of frustration at being the default leader of that group, regularly asking for people's opinions and thoughts on what to do, how to do it, and clearly resisting giving instructions (though at times this would boil over and they would get frustrated if somebody did something

"wrong", for example). There was, however, significant effort to share responsibility democratically, even if the other gardeners did not seem to want to do so. Many of the other gardeners themselves seemed comfortable in asking this person for their opinion—an act which ended up reproducing the common sense of them being the "authority" in the garden. This person did not have coercive power over the group—they could not evict somebody from the garden, for example. Ultimately, this resulted in people carrying out what could have been an autonomous or horizontal task yet deferring to this leader instead (*"I'll just check it with them first"*). In this sense, the hierarchy didn't emerge simply out of the search for power by this person, but also out of a general subservience by the broader group—by looking to them for advice, ideas, and reassurance. While Ward (1996a [1973]) suggested that forms of hierarchy were less likely to emerge within such small face-to-face groups, this is not necessarily the case, reflecting the observations of Freeman (1972) regarding the ability of people within small "unstructured" groups to become dominant. However, what is notable in this context is how this leader on the one hand produces and reproduces this dominance but is also uncomfortable with their position within the group as the leader. They are therefore demonstrating an almost reluctant dominance where they want to push back against this dynamic, albeit imperfectly. Thompson (2015) likewise argue that actually existing commons are not free from such human power relations.

During the fieldwork, there was a period in which this person was on a month-long holiday and the cooperation of the group functioned in a much more fluid, spontaneous, and effective way. People took more responsibility amongst themselves (since they no longer deferred to this person), they worked together more effectively, and ultimately managed to achieve a lot more in the garden than any other time that I was there. This dynamic was also observed by other gardeners in the group, who regularly brought it up when I had the opportunity for a one-on-one conversation or interview. One of these interviewees suggested that this dynamic was a problem due to the lack of structure within the group itself, which allowed for such informal hierarchies to emerge—again, an observation which closely mirrors Freeman's (1972). This person stated that *"if you don't have a bit of a structure, someone like Ruth will take over…it does happen."* However, they also recognised that the group functioned better during this period without them at the garden. A separate gardener had some quite contradictory views on this dynamic. At one point in the interview, William mentioned that they would like to see more leadership:

> *"We sort of make all the decisions as a co-operative, which is not always the best I don't think. I think some people should be saying 'we need to do this'. The whiteboard is a great idea because it focuses us on what the group decides we need to do, so that's the sort of leadership I'd like to see."*

The contradiction within William's ideas were interesting—on the one hand, suggesting that horizontal decision making (co-operative) was not the best way, but on the other emphasising the whiteboard as the place where *"the group"* could decide how things should be done. I probed the gardener about this, who then suggested that there needs to be more direction from Ruth:

> *"We all tend to look to Ruth for ideas and things and guidance, but she doesn't seem to want to take that on...Ruth says 'I think we should be doing' rather than 'we need to do'... She needs to be more pushy, more officious—'come on guys let's go and do this.' I know Kyle doesn't like sitting around and talking, so he went out and did his sanding and we were all quite happy to sit and chat. Perhaps Ruth should have turned around and said 'let's paint the tires. Do you 3 want to paint the tyres? Do you want to tidy this up?' rather than just letting us decide what we want to do."*

In this sense, the contradiction continues, since William suggests that there's a problem of the other gardeners looking towards Ruth for ideas, who does not want to take this on, but William explicitly wants Ruth to be *"more pushy"* despite this reluctance. However, I also probed about the period at which this person was away on their holidays, asking if they had noticed anything different. The interviewee said that *"people took on more responsibility"*. I asked why this happened, and they stated that it was because *"people look to Ruth because she is the gardening guru, if you like"*. In many ways, the more time spent in the space, it was increasingly evident that people had contradictory ideas regarding the democratic functioning of the space, including in terms of ideas of leadership.

I further explored with the interviewee on this apparent contradiction, asking *"wouldn't giving Ruth more authority and more decision-making to lead things get rid of people's confidence to decide things collectively like they have done in the last month?"*, to which they replied:

> *"No, I think it would build their confidence because she could turn around and say 'can you paint the tires? Off you go, paint the tyres and when you finish come back and tell me'. And they go off and they sort the paint, what colour they're going to use, that's entirely up to them. And then Ruth will think the next thing we need doing is to plant out the front."*

This same gardener had also noted problems in their old work at the Post Office, where he felt that over the years it had become increasingly managerial and detached, with professional managers who had no "grounded" knowledge of the job:

> *"They didn't trust us...when I started work, do you know the Butetown tunnels, I was on the project team for that and I was able to sign up to nearly 3 1/4 million pounds worth of work. When I left, I couldn't sign for a pen. I needed my manager's approval to get a pen...We're getting managers who didn't know how to manage, who were getting jobs because—no disrespect to you—but they had qualifications, they had degrees, but they couldn't manage, they had degrees but they didn't know what the job entailed. They had no practical experience of the job, so they were doing as they were told by senior managers who had less idea of how the job was done, and it just came down like that."*

De Angelis (2017) claims that an important endogenous aspect of the commons is that it depends upon breaking habits of delegation, and in place of those habits, establishing participatory methods. Thus, practices of participation and delegation have to be learnt as habits, and people's experiences in work and politics lean heavily towards processes of delegation rather than participation. I found these contradictions in terms of how people understood management, responsibility, and hierarchy interesting but equally frustrating, but it also seemed that the gardener was distinguishing between a sense of leadership and authority.

This was apparent in a discussion between two gardeners at APCG, with one stating *"you need a leader sometimes, it doesn't happen on its own"* and then another responding, *"someone to guide…I wouldn't say a leader, but it needs direction."* In terms of leadership, the gardeners were suggesting that it was more about the lack of direction and knowing what to do, an issue that somebody with more expertise could help guide.

Figure 26: Liminal spaces of democracy in Aberporth Community Garden

Later in the interviewing process, when the "leader" had returned from their holiday, I interviewed them. They also, without prompting, brought up this issue. We spoke about how democracy works in these types of groups, and why and how a level of flexibility was important. I asked what the key thing was for such groups to achieve this:

> *"Not having anybody dominant. Not having anybody who's trying to push their own. I mean, I've been in other community groups to do with other issues where you just go 'why am I here? That person is going to make all the decisions whether we want them to or not'…I did say to you at some point a long time ago, that I do sometimes get frustrated because people keep asking me gardening questions, it's 'Ruth, what are we doing today?', and I think we ought to be working that out together. 'What are you asking me for?' Or, I'm*

working round the front and somebody comes round from the back and goes
'what shall I do now?' I get a bit frustrated sometimes, I don't want to be a
dominant person, I don't want to be the one that people constantly say 'what are
we doing now?'...I don't mind the 'I don't know enough about gardening, I
don't understand how to do this' but being asked all the time 'what do we do
next?', I don't want that to be me."

Clearly the informal hierarchy that had been established had become a burden for them. Even though this frustrated them, and they suggested that this was not their intention (in fact, as noted, they joined this garden out of frustration with lack of democracy in the other places), and I had noticed at times their effort to change this, I had also witnessed that they at times explicitly practiced forms of managing others. In other words, they seemed to possess an internal conflict between challenging being seen as the "leader" or expert, while also reproducing it. I wondered whether there was a relationship between their description of their lack of democratic voice in one space (Whitchurch Community Garden) and their relatively dominant voice in this garden. This might reflect the fine line between these two poles—where, on the one hand, the frustration with a lack of voice in the other garden might not necessarily reflect a desire for more democratic structures, but instead a frustration with not being the de facto "leader" or authority in the first place. However, this doesn't explain their frustration with people's subservience and the lack of democratic empowerment in APCG. Interestingly, however, they also distinguish between expertise and authority in a similar but more explicit way than William does—they had no issues giving gardening advice, but they didn't want to be making all the decisions about the space and what people should be doing, which they wanted to be a cooperative pursuit. Another gardener attempted to balance these two dynamics, by suggesting that *"because it's a voluntary organisation, I think people are a bit reticent and feel it might be sort of taking over...you do have to have rules but the most difficult thing then is to not go too far, you've got to give them the chance to have fun and use their own initiative."*

Crucially, then, there is a question of the difference between authority, expertise, and leadership, and the ways that various people within this situation reproduce this hierarchy (including those who are subservient to it). Bakunin (1871) also made this distinction between expertise and authority: *"In the matter of boots, I refer to the authority of the bootmaker;*

concerning houses, canals, or railroads, I consult that of the architect or the engineer...But I allow neither the bootmaker nor the architect nor the savant to impose his authority upon me." While on the surface, it was the lack of direction that people tended to associate with this dynamic, it was more importantly a dynamic that resulted in broad passivity. Ultimately, when there is an informal "leader" (as there often is with community projects), this leader tends to take on responsibility in a way that appears natural (perhaps due to their sense of ownership of the project, their acquired skills, etc.), which both creates a passivity amongst the broader group, then allowing the leader as well as the broader group to justify and reproduce this position and hierarchical dynamic as a result of this passivity (e.g. *"we clearly need a leader because we don't know what we're doing otherwise"*). In this sense, these hierarchies can and do create passivity, in return justifying the need for these hierarchies. As Manicas (2011) notes (in reference to state authority), rulers require legitimation if their roles are to be reproduced. How to avoid this scenario is difficult, and ultimately depends on the broader group having a sense of collective responsibility and ownership that restricts the need for individuals to attain these positions. A similar dynamic exists between civil society and the state, as noted in the work of Kropotkin (2014 [1902]) and Buber (1999 [1957]), who broadly understood that this social element (of mutual aid and self-organisation, for example) becomes weaker as it becomes alienated from the people themselves into the structures of the state.

In this section, I explored some of the endogenous issues of self-management, but from here-on, in this chapter I explore in more detail how these relate to, come into conflict with, and are limited by, exogenous state-capitalist dynamics.

6.4 Conflicts Between the Vernacular and the Official

Though I've highlighted the importance of vernacular self-management in these spaces, including the internal challenges of micro democracies, I now turn to the ways that this vernacular relates with and often contrasts (if not clashes) with the formal authorities. Bresnihan and Byrne (2015) argue that there has been relatively little work done on how the forms of ownership and governance materialise in the everyday dynamics of commoning. I explore this process of self-management through the dynamic (and friction) between the vernacular and the official (Scott 2012; Bollier 2019). In many ways, the distinction between vernacular/official

reflects Dewey's (2012) critique of practice and theory, though his relevance to Scott's (1999) seminal work has been underexplored, with only Manicas (2011) mentioning their similarities briefly.

Many of the gardeners regularly understood what they were doing and practicing within the spaces in contrast to the "outside"—including the institutions that owned the land, created the bureaucracy and rules of the spaces. Firstly, I will explore the ownership of land as both the foundational element of conflict between the vernacular and official.

6.4.1 Authority and Land

First and foremost, this clash between the vernacular and official is seen in *how* land is managed and *what* land is "used", a point I have made already in this chapter. These gardens, in particular community gardens, are often understood as a claim to the Right to the City (Purcell and Tyman 2015), where citizens take over neglected land (Mattei and Quarta 2015) for social and public use (Cumbers et al. 2017). Such dynamics of reclaiming land is often considered a dynamic of commoning, which directly contrasts with the removal of land *from* the commons in the process of enclosure (Cumbers et al. 2017; De Angelis 2017). However, such political statements are premature, since my research highlighted the ways that the *owners* of the land (in this case Cardiff Council and Wales & West Housing Association) are extremely risk averse and selective as to what land gets used by community groups in the first place. Thus, there is no dynamic of guerrilla gardening (squatting) (Reynolds 2008) occurring here, but a handover of unused land (usually by the state) for community projects—which reflects an initial power dynamic related to land ownership. Therefore, this is not necessarily an example of the state becoming a partner in a public-commons partnership (Milburn and Russell 2019), but highlights the way that the local state is deeply tied to the logic of profitability, as Hannah, who worked for an organisation that provided advice to communities about land access, described (specifically in reference to a different community garden in the city):

> "Sometimes what you get as well is that they [Cardiff Council] don't even know they owned the land, and you point it out to them and then they look up on GIS and realise they do...then because you point it out to them it goes on their list as

well to see if they can get money from it. So, it can be quite a long process and challenging process really. We did quite a lot of work to show the local authority that you can't make money from that particular site because it's not capable of being developed by housing because of the distances between the existing properties."

The priority of the local state (Cardiff Council) is therefore evident in this dynamic. These garden commons lie in the ruin of capital—much like Tsing's (2017) matsutake mushroom—by using up parcels of land that are not of sufficient economic value to capitalism (and the state) whatsoever. The community gardens in this case were handed to the gardeners because the land was unprofitable (from Cardiff Council's perspective), which contrasts with the understanding that community gardens predominantly exist through meanwhile use in spaces that are earmarked for development (Bigell 2015). While there is a general commons critique (especially within the Marxist understanding of the commons) of the state as an instrument of the elite used to entrench capitalist accumulation (Cumbers 2015), this is part of that same process. Although these gardens aren't directly contributing to the enclosure, privatisation and commodification of city land (a dynamic which Christophers (2018) has recently explored), the gardens exist in particular areas and spaces of the city because of this same dynamic. Another participant noted that community groups overall have increasing difficulty in accessing land through short-term agreements because *"they're [Cardiff Council] trying to get as much money from their land and develop their land and get a return on it as much as possible".* In this sense, it reflects the *"iron fist behind the invisible hand"* (Carson 2001, n.p.), where the state is a very active facilitator of neoliberalism, again collapsing the problematic public-private binary (De Angelis 2007). In this sense, the emphasis on the reclaiming of waste land deserves further interrogation, where it is possible to over-emphasise its transformative potential, since waste land is itself created by the logic and demands of capitalism in the first place—ultimately, it is considered unprofitable land. As a result, they pose no direct challenge to this dynamic but simply exist in its ruins. While others have highlighted the ways that community gardens and allotments can come into conflict with the local state through their destruction for development (Ginn and Ascensão 2018), in this case, I suggest that this is extremely unlikely since the council often ensure that the land is undevelopable *before* it can be used. Huron (2015) argues that the ultra-commodified and privatised nature of urban space means that the commons has to grapple with the capitalist landscape of cities, through the removal of a particular resource

from a financialised urban landscape. I argue that in the case of community gardens, the commons exist in the leftover and un-profitable spaces of the city, and therefore this problem is to some extent avoided, which also suggests the lack of confrontation with these capitalist land structures.

It is not unreasonable to suggest that each of these are therefore directly related to a political landscape of austerity. De Angelis (2017) also recognises these are latent forms of commoning that are exploited by the state during periods of austerity for the purposes of capital accumulation. However, it is important to note here exactly how it relates to this dynamic of capital accumulation. While the allotment is an example of the state's devolution of responsibility onto communities during austerity, this is less apparent in the community gardens, though they are related to capital accumulation in other ways. Again, as I previously noted, these exist in the ruins of capital—thus, while they are not directly contributing to the accumulation of capital, per se, they exist in particular spaces of the city due to the same patterns of accumulation, thus they are related to and structured by this capitalist accumulation in the city, where as I noted, they exist in the margins or ruins of this accumulation. In addition to this, these can operate in ways that the council can use as forms of what I describe as 'democracy washing'—where, despite the forms of destructive and elite-driven neoliberal land development across the city, the council can use such projects to demonstrate their work with communities, for example, as a participant described:

> "They [politicians] know if they provide a flourishing community site serving that community and providing lots of social benefits that is a massive plus for them when it comes to getting re-elected. It's a cost saving to them by getting it off their books and having someone else manage it. They have these Seven well-being goals from the Well-being of Future Generations Act, and these things that they have to be shown that they're doing in terms of community well-being and showing that their communities are resilient and these sorts of things so they can use that as a conduit for meeting their targets."

As a community development worker linked with HDCG noted, there are elements of 'democracy washing' occurring here too, in particular through meeting targets that do not necessarily reflect more genuine or deeper motivations:

> "Stuff like Wellbeing of Future Generations Act [4], how do you actually record that that is being done? Because there is just a pressure to say like 'oh quickly let's start doing community gardens in the housing association', which I think has done them good things, but...if it gets like too controlled, it doesn't actually provide too many benefits to the community."

This worker then goes on to detail how the starting point of landlord-tenant creates an unequal playing field from the beginning:

> "Often housing associations are so embarrassed of engagement because they provide such a terrible service, and then say 'why don't you do this?'...for example in HDCG, the way they got it was the landowners were like, 'you can have it'...but because I had targets it has been a bit more top-down facilitation of community...when you actually are their landlord...often that's not a good starting point."

This participant again notes the power relations that are inherent in a landlord-tenant dynamic that can and does affect community development possibilities, but also the broader issue of land ownership that I've highlighted in this section.

In the allotment, the ownership of land was connected with retaining authority over the site, as a gardener on the committee described:

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[4] The Wellbeing of Future Generations Act is legislation that requires public bodies in Wales to forefront long-term sustainability in their actions and policies.

> *"At the end of the day, you know, whether we like it or not, the council still like the thing of being in charge. And I suppose if I'm being absolutely honest as well the council have quite a decent investment in their sites really. In terms of land, if this site was sold for development you can imagine what they'd probably get."*

This gardener therefore links the council's desire of *"being in charge"* with the site as a financial investment for them. While the commons requires a shift to governance at the local level (Sievers-Glotzbach and Christinck 2021), this is only partial in these cases. If there is a difference between management rights and ownership rights (Colding and Barthel 2013), this demonstrates that the latter regularly impedes and restricts the former. However, the committee were also concerned that this made their site inherently vulnerable to development as Jim, a committee member, described:

> *"You could say that you're about 80% protected. There was a classic case up near Reading, and they thought they had the same sort of protection as we did, and the council said they needed the land because they were developing a new hospital. As it was for communities, they would then acquire the site because it was the most convenient and so-on. They went to the allotmenteers and the association, who defended it vigorously, but they lost. The biggest frustration for those people, once they got planning permission, was the hospital never materialised, but buildings and houses did."*

This is a dynamic that is emerging in Cardiff at the time of writing, with the proposal for the development of a cancer-treatment hospital on a meadow in Whitchurch, North Cardiff (Owens 2021, WalesOnline). The state's facilitation of neoliberalism (Barnett 2010; Christophers 2018) is also one where the council can utilise a moral argument (e.g. the building of a hospital, in both of these cases) for the destruction of a meadow or an allotment. Of course, the broader public is unlikely to protest against the development of a hospital, in comparison to the explicit building of houses or offices on the same land.

In this section, I have emphasised the importance of focusing on the question of land ownership and how it affects the possibilities of commoning. While Gibson-Graham et al. (2016) claim that commoning is not dependent on changing ownership structures, but on changing the dynamics of access, use, responsibility, and care, *through* commoning, I have demonstrated that this neglects the power of underlying ownership structures which can restrict and manipulate the possibilities of these other aspects of commoning to begin with. Next, I will consider the ways that "democracy" is practiced from above, and can often conflict with the interests of the gardeners.

6.4.2   The Illusion of Democracy from Above

Tied into this is the processes of decision-making within the institutions who own the land, which often can contrast with the forms of vernacular self-management on the sites themselves. This is the case in relation to the allotment, where there is a dedicated allotment officer within Cardiff Council Parks Department who I heard *a lot* about (and mostly in a negative sense). A committee member described the relationship in relation to a failed application for a beehive on site:

> *"The allotment officer insists on consulting with everyone in the neighbourhood, even people not on the site. As a result of one objection, we were told we couldn't have bees. It's stupid...So I think the frustration particularly here in Cardiff is we have an allotment officer who has engineered a situation where she's basically very much the power. And if the allotment officer decides that she doesn't want it then we don't have it, there's no discussion."*

This raises questions as to who is involved in the process of democracy within the commons and the boundaries of this management, a problem De Angelis (2017) suggests needs attention. Ultimately, an allotment officer can in fact have quite a significant (and imbalanced) impact on this decision, thus overriding the decision by the allotment gardeners themselves who were those who'd be most affected by it—a crucial principle itself of the commons (Ostrom 2015 [1990]). This is a situation whereby this particular officer has undue authority over what happens in these situations—as another gardener mentioned, the allotment officer wrote *"a*

fairly persuasive letter" to local people—and is not bound by or held accountable from below by the association itself, reflecting a general lack of democratic accountability. As the committee member describes, this allotment officer is *"very much the power"*, suggesting that there is little the association can do about these decisions. A lack of democratic accountability over such roles allows the accumulation of micro power, as this committee member described:

> *"I think the frustration lies in the fact that the person who is the actual allotment officer is not very good with communication, tends to think of herself as being a law unto themselves, and when you're faced with some difficult decisions sometimes if you're self-managing a site, you can't feel sort of reassured that she will cover your back...We've had a very long-going incident on this site which has lasted almost 2 years and there's yet to be a resolve and there's no failing on the part of our committee because we've followed the procedures to the letter."*

This is a reference to an issue whereby the allotment committee wanted to evict a problematic tenant, but the council's failings and desire to have control over this process resulted in a long and arduous process that was still unsolved. As I've noted, the right to exclude is an important element of the commons (Ostrom 2015 [1990]; De Angelis 2017). In this sense, the democratic deficit lies in the way that the requests of the self-managed committee were ignored, where a single individual *within* an institution (who is on the surface supposed to represent the institution, and the public as a result) has a stronghold (as an individual) over that process. Another committee member reflected upon this as a top-down issue:

> *"Well I think it [self-management] works as long as the council allow it to work. This fella here...he's been messing around the council for long enough, and he eventually got up here somehow, and now he won't bloody move from here...Self-management really is control by the people to me. We do various things, we put various signs up, and that type of thing, but when it comes to the crunch 'oh no you can't do that', so you can't do it. If it's self-managing and that's what management has decided then the council to me should support you shouldn't they?"*

As this gardener described, self-management was explicitly hindered by Cardiff Council, and another gardener suggested that it *"makes a mockery of self-management"* as a result. Huron (2015), for example, notes that this right to manage and exclude is crucial in the case of housing co-operatives, whereby the members decide on the rules of housing (e.g. whether to have a security camera), or how to deal with conflict and potentially asking members to leave (who may be operating in conflict to the broader collective needs). Kropotkin (2017 [1892]) didn't shy away from the necessity of such collective sanctions, either. Therefore, while rules within the commons should vary according to the needs and values defined by the commoners themselves (Sievers-Glotzbach and Christinck 2021), such possibilities are affected by broader power relations with the state, which likes to define these rules and the systems for dealing with them. I found that this was perhaps the most difficult thing in all of these spaces for different reasons. In the allotment, it was because such calls were ultimately made by the council, where the ownership of the land tended to define this institutional process of eviction—even though it often utilised the committee's vernacular information (on problematic tenants, problems on the site) to come to such decisions. But, there are times when the allotment members want to evict a particular tenant (who may be causing problems to other plot holders, or may have abandoned their plot over a long-term period), yet they do not have recourse for dealing with the situation.

The broader issue is that the neglect and inability to allow the site to properly self-manage, with one person telling me that *"we talk about it, we ask the authority, and nothing ever gets done"*. This tends to create a lot of frustration and difficulties internally, as a gardener at the allotment described:

> *"I think what that does is it makes it difficult to recruit people to do the voluntary roles. Because they feel they get so frustrated with not being able to improve the site and manage it to a beneficial way really, as a result of 1 person hiding behind procedures...So yes getting people to sit on committees as well, because they say "what's the point? We talk about it, we ask the authority, and nothing ever gets done."*

This gardener highlights how the problems of communal work that I highlighted in the last chapter—especially the lack of volunteers—might be as a result of top-down forms of control and lack of ability to feel affective in that space. Ultimately, this dynamic can create a sense of alienation that contrasts with my emphasis of these as sites of self-determined, creative, and purposeful activities. Therefore, while the gardens can be crucial areas for civic engagement and participation (Ohmer et al. 2009), it is also possible that they serve as sites of civic disengagement and disenfranchisement, as a gardener at the allotment bluntly described:

> *"Oh, the council are fucking rubbish. People who are in charge of the allotments in the council, they couldn't care a shit...I can't describe it. I just think they're a joke. That's my view of the council."*

While much of this self-management dynamic might be framed within the context of an increasingly polycentric governance framework (Morgan 2007), or even a public-commons partnership (Milburn and Russell 2019), it can remain a distinctly top-down agenda.

A lot of these dynamics were described in much more informal ways in the community gardens, where there was less direct and explicit conflict and frustration with the landowning institutions. However, the gardeners sometimes reflected on how the institutions themselves remained detached from the gardens, as a worker from a local food growing organisation notes (in reference to a separate community garden):

> *"We put in loads of trees and we put in bee bank areas and we put up signs saying 'please don't spray here, community garden'...and we plant a tree and they mow over it...and they just spray it all with chemicals. And then we have the head of the council guy come over for that department and he said 'sorry it won't happen again' and then the next week it will happen again."*

Again this contrasts with the notions of self-determination I highlighted in chapter four, which undoubtedly clash and conflict with the potential for these types of carelessness of the sites

from the outside. Given that APCG community garden was located on a council hyb site, there was often regular interaction between the gardeners and the council workers on site, which reflected some dynamics of friction between the gardeners and the council workers. This was less apparent in HDCG, which was separate from any of the Housing Association offices and so on. APCG, in contrast, was a site that felt a bit institutional, even though the council had attempted to soften the colours and aesthetic of the building, and there were regular awkward interactions between the gardeners, who often shared the staff kitchen (to make tea and sit in when raining), and the council staff. One gardener claimed that *"they were a bit nervous at the beginning, a bit suspicious of us...because we were invading their staff room and their land and they weren't quite sure what we were about."*

More broadly, within such a polycentric environment, what was apparent was the number of organisations, stakeholders, and actors that work across an increasingly complex governance field in relation to community gardens and food growing. The complex arrangements of this meant that it appeared that several organisations—usually through a mix of government and charity funding (usually the National Lottery)—often appeared to be carrying out very similar work. Though I have anonymised the organisations, I did interview people from four different organisations that, in various terms, were interested in improving the possibilities for community gardens and food growing spaces—from advocacy, networking, policy, community engagement and education. Yet in these discussions, people regularly reflected not only on the complex arrangement of much of these polycentric governance arrangements (including their short-term cycles of funding), but also how various governance structures themselves can and do create unequal playing fields. Ostrom et al. (1999) emphasised the importance of multi-level (polycentric) governance systems that were diverse in character in order to manage the commons (especially the inevitable conflicts between groups etc). However, rather than necessarily helping solve conflict between groups, these governance processes can easily produce confusion, conflict, competition and inequality (especially in terms of access to land).

One participant described how the lack of transparency in the governance of these processes creates problems for citizens:

> *"I've heard of some people getting access quite easy and others having issues going back and forth…Sometimes it's just a case of knowing who to go to and that could be the main stumbling block. I've spoken to people who have literally gone round and round in circles for about 3 years trying to find out who that bit of land belongs to…Is it local authority? Which Department in local authority? And who do I need to speak to? It's even just speaking to the right people and getting things moving."*

Again, this participant highlights the issue of land—who owns the land is a democratic concern yet is often concealed from the public. They also claim that it is about knowing *who* to contact, suggesting that it might be knowledge of a particular person or a particular department, which in turn can favour citizens who are well-connected and have a pre-existing understanding of these arrangements. A worker in a Cardiff food organisation reflected on this inequality in working across various community gardens:

> *"It really depends on who you're working with. Some of the council workers are excellent and have been really supportive, and on other sites they just haven't at all, it just feels like they've been working against us."*

Ultimately, Nora demonstrates again that the state itself does not provide a universalised "flattened" service across the city, but it can vary depending on who is responsible for that area (whether geographically or departmentally), again revealing it to be an *individual* issue created by the structures of the institution itself. These critiques so far do not reflect some of the genuine *interest* and passion shown by many community-based organisations, and some individuals within the council, in doing work in this area. This was the case with the Housing Association, who appeared to be committed to participatory practices, as well as an experienced and enthusiastic community development worker in Cardiff Council who worked with APCG. During the early stages of the COVID pandemic, many of these actors contributed to establishing Edible Cardiff, an organisation to bring together a relatively chaotic community gardening/urban agriculture/food growing scene in Cardiff into a more intentional network. Of course, such efforts are important, and again contrast with the critical perspective I've taken in this chapter. This suggests that the state operates in somewhat contradictory ways, even at this

level, reflecting the state as a relatively fragmented and non-unitary institution (Abrams 1988; Jessop 2015). Abrams (1988), for example, considers the phantasmagorical notion of the state as a unitary entity problematic, which obscures the relative disunity of it, as a fragmentary and fragile arrangement of institutionalised political power. There are broader issues, also, such as questions of the large-scale infrastructure provided by the state, which in many ways equally facilitate the existence of these gardens in the first place yet remain relatively hidden—an issue that Harvey (2017) points out as an important aspect of the state.

Another participant, a council worker, emphasised their attempts in providing a more coordinated approach across the city within the council itself:

> *"There's lots of community gardens around the city all working on an ad-hoc basis. It happens that somebody has got the right person to give them authority. Some have got a lease agreement, some have got a license agreement, some have no paperwork at all associated with them. But we want to have a more coordinated approach so that people know who to approach, and also it's not the same people always getting the land. You do have a community group who knows how to ask and knows my name, or the person in parks or street departments, then they've got a piece of land...So you have to have a terms of reference and that anyone in the community can be involved and it's not just the people who've asked otherwise it becomes quite cliquey and niche."*

While on the one hand this might reflect an attempt at organising what does legitimately seem to be a chaotic system, it also demonstrates that this is a system that is only chaotic because of the council in the first place. The lack of knowledge of these governance arrangements (including who to contact, knowing who owns the land, the type of agreement the group might need) all derive from demands created and sustained by the council—they own the land, and create a complex governance system to access this land, and then attempt to coordinate and fix a problem that they have largely created in the first place. In this sense, then, the state often appears to be like a dog chasing its own tale, by trying to solve problems which it is often involved in creating.

This same participant in the council also reflected on some of these problems at an electoral level:

> *"There are so many [barriers]. If you get a block in either officer or politician who is not supportive. They were very against mapping initially and they were concerned that I was going to advertise them [the land], and instead of saying that we can advertise the process said that people can contact us."*

The council worker here claims that there was, again, a reluctance to democratise the process of accessing land, where they did not want the land to be openly advertised to the public but instead proposed a process whereby it remains fundamentally hidden and ordered by the council themselves (through groups contacting them). Ultimately, the crucial point again is land ownership, but also the governance structures of this ownership (who has a say over the land, and who does not), and the associated *individual* within these structures—and as I've noted throughout this section, such individual positions are inherently structural.

While on the one hand, this section demonstrates the ambiguous and complex nature of governance in commoning, on the other it also reveals quite a clear perspective from above, where there is a lack of trust in communities and a desire to retain control of governance processes. This raises some important questions for the commons, especially given the role of the state within it tends to be contested (Thompson 2015; Bollier 2016; Milburn and Russell 2019; Arbell et al. 2020). How to relate to the state which also expresses forms of internal conflict, as well as embodying a number of internal contradictions, is a difficult challenge for commoners. In the next section, I explore the micro ways that this authority is retained through the politics of restriction.

6.4.3   The Politics of Restriction

In many ways, the politics of restriction was what most obviously defined the relationship between the vernacular and the formal governance in the everyday sense. It should be noted that the gardeners often understood this as an everyday experience of *feeling* limited by these

institutions, above anything more widely generalisable (as anti-state, for example), and some gardeners of course had quite mixed and contrasting feelings about these institutions—from the types of dynamics I've referred to here, to being grateful for the Council or Housing Association for allowing them to use the land, for the support in bureaucratic matters, funding, and so on.

However, while the vernacular and official can sometimes be brought together in a more productive way, it certainly takes time, and more often than not it appeared to produce a more restrictive sensibility than a productive and facilitating one. Such restriction is a significant part of the governance of these spaces and is defined by what institutional powers restrict as well as permit. This is by its very nature a top-down process, since by necessity there must be a level of coercive power by those restricting something, and thus it usually is accompanied by a set of limits but also an appearance of permission (e.g. a parent telling a child *"you can go out to play, but you have to be back by 9"*). When a group is given usage of a piece of land (permission to use it), it is usually tied up with certain rules—things that can and can't be done, legislation, health and safety, leases etc [Appendix E]. This, ultimately, is how these sites are understood from above, as a council employee mentioned in relation to community gardens:

> *"We can help to draft up a licence agreement, it can literally just be a couple of sides of A4 saying 'this is what you've got the land for, this is what you can do on the land, and this is what you definitely can't do on the land. If we've not said you can or can't do it then please get in touch with us before you do it because we can't cover all bases...if we don't give you a list of do's and don'ts how do you expect to know what to do on this land'."*

This is a dynamic which again reveals a power imbalance between those who own the land (the official), and those who use it (the vernacular). Bureaucracy and Health and Safety were often the main points at which tension, conflict and contrast emerged between the vernacular and official. As Müller (2014) notes, such an open-ended and creative space shouldn't be overwhelmed or predefined by rules and restrictions, since this limits the possibilities for people to be able to have the time and freedom to pursue an activity as one sees fit—a creative process I explored in chapter 4. These restrictions were notable throughout my fieldwork and

were often extremely minor situations, yet they accumulate to serve as quite a significant experience for the gardeners. This emerged often in reference to social gatherings and communal activities in the allotment, clear in my fieldnotes:

> *"Lots of mention of frustration at council rules. They used to have drinks up here regularly, on Sunday afternoon the bell would just ring and they'd have some beers."*

> *"Council person not allowing them to have bonfires, didn't allow them to have bees."*

Ultimately, the gardeners at the allotment found these rules often quite restrictive to the forms of self-management and demonstrated a lack of vernacular understanding of the site. At the micro level this is frustrating, of course, as a gardener noted:

> *"When we first came up here it was very social. 'Cause we'd go up to say hello or something and then come back plastered, 'cause we used to have a couple of glasses of red wine. And she'd say 'I'm just going up to see Kev to pay the subs', and would come back hammered. And at Christmas time we'd have a Christmas do and we'd have smoked salmon and scrambled eggs and a glass of wine, kids used to do pumpkins, and we had a raffle...then the council started getting all this PC thing—'you can't do this, you can't have a drink."*

Whether or not the banning of the alcohol in the allotment is "right or wrong" is not the concern here, but more the reaction from people on the ground to this. People aren't simply frustrated with these rules because they are against them per se, but because it derives from an institutional and official lack of understanding of the vernacular. First, I suggest that they are against the outside imposition of rules, since it tends to imply "stupidity" and lack of ability for people to define their own rules, regulations, and methods of monitoring—which is a crucial aspect of the commons (Rogge and Theesfeld 2018). Secondly, I suggest that they are against

these because they can limit the social possibilities of the sites, and further diminish people's ability to organise social gatherings, events, and celebrations.

Many of these restrictions appeared to be reactions to minor incidents elsewhere. For example, it became clear that the banning of bonfires on the allotment occurred in response to a bonfire in England, where the smoke blew onto a major road and resulted in a serious accident, and therefore bonfires were banned. From a macro perspective, such a ban might have prevented other accidents such as this occurring. The question is whether pure vernacular knowledge of the situation would allow for such macro understandings of the situation to emerge and to be able to respond and act appropriately to it. In this instance, it was an example of how information can become distorted at this vernacular level, thus one of the problematic elements of the vernacular might be described in terms of gossiping and the distortion and muddying of information at this level. Ultimately, I heard several stories of the nature of why bonfires were banned, where each gardener had a different story, though in general tended to know that it was a bonfire, somewhere in England (some said an allotment, others said a rugby club), that resulted in a car accident. However, the vernacular absolutely lacked detail and precision about this. In this sense, while the macro is unable to understand the granular vernacular, the macro can also become distorted at the granular level. Another gardener made a crucial point in relation to this, however:

> *"So instead of looking at this place and saying, 'it's not going to cause a problem, although people do complain', they said 'that's it, carte blanche...no more bonfires'."*

As the gardener notes, such a decision is ultimately based on a lack of sympathy for particular local contexts, where such bonfires, as he noted, are unlikely to cause such a problem since they are not located near a major road. Similarly, in HDCG, an accident in another community garden resulted in the aforementioned blanket ban on power tools:

> *"I think what happened was somebody up North Wales, they had an accident up there in one of the gardens, and as soon as they heard something went*

wrong, we had to have no power tools and we had to come down the garden with a buddy."

This was often understood to be part of a broader risk aversion within institutions. One of the Linc Housing Association community development workers also reflected on the difficulties in convincing the HA to allow gardeners to set up a bee home:

"For example, we wanted to put a solitary bee home up, and the amount of risk assessments we had to do for that…if I was a member of the community and I wasn't doing it professionally, I wouldn't have done it, because I had to do so many. And in the end I produced a 2 page reference thing about how solitary bees are not dangerous at all, and they still didn't let me put it in the place I wanted to put it in."

While vernacular forms of creativity and experience is often overlooked in formal procedures (Bendt et al. 2013), I suggest that these forms of local creativity and experience are explicitly hindered, not passively overlooked, through these forms of restrictions. These are dynamics which I suggest can actively restrict and limit many of the elements that I referred to in the previous chapters—including the social life of the spaces, their forms of self-determined practices, and the everyday communism that produce and reproduce the site. A worker at a local organisation that advised groups about land described this lack of trust of communities from above:

"There's a lot of reasons why they should do more of this thing, they are just risk averse and they don't trust communities very much. Local Authorities often want to see some sort of business or management plan, really heavy handed sort of tactics really for some small spaces. There was this one up in Ponty a year or two ago and the group just disbanded in the end because Rhondda Cynon Taf Council just wanted so much information and jump through so many hoops, and all they wanted to do was to put a few raised beds on a grass verge."

While these are everyday reminders to the gardeners as to who is in control of these sites, they are also frequently subverted since they are quite restrictive to the goals and tasks of the gardeners. This demonstrates the ways that this vernacular law doesn't always align with formal state law (Bollier 2019), yet also how this "living" vernacular law extends beyond formal law in various ways. As Graeber (2010) notes (in a similar way to Scott (2012)), even the most totalitarian rules only function through informal and improvised interpretation of the rules and the cooperation amongst people on the ground. Though Colding et al. (2013) argue for top-down facilitation of the bottom-up commons (like community gardens), I suggest in this that the majority of people's experience on-the-ground tends to be one of restrictive and risk-averse nature from above, rather than facilitation. In this sense, community gardens exist largely *in spite* of this. As Scott (1999; 2012) argued, using the example of the work-to-rule strike, the function of spaces (in Scott's case, the workplace) depend upon people's informal and improvised practices that extend beyond formalised rules. Therefore, when rules are followed meticulously, the spaces no longer make sense, no longer "work", on the ground.

For example, HDCG were told that the Health and Safety requirements of the site meant that they were unable to use any petrol or electrical tools. The gardeners of course knew that the creation and maintenance of that site was impossible without the use of these tools, as Elin described:

> *"We weren't allowed power tools to use—health and safety. My argument was 'we use secateurs, we use forks, we use spades, we use trowels, they're all as dangerous as power tools...' So I went down and I bought power tools but we don't keep them here. We charge them up, use them, take them back. What the eye doesn't see."*

One of the gardeners, Keith, had a lifetime of skilled work as a labourer—primarily as a sheet metal worker—and was frustrated by these restrictions in the garden:

> *"Well I used to be a bloody sheet metal worker, and they're saying I'm not allowed a hand saw down here. It's ridiculous."*

Therefore, given the type of acquired skills that I noted in the last chapter amongst retired gardeners, such restrictions are extremely patronising. Elin at HDCG also reflects her frustration with the health and safety on site, which she tends to associate with a lack of trust.

> *"There was a guy Rhys from North Wales who was a nightmare. From Wales and West. Control freak. I didn't get along with him. He wouldn't let us do anything...the health and safety is mad. 'You can't do this, you can't do that'. But Rhys was never here, he bloody lived in North Wales telling us what to do. We just ignore it. We're all old, we know how to garden and use tools. We're not stupid. We just do it anyway, quietly come down here and get on with it."*

One of the interesting dynamics here is that the gardener refers to distance, and the further away the authority, the less legitimacy they have (since they cannot possibly understand the vernacular without a physical presence), but also the easier it is to subvert their demands. In fact, Dewey (1954 [1927], p.41) points towards something similar by claiming that the state *"rules but does not regulate".* In this sense, these vernacular practices tend to happen *despite*, or at least beneath, the heavy weight of the state (as Colin Ward (1996a [1973]) was also keen to emphasise). Bigell (2015) has a slightly different outlook on this relationship, by distinguishing between the public (who usually own the land, provide infrastructure, etc) and the co-operative level (who shape and use this land). Based on this, Bigell (2015) understands the state as a potential facilitator—and in this sense, it does provide important infrastructure for these sites. Bigell (2015) therefore claims that the real antagonism is with the private sphere. I have however argued throughout that there remains an antagonistic (though not always) relationship with the state as well, not only in the way that it facilitates further privatisation of land (a process which defines a careful selection of urban gardening land), but in the way that the landowner (who possess alienating rights) can affect and restrict what Bigell (2015) describes as the co-operative level.

One afternoon gardening at HDCG, we were discussing some of these challenges amongst ourselves:

> Elin: "We have discussions about what we want to do down here, and if we want to build something we've got to discuss it with somebody then."

> Keith: "Before, what we used to do was come down here in say January time, and they'd ask us what our plan was for the year. We used to tell them and they'd write it down. But the thing is, you can't really plan anything because everything changes so much doesn't it. You go by the seasons and all that."

This brief discussion highlights a few key points. Elin reflects again on the type of "permission" that is required if they wanted to alter the space in any way, and Keith's suggestions are a crucial way of demonstrating how the vernacular and official operate in different ways. The official attempts to formalise, plan, and schedule, while Keith recognises that this is very difficult to do in reality, and instead that they need to have a more flexible understanding that is shaped by the changing seasons and needs of the garden in *real-time*. This demonstrates how the vernacular by necessity works beneath the demands of such plans and ordering, where there needs to be a certain amount of flexibility and on the ground knowledge of the situation as it unfolds. Keith also mentioned that the housing association no longer "bother", partly because they have eventually learnt to trust the gardeners.

However, there was also sometimes a blind eye turned by the authorities themselves towards this—as though it was some form of bureaucratic game where both sides had to pretend to play within the rules, while bypassing them whenever the rules might actually come in to play, as Elin of HDCG describes again:

> "So we had this bloody pump flask that we had to use for teas and coffees, and in the end I thought sod this and brought one down (a transportable camping stove), started using it, and nobody said a word so I bought another one down. They've all been here, even the CEO of Wales & West came down for our open day, she's seen it and never said a word...I think somebody that was new to the job and was being a bit oversensitive."

Thus, such forms of bureaucracy aren't concerned with how something is necessarily done (since they turn a blind eye to it), only who is responsible *if or when* it goes wrong. Therefore, it is possible that they in fact simply exist to protect those authorities *if* an accident happens, whereby in such a scenario they could highlight in their formal papers what their rules stated (and therefore absolve their responsibility for it).

The potential for subversion was more difficult in APCG, which was located at the back of a council building (the hyb) with council employees in the building every day. This spatial closeness between the gardeners and council workers was often quite problematic, as I noted in my fieldnotes:

> *"Interesting interaction with the official hyb person (who wears clothes with the hyb badge on)….they [the gardeners] always feel like they have to run things through them—the groups seems to act quite horizontally until there's the presence of an official person there, and the mood changes. The energy changes and is directed towards them. They had to ask for permission to drill into the outside of the building for hanging baskets—always a reminder of who owns this site."*

This meant that there was a general appeasing of council's rules and regulations, rather than necessarily subverting them. One gardener told me *"do first, ask after",* and another that *"it keeps the powers that be happy".* One morning I arrived at the site, and one of the members was planning to attach a hanging basket to the wall of the building, and said he had to *"check with the man if he's on board with the idea."* However, while these demonstrate and reiterate the ways that the vernacular self-management, and the related dynamics of self-determined aspects that I noted previously, were restricted in ordinary and prosaic ways, there was also the odd opportunities for quiet subversions, as well, partly seen in the aesthetics of the site, as Miriam at APCG noted:

> *"This all came from the council and they wanted to set up a community garden, and they wanted to make sure we only grew edibles. So the fact we grow flowers now isn't really what the council want."*

This reflects that a part of this is a conflict over the aesthetics and purpose of the site (and in this case, a conflict between edibles and flowers). At other times, the casual subversion of these rules was extremely minimal—from using ladders or tools when they were not permitted, or comments such as *"the authorities wouldn't like this"* when carrying out a task. Gidwani and Baviskar (2011, p.42) argue that part of the process of commoning is about evading the fixity of law, where the very act of commoning, and commons itself, survives by *"dancing in and out of the state's gaze"* and by escaping its notice. Keith at HDCG claimed, *"we wait till they gone and then we do it."* Similarly, I noted about the bee issue in relation to the allotment previously in this chapter, with a gardener further claiming, *"the worst thing we did was go down the official route, we should have just done it."* This was also reflected by another committee member in relation to plans to alter the car park, *"I think they'd probably say no, so I think we just do it anyway."* While there are times when subversive acts are possible, since there is no direct authoritative presence controlling what the gardeners are doing, the potential of eviction can and does at times restrict these possibilities in other ways. Thus, in the allotment, the potential for being evicted for breaking these rules demonstrates that the ultimate authority is still retained by the council:

> *"We used to enjoy a glass of wine on a Sunday lunchtime, and it went well. But, how can you say, the council will not have alcohol on the site now so fair enough. You don't want to be in conflict with the council because they can stop you being up here. They cancel your tenancy, and that's not wanted."*

Therefore, the council do not need to impose these restrictions directly, since the *threat* of eviction results in an element of internal policing. My broader point here, however, is to suggest that there is very little to distinguish this type of external and internal policing since, in many ways, I witnessed several examples where the former shapes the latter. Therefore, even if it is now widely accepted that power isn't simply a matter of command and control (Allen 2011), Graeber (2004, pp.71–72) suggests that such forms of orthodox control still becomes infused in

the everyday dynamics of self-policing and more fragmented and horizontal forms of power. Thus, for Graeber (2004, p.72), this form of control permeates everyday life to such an extent that *"most of us have given up even thinking of crossing the innumerable lines and barriers he creates"*. Thus, while forms of self-governance might be apparent, there is always a point whereby the forms of coercive control (e.g. of the state) will become actualised. However, while Graeber (2004) is critical of post-structuralist theory in this instance, it seems that this is what Foucault (1995 [1975]) was describing, where self-governance is consistent with the regime within which it operates. Thus, it doesn't emerge independently but is directly related to the potential of orthodox command and control forms of power. Another gardener at the allotment reflected on this relationship between the vernacular and official forms of policing:

> *"We create our own bureaucracy though, because it's self-managing, when we took the plot on they [the committee] gave us this big long list of rules which the council have applied and said we've got to tick the box...but when I was in Merthyr, they had a couple of sheds with chimneys sticking out of them...perhaps we're too conformist."*

However, this internal policing is not always defined by the threat of external authority, since as I've noted the gardeners also define their own principles, rules, and norms (even informally) that extend beyond the formalised ones. For example, if using a banned power tool, and a gardener is confident to use it, then they might accept this as a legitimate risk (which was the case in HDCG). On the other hand, since a bonfire might be reported by someone else (e.g. a neighbour) or pose risks to others (e.g. the vehicle accident) or hedgehogs (who often hide in the rubble), this is a law that is not worth subverting—thus, gardeners tend to accept the logic of banning bonfires because of these reasons. There are ambiguities within this, too. Since a cook at the garden could still give people food poisoning with a food license, it suggests that it is the skill of the practice (of cooking) rather than the license itself that is important (although there are legal requirements), with the license perhaps being a symbol of a necessary skill or practice that the gardeners have acquired. However, the institutions demand a license for the gardeners if they have a BBQ or event involving food (in each of these cases). Therefore, subversion doesn't occur at all times and for any reason—doing so would suggest a lack of awareness of the practices and associated risks by the gardeners. Instead, subversion is carefully calculated to

specific tasks that are likely to go unnoticed but likewise are carried out in relation to broader risk factors (especially to themselves and other people):

> *"I remember seeing a young couple who had a plot and they had an apple tree and one of the branches was a bit iffy. I said; 'You've got a young family, if the branch is dodgy I would cut it off'. But the guy said he had to apply for to the council. I said 'refer them to me' because I was on the committee. I said 'just do it, don't wait for them'. If you see a situation that could cause damage to somebody that could be rectified immediately then do it. And that applies to everything."*

In this way, then, gardeners are quite specific around which laws and rules they subvert, and in this way there is an element of self-policing within these institutional frameworks, but also is reflective of a careful form of infrapolitics (Scott 2008 [1985]; 2012). In this sense, if the commons *"require the active participation of the people in formulating and enforcing the rules that govern them"* (Bollier 2012, p.212), these sites reflect a dynamic whereby on the one hand, the top-down and externally enforced rules conflict with this understanding of the commons, but on the other, the gardeners attempt to subvert this and in doing so create their own vernacular laws *despite* these top-down structures.

For De Angelis (2017), the commons must officially be defined by two particular rights—the right to exclude, and the right to manage. In this section, I have demonstrated the struggle between the vernacular and the official in terms of the right to manage the sites. Therefore, *"these two rights are the rights that commons systems in particular must have at a minimum in order to exist."* (De Angelis 2017, p.255). Once again, the ambiguity of these sites as neither commons, state, or capitalist systems, but an almost uncomfortable and awkward intersection between them, becomes clear. The gardens themselves cannot be legitimately considered commons without this explicit right to manage since, as noted, it only does so beneath the dynamics of state control. But, this is not to discount the other arguments I have made throughout this thesis for these as commons, or more specifically, the acts of commoning within them, but it is that these as "actually existing commons" (Eizenberg 2012) needs to be questioned in these terms. De Angelis (2017) notes similarly that although a University or

factory are not commons based on this criteria, there are elements of intersecting commons systems within them (alongside capitalist systems). This is why it's more appropriate to refer to this as arguably forms of "actually existing commoning", not commons, since as De Angelis (2017) notes, commoning is this process of redefining and negotiating such boundaries, not a finished "end" point.

6.5 Chapter Summary

If the commons consists of people themselves determining the rules, traditions, and values of the spaces and resources (Bollier 2020b), I argue that this is a broad principle in each of these gardens through exploring the dynamics of self-management. I then demonstrated how this was a challenging endogenous process through exploring the various internal conflicts of vernacular self-management. However, this chapter suggests there is greater complexity and ambiguity of this dynamic as it relates to the exogenous factors, since the authority over these spaces is retained by landowning institutions (the local state or housing associations in this case). While the vernacular forms of everyday governance remain an important point of interest for the commons and commoning, understanding the contradictions of the relationship between the vernacular and the state is crucial. While Bendt et al. (2013) noted that the vernacular is often *overlooked* by such institutions, this suggests an overly passive role, where I instead emphasise how these institutions have an explicit agenda in retaining control and authority of this land, and therefore inherently come into conflict with the vernacular world. Thus, the vernacular is not only misunderstood by the state, but the state actively attempts to control and order it, as Scott (1999) also noted.

Arbell et al. (2020) note the various ways that the commons are understood to relate with the state and capital—either existing against and beyond them (Caffentzis and Federici 2014), as an escape from them (Bresnihan and Byrne 2015), or entangled with them (De Angelis 2017). I suggest that they remain entangled with them in this case, yet rarely in any clear productive way. While it should be noted that the two community gardens have elements of a productive relationship with the state, this facilitation still only occurs because the state owns the land in the first place and produces the necessity of facilitation. In other words, facilitation is a result of an existing power imbalance above anything else, both in terms of who owns the land as well as

who "governs" and ultimately has control over it. Therefore, while there is minimal genuine facilitation or enabling occurring through these institutions, such lack of facilitation certainly contrasts with Cardiff Council's committed facilitative role with urban developers (Thomas 2003; Hall and Smith 2011; Gale and Thomas 2018). Indeed, while Cumbers et al. (2017) claim that these are examples of the reclaiming of wasteland for social need over the dominant neoliberal urbanism, the careful "handing over" of land in these situations happens precisely because it is *unprofitable* land. These sites exist *because* of the state's neoliberal priorities, and I suggest that this is not because it saves any significant amount of money through the devolution of responsibility, but simply because the land goes through a neoliberal filter in the first place—it is unprofitable and useless land from the point of view of a neoliberal state. However, related to this also, is the process whereby the state can also use these in a process of "democracy washing", demonstrating and cultivating an image of care, community spirit, and devolved power, while on the other hand, its handover of urban land to developers does far more damage to these elements.

While these processes *can* and *do* highlight the neoliberal priorities of the state, the gardens also reveal something more empowering once considered beyond and beneath the realm of the state and capital. They are examples, and warnings surely (since internally they are imperfect), of the possibilities and challenges of self-management. They provide an opportunity for ordinary non-politicised groups such as these to experiment with and develop forms of self-management that certainly exist in conflict with (or at the very least restricted and structured by) the state, but also point beyond it. In this sense, it certainly questions Ostrom's (2015 [1990]) assumption of the commons being able to co-exist with state-capitalist society. While the state attempts to rule, order, and organise these dynamics, the people on the ground can at times develop practices—largely through their vernacular knowledge and accompanying practices—that extend beyond and despite these limitations.

7 CONCLUSIONS

7.1 Introduction

> *"The need of activity is one of the most fundamental urges of man. Watch the*
> *child and see how strong is his instinct for action, for movement, for doing*
> *something. Strong and continuous. It is the same with the healthy man. His*
> *energy and vitality demand expression. Permit him to do the work of his choice,*
> *the thing he loves, and his application will know neither weariness nor shirking.*
> *You can observe this in the factory when he is lucky enough to own a garden or*
> *patch of ground to raise some flowers or vegetables on." (Berkman 2021 [1929],*
> *p.255)*

Despite the vast theorisation around the commons and commoning, it remains relatively under-
explored empirically (Bresnihan and Byrne 2015; Euler 2018). While some have tentatively
pointed towards urban gardens as forms of commons (Eizenberg 2012; Bigell 2015; Corcoran
et al. 2017; Ginn and Ascensão 2018), there is a tendency to over-romanticise the *explicitly*
political nature of both the commons and urban gardening. Doing so fails to capture the
everyday, ordinary, and prosaic moments of commoning (including all its possibilities,
challenges, disruptions, and "contradictions"). This thesis set-out to address this through an in-
depth ethnographic exploration of the everyday politics of commoning, with a focus on retired
gardeners. In this final chapter I summarise the overall contributions of this thesis, tentatively
diving into its wider political implications, as well as recognising the methodological potential
for other researchers interested in post-capitalist possibilities.

7.2 Implications and Contributions of the Thesis

This thesis explores the everyday politics of commoning that draws on a diversity of theoretical
work grounded in rich empirical detail. This is an important intervention in a set of literatures
which can often overlook the distinctly ordinary dynamics of commoning in everyday life,

where there is a tendency to prematurely attach a coherent political meaning to the dynamics of commoning. Instead, the everyday focus uncovers under-explored political elements which reveal the possibilities and limitations of commoning (in theory and practice). By focusing on the transition to retirement, this research introduces a novel intervention that understands the dynamics of commoning as a process that emerges (and perhaps recedes) as people pass through the life course. I have highlighted how this can be read through people's changing relation with capital during retirement—both in terms of the spheres of production and reproduction. In particular, the search for meaningful social practices is a type of self-valorising activity that contrasts with people's experience of work, and exists in the vacuum of capital. In this sense, commoning becomes apparent in the vacuums that cannot be reached or understood by capital. People come together in these situations to feel powerful, to regain some sense of control over their lives through what they do together, which is meaningful, creative, and pleasurable. This is a unique contribution of seeing the mundane pleasures of commoning, rather than seeing it as either an explicit political strategy or one that is satisfying basic needs of subsistence. By using Graeber's (2010; 2011; 2014) theory of everyday communism to explore the dynamics that produce and reproduce these sites (the people and the gardens), I contributed a spatial reading of mutual aid and everyday communism, while also exploring the ways that people's acquired skills produce a dynamic of complementarity that are an important feature of commoning. I then explored the conflicting aspects of governance that unfold in the everyday moments of these spaces, by contrasting the vernacular experiences of the gardeners with the institutions that own the land. These forms of commoning exist beneath and despite the rigidity of these institutions (who attempt to stamp a different logic onto these sites), bringing the work of James C. Scott (2008 [1985]; 2012) into these mundane experiences. However, I also warn against seeing the vernacular as simply restricted from above, highlighting the internal friction within forms of vernacular governance. Therefore, through rich observation, this thesis provides further nuance to the politics of commoning, understanding its political possibilities and limitations within and beyond contemporary capitalist society. In the remainder of this chapter, I address three themes that cut across the thesis, providing further detail of the contributions of the research.

7.2.1   *Everyday Life and the Political Possibilities of the Ordinary*

This thesis provides detailed empirical and theoretical exploration of the ordinary politics of everyday life, which is an important political intervention, since it contrasts with the trend to

subsume these moments of everyday life as only functioning for the ongoing motor of capital (Cleaver 1992b). As I've claimed throughout, such 'critique' in the social sciences can often overlook a great deal of the substance of ordinary life, in turn enclosing political possibilities and failing to imagine a life beyond capital. In the introduction to a newly illustrated version of Kropotkin's classic 'Mutual Aid', Graeber and Grubačić (2021, p.23) argue similarly:

> *"For the last few decades we have heard little else than relentless exhortations on cynical strategies used to increase our respective (social, cultural, or material) capital. These are framed as critiques. But if all you're willing to talk about is that which you claim to stand against, if all you can imagine is what you claim to stand against, then in what sense do you actually stand against it?"*

I highlighted a similar critique in the literature review, not only through some of the urban gardening work which critiques the supposedly "critical" reading of these as sites of neoliberalisation (Crossan et al. 2016; Cumbers et al. 2017), but also anarchist (Ward 1996a [1973]; Scott 2012; Pickerill 2017; Ince and Bryant 2019; Springer 2020) and Marxist Autonomist (Holloway 2010a; Cleaver 2011) critiques regarding the supposed domination of everyday life by macro structures. Much of this stems from an association with a binary reading that separates the micro and macro, or what I've highlighted as the endogenous and exogenous throughout this thesis (De Angelis 2017), a concern I address more concretely in the next section.

This thesis therefore contributes to the increasing academic attention and enthusiasm for destabilising and questioning the authority and centrality of capitalism in everyday life (Gibson-Graham 1996; Graeber 2001; White and Williams 2014; Williams et al. 2014; Ince and Hall 2017; Tsing 2017). But, I edge slightly away from the influential work of Gibson-Graham (1996), and more towards the work of Graeber (2001; 2011) and Tsing (2017). Graeber, for example, is critical of prioritising an all-encompassing and structuring capitalism as the point of analysis, but doesn't extend his non-capitalist analysis towards a diverse or fragmented economy, but instead understands the forms of non-alienated (Graeber 2004) and everyday communistic (Graeber 2001; 2011) practices that proliferate everyday life. I provided empirical observations to these dynamics, adding complexity and detail to the notion that anarchistic

behaviours exist within the spheres of ordinary life (Ward 1996a [1973]; Scott 2012; White and Williams 2014). Through this empirical engagement, I not only highlighted the ways that they point beyond the logic of capital, but can at times become entangled with it (whether through the acquired skills of work, or the reclaiming and appropriation of materials for commoning purposes). In this sense, they might be best understood as peri-capitalist practices and spaces (Tsing 2017), which step in and out of capital at various points.

I highlighted the self-valorising practices (Valle 2012; Crossan et al. 2016; Cumbers et al. 2017) that point beyond the logic of capital, and how this might be understood in the context of retirement (which, itself, I have argued is an interesting point of attention for exploring contemporary capitalist society). No longer determined by the work needs of capital, people can pursue activities for values that extend beyond the reach of capital (in its vacuum). Broadly, I argue that this reflects a type of non-alienated work which has its own intrinsic value, a dynamic which is often undermined in neoliberal capitalism (Sennett 2009). This is a process that provides an increased sense of control and belonging (Eizenberg 2012), which is crucial given the dynamics of alienation from one another (Federici 2018) as well as alienation from the process of what we do. I demonstrated how urban gardening is a poignant example of this, not only due to the social activities of the spaces, but also the way that it reflects people's ability to be affective, creative, and constructive in what they do. This is an important finding of the research. These micro dynamics are a struggle against people's sense of alienation in capitalist society, both alienated from one another but also from their actions and practices.

While allotments in particular have often been understood as a struggle for non-waged activity and subsistence (Moselle 1995; Miller 2015), I argue that these urban gardens don't appear to be preoccupied by such notions of basic subsistence, but are more defined by satisfying life in ways that is broadly neglected within a capitalist society. In this sense, while the former was a type of resistance against waged work, this is more a dynamic of quietly and subversively attending to one's life beyond work in various ways, including ways that highlight pleasurable and positive aspects, rather than simply a struggle. This contributes to a distinct neglect in the urban gardening literature around its potential for being a non-alienated practice, which has only been briefly attended to (Ward 1996a [1973]; Müller 2012; Cumbers et al. 2017). I argue that a fundamental aspect of these are a reclamation of a form of conscious life activity

(Holloway 2010b) that is otherwise alienated in everyday life, where such a refusal to allow money to determine our activities can implicitly reflect a rejection of capitalism (Holloway 2010a). But, these shouldn't just be understood as reactive, but ones that reclaim space time and labour from capitalist valorisation (Cumbers 2015).

While it is possible to over-romanticise these self-valorising activities, I have suggested that the way that they negotiate and construct ways of doing that fulfil their lives despite and sometimes beyond capital remains important. Although they do not contest or challenge these structures to begin with, it is important to note that commoning in the interstitial vacuums of a capitalistic landscape doesn't simply function for the reproduction of these structures. Thus, rather than confronting capital where it's strongest, it exists where it is weakest, in the vacuums where it cannot reach, and in the spaces that it cannot comprehend.

As De Angelis (2017) notes, many commoners don't engage with commoning as an explicit identity. Therefore, this thesis has provided an important contribution of understanding the ambiguity of this position by highlighting the everyday actions and practices of commoning (through gardening), and how these are articulated and understood by the gardeners themselves. Therefore, when I use the term "ordinary", not only am I referring to the unarticulated and implicit political dynamics within these sites, but also an appreciation of starting from where people are and understanding the endless possibilities, challenges, opportunities, and pitfalls that are embedded within the present. Thus, rather than being signs of the prefiguration of a new society, they are more a dynamic that reflects ordinary pleasures and achievements through the simple shared practice of gardening (Guerlain and Campbell 2016). This questions what is and isn't a political act and contributes to understanding the less explicitly political forms of agency and action that are not imposed from the outside (Guerlain and Campbell 2016), instead reflecting a quiet political process (Smith and Jehlička 2013; Hankins 2017; Kneafsey et al. 2017). It is more a daily and quiet practice of satisfying life (Smith and Jehlička 2013). I have therefore explored such practices and possibilities of commoning as not simply the privilege of the explicitly political but as aspects of everyday life that many are already practicing and familiar with, which offers some political potential beyond this thesis.

This is an issue that Sennett (in Amin et al. 2020) has picked up on in a discussion with De Angelis, suggesting that there is a separation between the life world and the world of social movements. Much of the critical attention towards the commons has focused on the latter, while neglecting the ways that commoning can often simply be about *"making life work"* (Sennett in Amin et al. 2020), rather than an explicitly political strategy. This dynamic also seemed to motivate Kropotkin's (2014; 2017) and Ward's (1996a [1973]) work also, but has been lost amongst many contemporary leftist writers whereby the quiet dynamics of mutual aid only exist in the service of broader capitalist needs and reproduction, such as the over-worked and stale debate on the Big Society (see Featherstone et al. 2012; Levitas 2012; Williams et al. 2014 for a more nuanced debate). While it is important to consider the ways that these sites are framed by broader political-economic dynamics, doing so can often reduce the agency of those involved at ground-level, and overlook some of the political potential of these other dynamics which in fact can counter this neoliberal logic (Williams et al. 2014; Crossan et al. 2016; Cumbers et al. 2017). In this sense, I'd also argue that the dynamic of neoliberal subjectification in these spaces is overstated. The idea of a neoliberal project from above being realised and concretised on the ground is less apparent. In chapter 6, I highlighted this by exploring how the view from above often conflicts with the view from below (the vernacular). What the state attempts to realise through these projects is distinct from the vernacular experience, which can often have its own logic, instrumentalities, and subjectivities beyond the state-capital one (even if it is quietly political).

A further and core aspect of this contribution is my suggestion that it is important to pay attention to the relationship between commoning, capitalism, and the life course. It might appear that commoning becomes more apparent during particular crises (Graeber 2011; Shantz 2013a; Out of the Woods Collective 2015; Firth 2020; Springer 2020), but it is also the case that it becomes more prolific and necessary during particular periods or events in people's lives. This might be during periods of care work, such as during the aftermath of childbirth whereby people share and gift materials, resources, and skills, or during weekends and evenings, or religious celebrations, whereby people come together in a more co-operative and social way. In this sense, there is scope for further exploring when dynamics of commoning become more or less apparent during particular times and rhythms of the life course, which I have done through the lens of retirement. Exploring these periods without necessarily reducing them as subservient to capitalist demands and needs is an important intervention. The concept

of everyday communism is a powerful theoretical tool in this regard, which I have utilised in this thesis to demonstrate these everyday moments whereby people co-operate with meanings, values, and logics that aren't reflective of a rugged individualistic neoliberal landscape, but quite the opposite. But, I have also reflected upon the ways that everyday communism can be disrupted by internal dynamics, demonstrating that it is an ongoing process to be struggled with, rather than an end to be reached.

7.2.2 Endogenous/Exogenous

The second theme is the development of a more complex understanding of commoning and its endogenous/exogenous relations. I started the Literature Review by highlighting the binary understanding of the commons, as one which focuses on endogenous (Ostrom 2015 [1990]) or exogenous factors (Caffentzis 2004). Both positions are inadequate and reflect an unnecessary and constructed binary. The anti-capitalist academic reading of the commons focuses on the exogenous systemic limiting of the commons through the ways that it conflicts with capital, and in doing so suggests an impossibility of transcending it without structurally changing these exogenous conditions, since without such a change, the exogenous factors will always determine the possibilities of the commons. The endogenous reading of the commons, however, remains relatively naïve to these structures, and it is equally problematic since it overlooks the challenges of how such capitalist "structures" do limit these immediate possibilities.

The endogenous/exogenous distinction is often accompanied by various debates and assumptions regarding social transformation and strategy. Focus on the exogenous factors tends to prioritise an understanding that overthrowing capitalism (the exogenous factors that limit the commons) will naturally free-up people to participate in the commons (endogenous) without any endogenous struggles. Alternatively, focusing on the endogenous dynamics in the present can overlook the way that it is limited by exogenous factors and tends to overlook the possibilities and necessity for broader social, economic, and political transformation (see Holloway 2002; De Angelis 2005; McNaughton 2008). Broadly, I have demonstrated throughout how the exogenous and endogenous factors are a false binary, and strategically it is necessary to consider how they interrelate in understanding possibilities for broader transformation. This is in some ways what the strategy of prefiguration attempts to tackle (Kinna 2017; Raekstad and Gradin 2020). I demonstrated these endogenous struggles around

both everyday communism (difficulties of participation and individual disruption of social systems) as well as vernacular governance (especially around questions of leadership, authority, and the challenges of self-management). In both of these cases, it was also apparent that these were intimately linked with exogenous factors—not only in terms of processes of learnt delegation that are a common feature of everyday life in capitalist society, but also the ways that aspects of the exogenous can be reappropriated within the endogenous sphere (such as skills or materials within capitalist society used within the processes of commoning). Exogenous factors also regularly come into conflict with (or at least restrict) endogenous forms of vernacular governance, demonstrating the way that these interact in the everyday sense. This research therefore contributes to a more fluid understanding of this beyond an endogenous/exogenous or inside/outside binary.

This relates to a broader ongoing debate regarding the role of everyday politics in social transformation. Holloway's (2010a) work points towards possibilities in the mundane aspects of everyday life, where the refusal to be defined and structured by the demands of capitalist values holds potential beyond simply being forms of self-indulgent lifestyle politics (Bookchin 1995). While I don't wholly disagree with Bookchin's (1995) broader critiques of lifestyle anarchism, it tends to reproduce a binary between structures and the everyday. What exactly are structures, but everyday articulations and practices that are produced and reproduced over time, that eventually create material and physical conditions, alongside expectations, logic, and "common sense" that are ultimately formed by these everyday dynamics? Even though Bookchin's work on direct democracies and assemblies offers a potential important point of intervention in this debate (see Cumbers 2015), these still require ongoing and processual dynamics of 'endogenous' everyday practices, as Dewey (1954 [1927]) rightly pointed out. I demonstrated this in chapter 6, by exploring the difficulties of vernacular governance practices—which requires ongoing practice, learning, and struggle, that are not simply restricted by exogenous structures. In this sense, there is a broader provocative question, as to how it is possible to change structures without changing the everyday substance of those structures? Indeed, the everyday (micro) is often considered the site whereby it is possible to study the macro (Lefebvre 1991 [1974]; Gardiner 2000), but how is it possible to study the micro in the macro? Sometimes, doing so is considered through the spheres of political economy, often engaging in policy work or analysis of governance structures for example. But, even at these scales, governance can be read through a micro everyday level, as I have done in the final empirical

chapter. I suggest that more attention that breaks down this micro-macro dualism is necessary through engagement with the everyday aspects of governance (especially one's which forefront an ethnographic exploration of the relationship between vernacular and official forms of governance), which in turn might offer further insight as to the endogenous/exogenous debate.

It is at this level whereby the endogenous/exogenous distinction becomes far less apparent. I have provided important empirical detail reflecting this point, from how skills learnt in the workplace can be utilised within the commons, to how the gendered relations and political divisions are at times reproduced *within* the commons, and the endogenous difficulties of self-management. For example, as De Angelis (2017) notes, if part of commoning is about learning to develop participatory forms of democracy beyond delegation, then this seems a difficult task full of problems that transcends an endogenous-exogenous binary. It is difficult to say whether such difficulties of participation are endogenous or exogenous for example, since it was also apparent how these forms of delegation that people had become used to were often *learnt*—in other words, through their experiences of work, political engagement, and so on, which might be considered as "exogenous" factors. There is no reason to believe that such expectations and habits would disappear in the event of widescale social and political upheaval and transformation, since they are habits which develop over long periods of time, to such an extent that such habits themselves become a site of struggle. These difficulties are apparent in the structures of the allotment in particular, which carries a particular history and context that I noted partly shapes everyday possibilities, in particular the difficulties of broader participation. Hypothetically, if we can extend this logic into the broader spheres of society, into the structural shapes and rhythms of the exogenous world that are central to capitalism (e.g. individualised and privatised housing, working structures, ways of producing and consuming), then what is the relationship between these exogenous factors and our endogenous worlds, and how can they be overcome without also needing to change the so-called endogenous aspects of everyday life? In this sense, these sites are important interventions in the way that they offer the possibility for experimenting in ways of being together that contrasts with the broader capitalist environment (of individualism, competition etc.), but it also has to inherently struggle with these dynamics at an endogenous level. In fact, the possibilities of broad social transformation lies within these endogenous dynamics (for example, difficulties *within* the left to self-organise) as much as within limiting exogenous dynamics (such as lack of time and energy within a capitalist society to organise). This thesis has contributed rich empirical detail to this debate.

7.2.3   Land, Space, and Territory

The final cross-cutting theme is the emphasis on space, land, and territory. Although there have been some attempts at distancing the commons from territorial and bounded sites as a managed resource (Dawney et al. 2016), I have claimed throughout that commoning is itself a spatial practice. The possibilities of commoning are not only shaped by various spatial and territorial dynamics associated with land ownership, but commoning likewise can reproduce these dynamics and at times break down such territorial boundaries. I demonstrated throughout that understanding space in relation to commoning is crucial, from the micro and subjective forms of self-valorisation, to the interactive and dynamic actions of everyday communism, and the way that the state itself attempts to control and guide these spaces through its ownership of land, and how this limits the present and future possibilities of vernacular governance. The politics of land is therefore a crucial point for further attention, rather than something to be dismissed as reflective of a more traditional commons. This research therefore contributes a distinct spatial reading of commoning.

One of the key insights of this was a questioning of the notion of these reflecting a Right to the City dynamic (Passidomo 2014a; Mattei and Quarta 2015; Purcell and Tyman 2015). In urban areas, the possibilities of the commons—without reclaiming land through squatting, for example—tends to be directly limited by an initial neoliberal filter which grants land based on the state's priority of profitability. Any form of commoning is likely to either have to go through this filter or come into conflict with it at some point. Rather than these being a challenge to neoliberalised land management, they tend to lie in the ruin of capital—in land that is deemed useless, unprofitable, from the state and capital's perspective. Although Gibson-Graham (2016) have claimed that it isn't necessarily about changing ownership structures but about access, rights, responsibility, and care, this perspective under-emphasises how ownership shapes and manipulates access, rights, responsibility, and care in the first place.

Such perspectives require more attention, since it again points towards a long and historic interest on the left in relation to questions of land and power (Marx 2004 [1867]; Proudhon 2011), that have been revisited more recently (Christophers 2018). These are concerns that must be dealt with and grappled with in the present, through recognising people's alienation from the land through both private and state ownership. Indeed, a crucial aspect of the

commons is that it supposedly extends beyond both of these forms of ownership (Carson 2013; Shantz 2013a; Bollier and Helfrich 2019). However, it is also particularly important to pay attention to the unsuspecting justification of private ownership that can come with such critiques—a concern that Cohen (1996) has addressed in a similar way (regarding self-ownership and alienation), but also the possibility for it to form around austerity agendas through handing over state land. Colin Ward (2011) also recognised these difficulties, since he was all too aware of how his critique of state ownership of housing could be utilised by the right for free-market responses to housing issues. But, instead, Ward (2011) favoured collective and grassroots tenant organisation around such problems which were unrecognised by both state and market solutions. Scott's (1999; 2010; 2012) work can also be understood to possess a Hayekian critique of state centralisation, though it is likewise critical of the hierarchical, undemocratic, centralised and monopolising forces of capitalism, which is equally alien and hostile towards the vernacular.

This thesis therefore contributes to an exploration of the spatial dynamics of commoning at an everyday level and how it relates with capital and the state. I reflected upon this especially through the dynamic of everyday communism, but also through the forms of self-valorisation. I highlight the importance of people being able to be affective and creative in particular spaces (self-determination), whereby what they do is mirrored and felt *through* the changing space, and how this reflects a sense of control in what feels like an increasingly uncontrollable and disempowering world (Eizenberg 2012; Müller 2012). Graeber (2001), for example, proposes to extend our communistic imagination beyond land to understand the politics of access and distribution. Such an approach is problematic in the sense that I've demonstrated how even the *felt* aspect of territoriality (in the rented allotment plots) points towards its permeation into our everyday social relations. It is therefore important to develop a further understanding of how current land and spatial structures facilitate or limit the possibilities of post-capitalism in the present and future. How, for example, do we move beyond a relatively individualistic form of housing or consumption, when these dynamics are reproduced by a set of everyday expectations, behaviours, habits, and practices? How do we move beyond an alienating physical landscape, when the difficulty in reclaiming the land is limited to it being a by-product of capitalist needs? To go beyond the capitalist housing market not only requires going beyond it in a structural sense, but also the ways that these structures have created certain expectations, structures, and logics. Indeed, there are elements of communal life all around us, as I have

pointed out through these examples, but there are also of course plentiful examples of individualistic, competitive, and territorial practices and spaces.

7.3 Toward Methodological Communism

Ultimately, I don't have guidance or lessons in policy-terms, since the purpose of this thesis was not to suggest or imply some form of improvements that can be "implemented" in these spaces. The participants are already doing what they're doing, and understanding what exactly this is, and its broader implications, is an important aspect of this thesis that is embedded within the methods. Instead, before some final summarising thoughts, I want to turn my attention towards the academic and methodological implications of this thesis, which is an important contribution itself. My relationship with academia has not been straightforward by any means, and during a very difficult initial period and transition of this PhD, I became increasingly disenfranchised and frustrated with academia in general. Early in my PhD, I had intended to carry out work with indigenous communities in North and South America—a highly ambitious project with hindsight. My change of heart, however, was an important turning point that is central to my methodological emphasis. The reason for changing course was largely an ethical decision around representing the voice of the marginalised, which I felt was fraught with various difficulties. Firstly, I felt that even with my best intentions, doing so would be ultimately impossible based on both geographical challenges, but also academic structures—whose name would be on the PhD thesis and in the conferences? Secondly, I felt that there were related challenges as to potentially emphasising the possibilities of carrying out forms of participatory research which may challenge the exclusionary, elitist, and extractive forms of research in such communities. I became increasingly wary of the political possibilities of doing this, which I covered in detail in my methodological chapter.

While such issues largely destroyed the entire first year of my PhD, they also drew my attention in particular towards anarchism. The work of Kropotkin, Ward, and Graeber was particularly enlightening, hopeful, and liberating. Graeber's own methodological reflections reflected but also pointed beyond some of my concerns. Graeber (2004) claims that it is important to recognise the everyday dynamics that we witness as researchers as valuable in their own right, as one's that extend beyond the purposes and values of research. This helps disrupt an element of

saviourism within any research project. I highlighted this issue in relation to **PAR** in the methodology chapter, suggesting that it tends to produce an idea that the research process, however democratic, is the central point of intervention and liberation (see Hammersley 2013).

Rather than subsuming all activities under the banner of research, methodological communism might point towards a way of "being" through research that is respectful of different interests, skills, practices, and focuses within particular fieldwork spaces that *does not* necessarily revolve around the research. It reflects the impossibility of finalisation, and instead respects both the limitations of our observations in the context of the infinite possibilities and openness of qualitative fieldwork. I highlighted this in chapter 5, claiming that it is possible to develop a complementary (Bookchin 2005 [1982]) dynamic in these sites by recognising this diversity. If adopting a methodological perspective of 'from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs', there is a necessity to further think through what abilities and needs are met in doing so, without reproducing either the saviourist/extractivist logic of much traditional research, but also without centralising the research process. Doing so must also, of course, recognise our position within a broader field of inquiry which is involved in a communistic spirit within wider society, through activism, teaching, disseminating, and engaging with wider public audiences.

7.4 Final Reflections and Future Thoughts

While I've argued for recognising the implicit and quiet moments of commoning, this does produce a bit of a political conundrum, strategically-speaking. The commons must become more energised and politicised towards an explicitly anti-capitalist lens, otherwise variants of the Big Society might continue to dominate. While on the one hand these urban gardens are unlikely to come into conflict with capital to energise it in this way, it is also possible that such spaces can be "sucked" in to the spheres of politicised prefigurative politics (Springer 2016). There is an underlying critique of capitalism within these spaces—of feeling alienated from the world, from each other, from what we do—which can be politically powerful. In particular, given that commoning might offer a glimpse of a non-alienated world, these quiet and implicit political dynamics might form a broader expression and interest of an escape from and beyond capitalism. But, broadly speaking, it is also important to pay attention to the points of conflict

with capital whereby the commons might emerge as a more militant and political force, rather than a latent and quiet one. Perhaps the Big Society agenda was a missed opportunity by the left (especially the grassroots left) to mobilise against the neoliberal state and to explicitly energise these latent commoning tendencies—which were, by all means, at the forefront of austerity cuts, and were undermined by the same political agenda which sought to claim legitimacy through their activities. However, it is absolutely crucial that we also recognise this scale as a distinct site of struggle, where the local, community, self-help and mutual aid, might be reclaimed for more progressive possibilities beyond the reach of neoliberal logic. Thus, we can continue to look towards the work on the commons, and the ways that it might be able to challenge, rather than reproduce and support, the existing systems which will otherwise exploit these dynamics. This might be where we move beyond it simply being an occupation of a vacuum, to one that cracks surfaces and spreads more widely. This requires many interconnecting struggles, including wider political education beyond activist circles, community-based work and activism, social and political struggle around social reproduction and care work, the democratisation of media and social media, and engaging in traditional sites such as workplaces.

This introduces a number of important considerations around future research possibilities, with two key aspects I want to highlight. Firstly, more work is certainly required to understand who the commons benefits, its reach, and its limitations, not only in the present empirical sense but also theoretically in future possible scenarios. Related to this, is a necessity to further explore class relations *within* the commons, which by necessity extends beyond a simple class dynamic, to one that must also appreciate and contend with the forms of class dynamism and conflict that concerned Bourdieu (1984) (see also Eder 1995; Rose 1997). This might open-up the possibilities for recognising various divisions within the commons itself as well as other forms of enclosures and exclusions (especially around gender, division of labour, and social reproduction).

Secondly, is a necessity to understand and explore the potential for the commons to institutionalise (in a similar way to the types of mutual aid societies highlighted by Ward (1996b)) in order to extend these possibilities over time, without in-turn developing all of the rigid problems of institutions. Related to this is the need for further everyday governance-based

work that explores commoning and its relationship with the state. This whole thesis might have easily been written through a different lens that highlighted these urban gardens as types of a Deweyan democracy, as micro publics that are potentially a part of a fuller democratic project. In this sense, how might such publics be distinguished from the commons? What are the limitations of becoming strategically linked to the state, such as in a Public-Commons-Partnership? Are the commons part of the state, and if not, why and how might they extend beyond it? If the latter, then are they simply anarchist movements? If we are speaking of political variations of the commons, then how does this differ from age-old political debates and divisions? These are issues that I've lightly touched upon throughout this thesis, though I don't think are well-enough articulated yet, but invite a number of possible interventions that require extending to understand various possibilities and challenges that lie ahead.

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9 APPENDICES

9.1 Appendix A: Information Sheet for Potential Participants

Owain Hanmer
PhD researcher
School of Geography and Planning
Cardiff University
Glamorgan Building, room -1.25
HanmerOJ@cardiff.ac.uk

CARDIFF UNIVERSITY
PRIFYSGOL CAERDYDD

RESEARCH INFORMATION SHEET

Invitation

You/your organisation have been invited to take part in this research project for my PhD research. Before agreeing to take part, it is important to consider why the research is being carried out and what it will involve. Please take the time to read the below information, and please don't hesitate to ask if there is anything that is unclear.

What is the purpose of the research?

My research is interested in DIY organising within communities, with a particular focus on gardening for people during retirement. I hope to understand if, why, and how gardening is an important and common part of retirement, how community groups organise and manage themselves, as well as the broader context of these gardens.

Why have I been invited?

You have been invited because of your engagement with the above activities and the knowledge that you will have of the area.

Who is funding the research?

My PhD is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, which is part of the UK Research and Innovation Group. This is a non-departmental public body funded by a grant-in-aid from the UK government. They require updates and feedback regarding the process of the research (including research findings, research impact, engagement with the public etc.)

Do I have to take part?

- Participation is entirely voluntary and you can withdraw at any point.
- At some point, you will be asked to sign a consent form. This is to confirm that I have explained the nature of the research and that you understand what is involved. It is just a way to prove that the research meets the correct standards.
- If you wish, you can withdraw from the research at any point, without giving a reason.

What will participation involve?

- Participation in the project won't necessarily involve anything too different than what would already be involved with the garden project. In general, I'd like to observe, engage, and take part in the project, rather than the other way around.
- My data collection will mostly involve some formal and informal interviews (involving individual and collective group discussions), as well as observation and participation in activities.
- Other methods of participation and data could be explored together (e.g. diary keeping, photos).
- I might also ask for feedback regarding my research, which might involve brief discussions around my findings and perceptions.

Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?

Yes. All field notes and interview recordings will be transferred to an encrypted and safe folder on my computer. After transcription, all conversation will be immediately anonymised.

What will happen with the results of the research?

- The results will be used in my PhD thesis, as well as more widely disseminated through speaking at conferences and (hopefully) publishing in academic journals.
- All of the written work (including relevant transcripts, results and the final thesis) can be made available to you and synthesised. I'd be more than happy to receive feedback and comments for discussion.

Contacts for further information

- You can contact me for any further information: HanmerOJ@cardiff.ac.uk
- If you have any concerns or questions around ethics or research integrity, these can be raised confidentially with the School of Geography and Planning's designated Safeguarding Officer, Dr Agatha Herman: hermana@cardiff.ac.uk

9.2 Appendix B: Consent Form for Individuals

Owain Hanmer
PhD researcher
School of Geography and Planning
Cardiff University
Glamorgan Building, room -1.25
HanmerOJ@cardiff.ac.uk

RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

Please read and complete this form carefully. If you are willing to participate in this research, please circle the appropriate responses and sign and date the declaration at the end. If there are any further questions, please don't hesitate to contact me. Thank you!

- I have had the research satisfactorily explained to me in verbal and / or written form by the researcher.   YES / NO

- I understand that the research will involve: *recorded individual interviews, observation/field notes, potential participation in other data collection activities TBC, e.g. group discussions.*   YES / NO

- I understand that I may withdraw from this study or any specific activity relating to the research at any time.   YES / NO

- I understand that all data will be treated in strict confidence, and that all names will be anonymised.   YES / NO

- I understand that any audio recordings will be used solely for transcription purposes.   YES / NO

- I understand how the data will be used (including storage and dissemination).   YES / NO

I agree to participate in this research study and have been given a copy of this form for my own information.

....
Name of participant [printed]   Signature   Date

....
Researcher [printed]   Signature   Date

9.3 Appendix C: Consent Form for Site

Owain Hanmer
PhD researcher
School of Geography and Planning
Cardiff University
Glamorgan Building, room -1.25
HanmerOJ@cardiff.ac.uk

RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

As ………………………………………… of the research site (…………………………………………….),

I give permission for Owain Hanmer (the researcher) to conduct his research at this site.

This does not guarantee any individual's permission to consent, which the researcher will

obtain separately.

……………………………………… ……………………………………… ………………

Name of participant [printed] Signature Date

……………………………………… ……………………………………… ………………

Researcher [printed] Signature Date

Cardiff School of Geography and Planning

SUBMISSION OF ETHICAL APPROVAL FORMS

<u>Staff and MPhil/PhD Projects</u>

ALL FORMS FOR ETHICAL APPROVAL <u>MUST</u> BE SUBMITTED TO THE SECRETARY OF THE SCHOOL ETHICS COMMITTEE IN GOOD TIME (PREFERABLY 2 WEEKS) BEFORE THE NEXT SCHEDULED SREC MEETING

An electronic version must to emailed to Ethan Lumb, Secretary of Ethics Committee LumbE@cardiff.ac.uk / Tel Ext: 76412/ Room 2.54 Glamorgan Building as a work attachment, bearing relevant staff and/or PGR Student signatures.

Title of Project:

Exploring community gardening during retirement: seeds of cooperation and mutual aid?

Name of researcher(s): Owain Hanmer

Date:	**Signature of lead researcher:**
12/08/2019	
↑	
Student project	

Anticipated Start Date of Fieldwork: Ongoing since May 2019*

*provisional ethical approval was granted from May 2019, this is an updated form upon request.

	Recruitment Procedures:	Yes	No	N/A
1	Does your project include children under 16 years of age?	X		
2	Have you read the Child Protection Procedures below?	X		
3	Does your project include people with learning or communication difficulties?	X		
4	Does your project include people in custody?		X	
5	Is your project likely to include people involved in illegal activities?		X	
6	Does your project involve people belonging to a vulnerable group, other than those listed above?	X		
7	Does your project include people who are, or are likely to become your clients or clients of the department in which you work?		X	
8	Does your project include people for whom English / Welsh is not their first language?	X		
9	Have you read the Data Protection Policy below?	X		
10	Have you read the Health & Safety Policy below?	X		

* Cardiff University's Child Protection Procedures:

https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0009/995094/Safeguarding-Policy-October-2017.pdf

If you have answered 'yes' to any of the above questions please outline (in an attached ethics statement) how you intend to deal with the ethical issues involved

	Data Protection:	**Yes**	**No**	**N/A**
11	Will you tell participants that their participation is voluntary?	X		
12	Will you obtain written consent for participation? If "No" please explain how you will be getting informed consent.	X		
13	If the research is observational, will you ask participants for their consent to being observed?	X		
14	Will you tell participants that they may withdraw from the research at any time and for any reasons?	X		
15	Will you give potential participants a significant period of time to consider participation?	X		

If you have answered 'no' to any of these questions please explain (in your ethics statement) the reasons for your decision and how you intend to deal with any ethical decisions involved

	Possible Harm to Participants:	**Yes**	**No**	**N/A**
16	Is there any realistic risk of any participants experiencing either physical or psychological distress or discomfort?		X	
17	Is there any realistic risk of any participants experiencing a detriment to their interests as a result of participation?		X	

	Research Governance:	**Yes**	**No**	**N/A**
18	Does your study include the use of a drug?		X	

		Yes	No	N/A
	You will need to contact Research Governance before submission (resgov@cf.ac.uk)			
19	Does the study involve the collection or use of human tissue? You will need to contact the Human Tissue Act team before submission (hta@cf.ac.uk)		X	

If there are any risks to the participants you must explain in your ethics statement how you intend to minimise these risks

Data Protection:		Yes	No	N/A
20	Will any non-anonymised and/or personalised data be generated and/or stored?	X		
21	Will you have access to documents containing sensitive[5] data about living individuals?		X	
	If "Yes" will you gain the consent of the individuals concerned?			

Data protection Act Guidelines

https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/public-information/policies-and-procedures/data-protection

If there are any other potential ethical issues that you think the Committee should consider please explain them in an ethics statement. It is your obligation to bring to the attention of the Committee any ethical issues not covered on this form.

Health and Safety:	Yes

	X
Does the research meet the requirements of the University's Health & Safety policies? https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/89405/SHWE-Policy-Statement-English.pdf	
Does the study involve the collection or use of human tissue (including, but not limited to, blood, saliva and bodily waste fluids)? If yes, a copy of the submitted application form and any supporting documentation must be emailed to the Human Tissue Act Compliance Team (HTA@cf.ac.uk). A decision will only be made once these documents have been received.	

Risk Assessment	Yes	No
Has the relevant risk assessment form been completed? Research abroad, complete: \\Geoplpool1\geopl\SHARED\05 - RESEARCH\ETHICS\SREC Forms & guidance\SREC Risk Assessment Forms\RA_Abroad_Example.doc Research in the UK, complete: \\Geoplpool1\geopl\SHARED\05 - RESEARCH\ETHICS\SREC Forms & guidance\SREC Risk Assessment Forms\RA_UK_Example.doc Research on campus, complete: \\Geoplpool1\geopl\SHARED\05 - RESEARCH\ETHICS\SREC Forms & guidance\SREC Risk Assessment Forms\RA_Campus_Example.doc If yes, ensure a copy is submitted with the completed application	X	
If no, explain why a risk assessment form is not necessary…		

Please provide following information for the committee:

Funding Source **ESRC**

What are the main objectives of this research?

- To explore concepts and processes of everyday democracy, mutual aid, and cooperation amongst people during retirement, looking at practices of food growing and gardening across 3 diverse sites (1 community garden run through a Council Hub, 1 community garden linked with a housing association, and 1 semi self-managed allotment site).

- To understand how communities manage gardens, DIY organisation, and its internal and external relations (with the local state, for example)

- To consider the disengagement from working life and its relationship with gardening (especially with a focus on notions of creativity, care, cooperation, and community-based politics in general).

Who are the research participants?
- The primary research participants are retired people who are involved in these gardens. However, while some of the case studies are exclusively retired people (formally organised in this way), some of the sites also include a more varied and informal engagement with people outside of this group. The gardens are often engaged with caring work with people with learning disabilities, for example, who attend with their carer(s). Additionally, parents with children regularly and informally drop-in and out of these gardens during school holidays. The informality of these gardens and engagement with a wide range of people is one of the interesting elements, but also in relation to this form mean it is difficult to know who will be at the site from week-to-week.

- Other participants (in relation to interviews) will be members involved in this activity and its governance (such as local council members, housing association workers, local gardening organisations).

What methodologies will you be using?

- My main methods will be participant observation and interviews, conducted within a broader action research perspective. Given time difficulties, it will be ethnographically-informed (participant observation) rather than a pure ethnography.
- I will involve myself in the regular and mundane activities of the gardens, with an emphasis on observation and becoming embedded during this engagement.

- In-depth interviews will be conducted with individual participants, in addition to formal focus group interviews as well as continuous and informal group discussions throughout.

- the 3 case studies are:
1) ████████████ (a well-being council gardening initiative in ████ ████████ Hub)
2) ████████████████████ (a community garden run by tenants of local housing associations)
3) ████████████ (a self-managed allotment in coordination with the council)

These 3 sites were specifically chosen for their diverse nature which I hope will draw out some tensions in the day-to-day governance of the activities. However, I have also developed links with other gardens who I hope to interview in the later stages (to develop a broader empirical perspective outside of these cases), including:

Fairwater community garden;
Welcome to Our Woods community allotment;
Men's Sheds Treorchy (community run NHS garden);
Maes Y Coed Community garden;
Oak Court, Penarth;
Ty Bryn Seion, Dowlais.

The organisations that I have links with for interviews include:
Public Health Wales;
Social Farms and Gardens (Cardiff branch of the organisation);
Wales and West Housing Association;
Cardiff Council workers

Ethics Statement

If your answers to questions 1-19 raise any ethical issues, please explain here how you will deal with them.

Ethics of research with participants:

Given that the research participants may be any age over 50, the level of vulnerability will differ. In these case studies, the vast majority of participants are early in their retirement, and are not considered vulnerable, either physically or mentally. In this instance, my first and go-to option is to consider

participants as autonomous and responsible adults able to consent and freely participate.

In other circumstances, where this is not the case, the co-operation, consent, and trust of the immediate family, organisation, or carer will be necessary. As noted earlier, given the nature of these gardens, the projects often do engage with members of the community who are more vulnerable. In particular, there is a notable engagement with people with learning difficulties, and in one case an older person with dementia. In this instance, I would speak to the person's carer to determine the person's ability to understand the nature of the research and to give informed consent, and with the assistance of the carer, explain the research and acquire consent. If the person's capacity is diminished to do so, I will gain consent from the carer/organisation/family member. This is consent for me to be in their vicinity, and for the person to be active in the environment that I am observing and researching. With regard to these particular vulnerabilities, I would avoid directly interviewing the vulnerable person, though would ask for the consent of the carer to speak themselves about the engagement and experience of the garden.

There may be times when parents and their children visit the garden. If so, it is likely sporadic, informal, unplanned, and infrequent, thus posing other challenges of ongoing consent and participation that must be considered. However, the ethical precautions remain similar, involving explaining to the parent and the child the nature, purpose, and expectation of the research project, and then to gain the informed consent from both parent/adult and child in relation to this.

I will also pay attention to the inherent power differentials between myself and vulnerable participants, thus an awareness of this is the first step to mitigating the issue and developing more inclusive and empowering research environments.

I will follow all legislation and guidelines regarding safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults, including: Government guidelines; Cardiff University's 'Safeguarding Children and Adults at Risk: Policy and Guidance'; University of Manchester's Guidelines for conducting research with the autistic community; guidelines on ethics of researching with people with dementia, from Alzheimer Europe, as well as the ethical guidelines and advice from Alzheimer's Society.

Though the nature of this research is not particularly sensitive (especially in comparison to other research involving children), it is always necessary to pay attention to the potential impact of participation, and the potential that people might discuss distressing situations. In particular, it seems that gardens are often a place of inclusivity, reflection, and informal therapy. This might

result in people discussing potentially difficult and traumatic things that they are experiencing now or in the past (e.g. physical or mental health issues). It is important to recognise my own limitations in such scenarios (to of course resist giving advice and support beyond my own competence). In the event of any particularly sensitive declarations by a vulnerable person with a carer, I would report this to the person with the duty of care to that person.

Given the spatial nature of the research (in open public gardens), there will not be any periods of being alone with any person considered vulnerable, thus avoiding potential ethical difficulties that would require further consideration. Research will be conducted in a collective and cooperative way alongside gatekeepers and other adults. However, an enhanced DBS check is currently in process.

Some participants in the garden may not speak English as a first language. In this scenario, it would depend on the fluency of their English to determine the person's ability to understand the research and to give informed consent. I do not foresee this being an issue, since all participants speak fluent English.

Anonymous data:
Some interviews will be recorded, thus there will be personalised data generated. These recordings will be conducted on a digital voice recorder, which will be transferred to my computer at the earliest possible time. I will follow the Data Protection Act legislation and the ESRC Research Data Policy to ensure that my practices meet these standards. All personalised data will thus be stored in an encrypted and password protected folder on my personal computer. All data (personalised and anonymous transcripts) will be backed up on a removable USB device which will be password protected and encrypted. Following Cardiff University's recommended guidelines (the ESRC does not have specific retention guidelines), the data will be retained in this secure format for *"no less than end of project + 5 years or at least 2 years post publication"*. The only raw data that might be shared with others will be the anonymised transcriptions. Personalised recordings of interviews will not be shared.

Relevant training:
I have previously worked (in the UK and Canada) as a youth worker/support worker in safe houses & shelters for homeless youth, as well as working as a support worker in a school for children and young people with Autistic Spectrum Condition. Therefore, I have experience of working with people in vulnerable situations, as well as training provided in-house (usually company induction programmes that involved a wide range of training based on safeguarding, responsibilities and ethics of working with vulnerable groups).

I also set-up a local community garden with residents where I regularly (as a local citizen) engage with families in gardening activities, and this informal training will be useful.

Any changes to the nature of the project that result in the project being significantly different to that originally approved by the committee must be communicated to the Ethics Committee immediately.

9.5 Appendix E: Cardiff Council's Allotment Contract

LEISURE AND RECREATIONAL GARDENS

Chief Infrastructure Officer
County Hall
CARDIFF
CF10 4UW
TEL:- (029) 2087 2000

CARDIFF
CAERDYDD

Parks Services
King George V Drive East
Heath Park
CARDIFF
CF14 4EP
TEL:- (029) 2068 4000

AN AGREEMENT made the ....Day..of..................................Two..Thousand..and..............................
BETWEEN the County Council of the City and County of Cardiff ("Cardiff Council") of the one part and
Name(s) of Tenant: ....
....
.... Post Code: ....
E-mail: .... Telephone No: ....
Mobile No: .... Date of Birth: ....
(hereinafter called "The Tenant" which expression shall include his executors, administrators and assigns) of the other part.

WHEREBY the Council agree to let, and the Tenant agrees to take on a yearly Tenancy from the
...........Day..of..................................Two..Thousand..and.............................. (but subject as hereinafter
mentioned), the Leisure and Recreational Gardens at:

ALLOTMENTS,   CARDIFF   .

and numbered .... in the Cardiff Council register of Leisure and Recreational Gardens and containing
.... x 25 square metres (1 perch) or thereabouts @ £...................... per perch (hereinafter called "The
Allotment Garden") at the yearly rental of £.................... pence, ... the chalet/brick cubicle erected on the
allotment garden at the yearly rent of £..........................., at the total rent of £................ pence or such other
amount as the Council may specify by 28 days notice in writing expiring at any time during this tenancy, payable as
hereinafter mentioned, and at a proportionate rent for any part of a year over which the tenancy may extend.

1.   The rent shall be paid in advance, on the second day of February each year, clear of all deductions (otherwise
        than allowed by statute

2.   If the tenant takes possession upon a date other than the second day of February, then the first payment of the
        rent shall be due on the date of which the tenancy commences. The rental shall comprise the full annual rent
        payable unless the tenancy commences on a date between 1st December and 1st February, when a
        proportionate rental will apply. The second and subsequent payments of rent shall be paid in the manner
        prescribed in Paragraph 1.

3.   The first payment of rent will be due and payable on the 2nd..Day..of..FEBRUARY..Two..Thousand..and
        .... Payment equating to a quarter of the annual rent may be made quarterly in advance on
        2nd February, 4th May, 3rd August and 2nd November each year.

4.   The tenant agrees to observe and perform the conditions in the schedule and to pay the rent.

5.   For the purpose of the Allotments Acts 1922, 1925 and 1950 and any Acts amending or extending the same a
        "Leisure and Recreational Garden" shall mean an "Allotment Garden" as defined by these Acts.

ALLOTMENTS TENANCY FORM		
4.HP.27.17	Revised 09/2010	ISSUE 6

SCHEDULE

1. The Tenant shall keep the Allotment Garden free from weeds, and well manured and otherwise maintain it in a proper state of cultivation (and shall put the Allotment Garden into a proper state of cultivation on commencement of the tenancy if necessary).

2. The Tenant shall himself cultivate the Allotment Garden and shall not without written consent of Cardiff Council, underlet, assign or part with or share the possession of the Allotment Garden or any part of it.

3. Any buildings and erections thereon shall be used only for the purpose of an Allotment Garden in accordance with the Allotment Act, 1922 and any Acts amending the same and no such building or erection or structure shall be used as a dwelling house, shop or workshop, stable, dog-kennel, pigeon cote, bee-hive, or as a pig-sty, or any purpose whatsoever other than the purpose aforesaid.

4. The tenant must not keep any bees, animals or livestock on the allotment site without the prior written consent of the Council.

5. The Tenant shall keep every path adjoining the Allotment Garden in good repair and condition.

6. The Tenant shall not without the like consent cut, prune, or remove or interfere with any timber or other trees, or take, sell or carry away any soil, mineral, stone, gravel, sand, slate, chalk, flints, clay or substrata.

7. The Tenant shall not plant or maintain any broadleaved, conifer or willow trees in, on or around the allotment plot.

8. The Tenant shall not without the like consent, erect or place and/or maintain on the Allotment Garden any, chalet, toolhouse, shed, greenhouse, pig-sty or other building or vehicle or fence or structure whatsoever, and if consent is granted it may be given subject to such conditions as Cardiff Council may impose.

9. The Tenant shall not use or permit to be used the Allotment Garden for trade or business purpose or any other purpose other than an allotment garden.

10. The Tenant shall not use or permit to be used the Allotment Garden or any building thereon for the sale, distribution or consumption of intoxicating liquors or for gambling in any form.

11. The Tenant must ensure that the gates are locked when entering or leaving the Allotment site.

12. The Tenant shall not install in the hut any form of heating apparatus.

13. The Tenant shall exercise due and proper care in regard to the water supply in order to prevent waste and shall not fix fittings to water supplied, shall not use hose pipes, shall not siphon water into another container, and shall use it for and in connection with the purpose specified in clause 2 above and Cardiff Council reserve the right to shut off the water supply and to empty the pipes whenever deemed necessary owing to frost or any other cause.

14. If in the opinion of Cardiff Council the Tenant causes wilful or wanton damage to any tree, fence, gate or main path, to any water pipe or tap, or any tool shed or hut or any fitting thereof or to any property of Cardiff Council, Cardiff Council may at their discretion require the Tenant to make good the same and in default thereof do such works themselves and may charge the Tenant with the cost thereof or may without such requisition carry out the work itself and charge the Tenant with the cost thereof.

15. All remains or objects of an archaeological or other scientific interest found on the Allotment Garden are the property of Cardiff Council and the Tenant, on discovering any such remains, shall forthwith report the fact to Cardiff Council and hand over the same to them upon request.

16. The Tenant shall not cause or suffer any nuisance, annoyance or damage to the occupier of any other Allotment Garden or to the tenant or owner of adjoining or contiguous premises or obstruct or injure any path set out for the use of the occupiers of the Allotment Gardens, nor shall the Tenant light any fires in on or around the Allotment Garden. Breaches of these requirements may amount to an offence under The Environmental Protection Act 1990 for which the maximum penalty is a fine of up to £5,000 and /or 6 (six) months imprisonment or as amended from time to time.

17. The Tenant shall not deposit any waste in on or around the Allotment Garden. Any breach of this condition may amount to an offence under The Environmental Protection Act 1990 for which the maximum penalty is a fine of up to £20,000 and/or 6 (six) months imprisonment or as amended from time to time.

18. Dogs must be kept on a leash.

19. The Tenant shall not use the Allotment Garden or have access thereto otherwise than between the hours of sunrise and sunset each day.

20. Any officer of Cardiff Council shall be entitled at any time to enter and inspect the Allotment Garden, Shed or Greenhouse.

21. The tenancy may be determined by the Tenant on the Second day of February in any year of the tenancy by 6 (six) calendar months' prior notice in writing to Cardiff Council or such lesser notice as the Council may accept.

22. The tenancy shall be determined by Cardiff Council in accordance with the provisions of the Allotments Act, 1922. In the event of the termination of the tenancy the Tenant shall be liable to pay rent pro rata to the time of such termination or re-entry.

23. This tenancy may be determined by the Council giving the tenant 12 months notice in writing on or before 6 April expiring on or after 29 September in any year. The tenant must yield up the allotment at determination of the tenancy in such condition as complies with the terms of this agreement.

24. The tenancy may be determined by re-entry by Cardiff Council at any time after giving 1 (one) months prior notice in writing to the tenant (a) if the rent is in arrears for not less than 40 (forty) days whether legally demanded or not or (b) if it appears to Cardiff Council that there has been a breach of the conditions on the part of the tenant in this agreement or (c) if the tenant becomes bankrupt. The tenancy will determine on the rent day next after the death of the tenant.

25. Any notice by Cardiff Council shall be delivered or sent by post to the Tenant at his last known place of abode or business or left for him upon the Allotment Garden.

26. Where there are two or more persons included in the expression "The Tenant" the obligation of the Tenant shall be made jointly and severally.

27. The tenant must at all times observe and comply with all enactments, Statutory Instruments or byelaws affecting the allotment.

Signed for and on behalf Of Cardiff Council:	Signed by the said Tenant:	Signed by the Site Secretary
NAME Celia Hart POSITION: Allotments Officer	TENANT ID:	Site: ALLOTMENTS
ALLOTMENTS TENANCY AGREEMENT FORM		
4.HP.27.17	Revised 09/2010	ISSUE 6

9.6 Appendix F: Anonymised Interviewee List

INTERVIEWEES (WITH GARDENERS)		
Hendre Community Garden	Aberporth Community Garden	Derwen Allotment
Keith	Don	Tom
Elin	William	Mair
Leah	Sandy	Bob
Jane	Ruth	Gruff (committee member)
	Kyle	Elan
	Miriam	Amy
	Mary	Lucy
	James	Jim (committee member)
	Danny	Martin (committee member)
		Robbie
		Paula (committee member)
		Pete
		Laura
		Freddie
		Roy
		Richard (committee member)
		Shaun (committee member)

OTHER INTERVIEWEES	
Joe	Wales & West employee, working with HDCG
Judy	Wales & West employee, working with HDCG
Liam	Linc employee, working with HDCG
Nora	Founder of food growing and gardening organisation in Cardiff, also worked closely with HDCG
Rosie	Cardiff Council Community Inclusion Officer, working with APCG

Hannah	Employee of organisation, working on community-land matters in the region
Anna	Cardiff Council employee, working on food-related matters in the city
Helen	Employee of an organisation working across the city coordinating different food projects
Rachel	Employee of a national food and gardening organisation